To my father,
George R. Anderson,
who has supported and believed in me
every step along the way

"Shakespeare" BY ANOTHER NAME

The Life of Edward de Vere, Earl of Oxford,
The Man Who Was Shakespeare

MARK ANDERSON

FOREWORD BY SIR DEREK JACOBI

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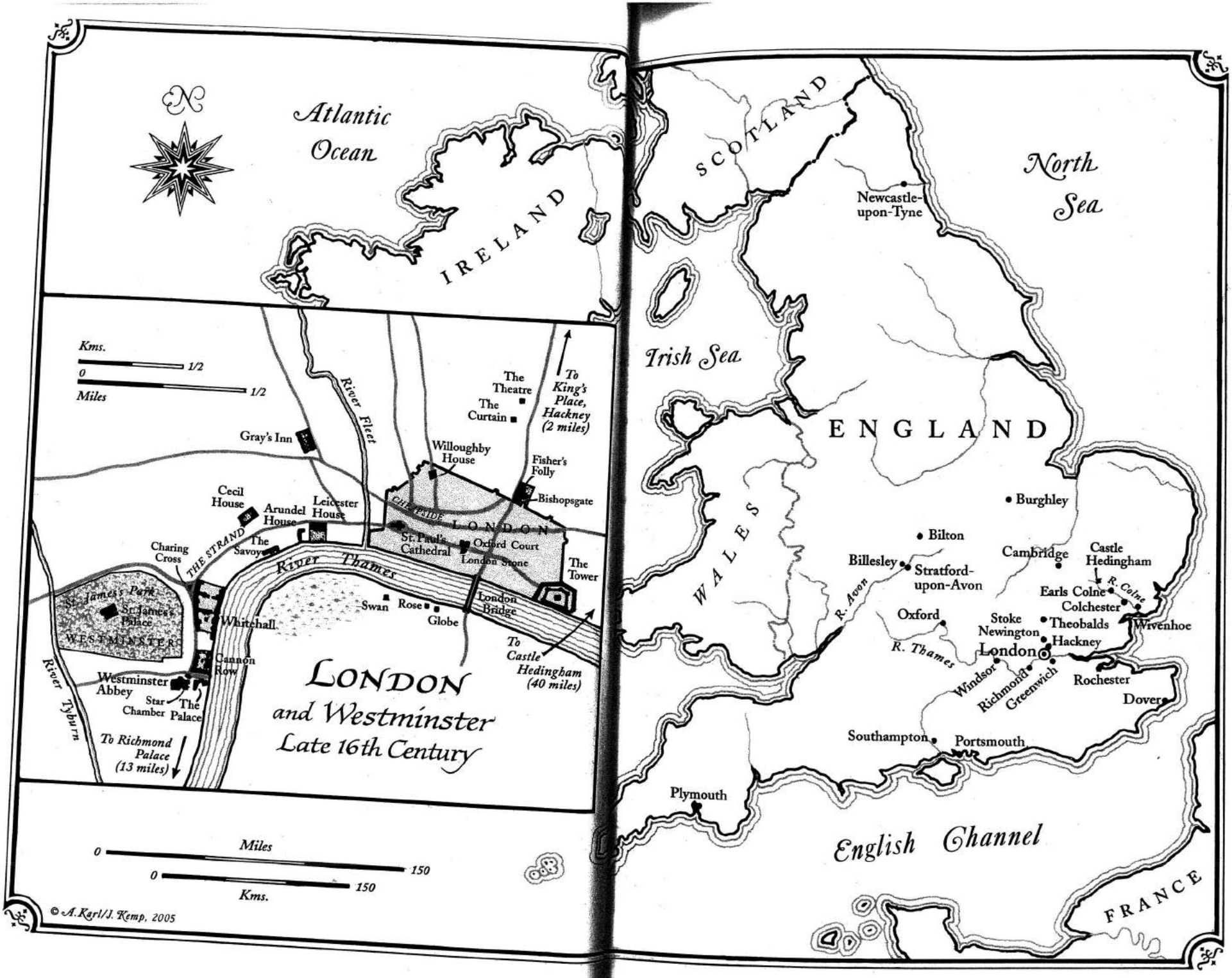
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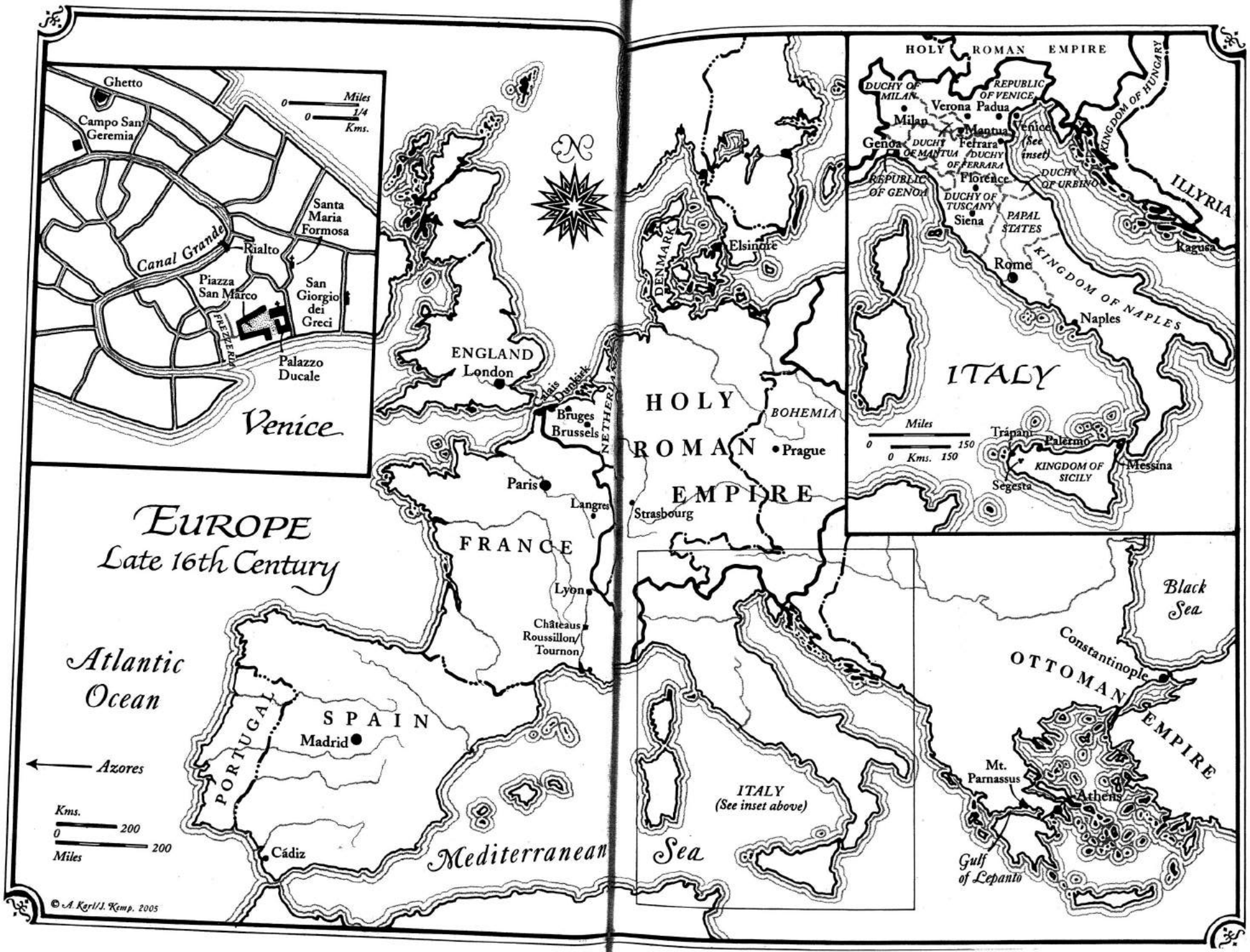
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Mt. Parnassus
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Gulf of Lepanto

TIMELINE

Historical Events		*Edward de Vere*
	12 Apr. 1550	(Lord) Edward de Vere born, Castle Hedingham, Essex, to John de Vere, 16th earl of Oxford, and Margery, countess of Oxford.
	c. 1554	Lord Edward's sister Mary born.
	c. 1554–1562?	Lord Edward under tutelage of Sir Thomas Smith, probably at Smith's estate of Ankerwicke, near Windsor.
	Oct. 1558	Lord Edward entered Queen's College, Cambridge (recorded enrollment through Mar. '59).
Death of King Edward VI; accession of Queen Mary I. July 1553		
Mary I marries Prince Philip (later King Philip II). July 1554		
Death of Mary I; accession of Queen Elizabeth I; Sir William Cecil appointed principal secretary to Elizabeth. Nov. 1558		
Coronation of Queen Elizabeth I. Jan. 1559		
	Aug. 1561	Queen Elizabeth visits Castle Hedingham.
	Jul. 1562	Lord Edward contracted to marry into powerful Hastings family.
	Aug. 1562	Lord Edward's father dies; Lord Edward now 17th earl of Oxford and ward of state; moves to Cecil House, London, under guardianship of Sir William Cecil, principal advisor to Queen Elizabeth.
	1563	De Vere tutored by Anglo-Saxonist Laurence Nowell (who also signs his name on the *Beowulf* manuscript during this year).
Elizabeth falls deathly ill with smallpox, names her favorite, Robert Dudley, as lord protector of England if she should die. Oct. 1562		
	Sep. 1564	De Vere receives bachelor's degree from Cambridge University.
Elizabeth raises Robert Dudley to earl of Leicester. Sept. 1564		
	Sep. 1566	De Vere receives M.A. from Oxford University.
	Feb. 1567	De Vere enrolls in law school at Gray's Inn, London.
Lord Darnley, husband of Mary, Queen of Scots, murdered. Feb. 1567		
Mary, Queen of Scots, abdicates crown in Darnley murder scandal. Mary's infant son, James, is now officially King of Scotland. July 1567	July 1567	De Vere kills undercook at Cecil House in fencing accident.
Mary, Queen of Scots, flees for England; Elizabeth imprisons Mary. May 1568		
Earls of Northumberland and Westmoreland lead Northern Rebellion against Elizabethan state. Nov. 1569		
Pope Pius V declares Queen Elizabeth's reign illegitimate. Feb. 1570	Early 1570	De Vere recovers from illness at an inn in the town of Windsor.
	Apr. 1570	De Vere joins earl of Sussex in military campaign to suppress rebellion of Northern Earls in English border counties and southern Scotland.
Sir William Cecil raised to Baron (Lord) Burghley. Feb. 1571	Apr. 1571	De Vere sits in his first Parliament as member of House of Lords.
(De Vere's cousin) the duke of Norfolk imprisoned for attempting to marry Mary, Queen of Scots, and depose Elizabeth. Sept. 1571	Dec. 1571	De Vere married to his guardian's daughter Anne Cecil.
Thomas Howard, duke of Norfolk, executed for treason. June 1572	Jan. 1572	De Vere publishes Latin preface to Latin edition of Castiglione's *Courtier.*
Massacre of 10,000 French Protestants (Huguenots), begun on St. Bartholomew's Day (Aug. 24) and continued across France into fall. Aug. 1572	c. 1573	De Vere rumored to be Queen Elizabeth's lover.
	May 1573	De Vere's men assault father-in-law's servants on road to Rochester.
	June 1574	De Vere runs away to Lowlands; promptly recalled by queen.
	Feb. 1575	De Vere begins fourteen-month continental grand tour; attends coronation of French King Henri III
The first public space for theater (The Theatre) opens north of London. 1577	May 1575–Mar. '76	De Vere travels throughout Italy (and other lands), using Venice as a home base; (in England) daughter Elizabeth born in July.
	Apr. 1576	De Vere storms back to England, hearing rumors of his wife's infidelity.
	Jan. 1577	The masque *A Historie of Error* performed at court for the queen, probably by de Vere, making self-deprecating jokes at his own jealous rage.
Elizabeth entertains marriage petition of French duc d'Alençon. June 1578	c. 1578–'79	De Vere a founding member & patron of "Euphuist" school of poets.
Alençon arrives in England to press his case for marriage in person. Aug. 1579	Sep. 1579	De Vere famously quarrels with Sir Philip Sidney at a royal tennis court.
Arrival of covert Catholic missionaries in England. June 1580	1580	De Vere buys mansion Fisher's Folly, north of London, a bohemian retreat for Euphuist writers; de Vere has love affair with courtly belle Anne Vavasour.
	Dec. 1580	De Vere turns in Catholic traitors (and erstwhile comrades) Howard, Arundell & Southwell, who in turn spread malicious libels about de Vere.
	Mar. 1581	Queen throws de Vere & Vavasour in Tower after Vavasour gives birth to illegitimate son Edward Veer; de Vere exiled from court.
Execution of Catholic missionary Edmund Campion. Dec. 1581		
Alençon marriage collapses; Elizabeth celebrated as "Virgin Queen." Feb. 1582	Mar. 1582	De Vere & Vavasour's uncle duel, sparking intermittent family warfare.
	Spring 1583	De Vere leases Blackfriars Theatre in London; buries a (legitimate) infant son; re-admitted to court; travels with court to Oxford University.
	Apr. 1584	De Vere's daughter Bridget born.
Assassination of Dutch Protestant leader William of Orange. July 1584	Dec. 1584	De Vere's troupe performs *The History of Agamemnon & Ulysses* at court, probably by de Vere, arguing for a commandership in Lowlands war.
	Aug. 1585	De Vere sent to Lowlands to join English officer corps.
	Oct. 1585	De Vere recalled to England.
Scots queen arrested for "Babbington Plot" to assassinate Elizabeth. July 1586	June 1586	Queen grants de Vere £1000 annuity.
Mary, Queen of Scots, sentenced to death for treason. Oct. 1586	Oct. 1586	De Vere sits on jury for Mary, Queen of Scots, trial.
Mary, Queen of Scots, executed. Feb. 1587	May 1587	De Vere' s daughter Susan born.
Spanish Armada launches from Lisbon for England. May 1588	June 1588	De Vere part of early intercept force to engage Spanish Armada en route to England; de Vere's wife Anne, countess of Oxford, dies.
English naval forces engage, ultimately defeat Armada. Aug. 1588	Dec. 1588	De Vere sells Fisher's Folly.
Puritan, anti-Anglican "Martin Marprelate" pamphlets circulate. 1588–'89	1589	*Arte of English Poesie* lists de Vere as court author whose works would be widely lauded if his "doings could be found out and made public with the rest."
Murder of French king Henri III; Henri of Navarre now King Henri IV. July 1589		
Robert Cecil (son of Lord Burghley) becomes Secretary of State. Apr. 1590	1590–'93	Marriage alliance between de Vere's daughter Elizabeth and the earl of Southampton promoted by Lord Burghley–and de Vere.
	Dec. 1591	De Vere makes over Castle Hedingham in trust to his three daughters.
	late 1591–early '92	De Vere marries Elizabeth Trentham of Rochester.
Playwright Robert Greene dies of overindulgence; posthumous pamphlet lambastes actor Will Shakspere as great literary pretender. Sept. 1592	Sept. 1592	De Vere (as "Will Monox") joins Robert Greene and satirist Thomas Nashe on Greene's fateful day of drinking and overindulgence.
Playwright Christopher Marlowe murdered in Deptford tavern. May 1593	1593	Nashe's pamphlet *Strange News* dedicated to de Vere (as "Gentle Mr. William").

Publication of poem *Venus & Adonis*, first work by "Shakespeare."	Summer 1593
Publication of poem *Lucrece*–like *V&A*, dedicated to earl of Southampton.	1594
Earl of Essex leads successful raid of Spanish outpost at Azores.	June 1596
Sir Robert Cecil is made principal secretary to Queen Elizabeth.	July 1596
Earl of Essex leads failed raid of Spanish fleet at Cádiz.	July 1597
Death of William Cecil, Lord Burghley.	Aug. 1598
First publications of plays under the byline "Shakespeare." (Other than above poems, all previous publications had been anonymous).	1598
Earls of Essex's and Southampton's failed campaign in Ireland.	Mar.-Sept. 1599
Essex stripped of offices and placed under house arrest.	June 1600
Essex and Southampton rebel against Elizabeth (and Cecil) and lose. Essex and Southampton condemned for treason; Essex beheaded.	Feb. 1601
Death of Queen Elizabeth I; accession of James VI of Scotland. Southampton released from Tower.	Mar. 1603
Coronation of King James I (de Vere performed ceremonial role).	July 1603
The "good quarto" of *Hamlet* represents the last new Shake-speare work to appear in print, two brief periods (below) excepted.	late 1604
Spate of four new Shake-speare texts appear in print: *King Lear, Pericles, Troilus and Cressida*, and the *Sonnets*.	1608-'09
Robert Lord Cecil dies.	May 1612
Henry Stuart, Prince of Wales, dies.	Nov. 1612
Henry Peacham's emblem book *Minerva Britanna* is published.	1612
Will Shakspere of Stratford dies; doggerel epitaph printed on gravestone in Trinity Church, Stratford; (sometime pre-1623) red-herring monument erected elsewhere in Trinity Church imploring viewers to "sieh [look there, at the gravestone, which is] all he hath writ."	Apr. 1616
Publisher William Jaggard publishes editions of ten Shake-speare reprints, two of which are falsely attributed.	1619
King James pursues marriage alliance with Spain for his son Prince Charles.	1621
Anti-Spanish Marriage crusaders earl of Southampton and(18th) earl of Oxford arrested; Oxford thrown in Tower of London.	June-July 1621
Shake-speare's *Othello* published, the first new work since 1609.	1622
Spanish Marriage collapses; earl of Oxford released from Tower. Florentine courtly correspondent notes "All's well that ends well."	Oct. 1623
Feb. 1593	De Vere's son and heir Henry (Lord Bolbec) born.
1594	Pamphlet *Willobie His Avisa* published with character "Avisa" representing de Vere's wife Elizabeth; suggests scandalous affair between her and Southampton (as "H.W.") with de Vere (as "W.S.") satirically portrayed as egging Southampton on.
Jan. 1595	De Vere's daughter Elizabeth marries William Stanley, earl of Derby.
1596-'97	De Vere, his wife, and son move to King's Place, Hackney.
1598	De Vere listed (along with "Shakespeare") as playwright in Francis Meres's literary and courtly who's-who *Palladis Tamia*.
1600	De Vere seeks governorship of Isle of Jersey, to no avail.
1602	De Vere's moribund troupe of actors, merged with Earl of Worcester's Men listed as performing at the Boar's Head Tavern.
July 1603	King James renews de Vere's £1000 annuity.
June 24, 1604	De Vere dies at King's Place, Hackney; son Henry becomes 18th earl.
1605	De Vere's daughter Susan marries Philip Herbert, earl of Montgomery.
1607	De Vere's natural son Edward Veer knighted.
Apr. 1609	De Vere's widow given permission to sell King's Place, Hackney.
1615	Susan de Vere Herbert's brother-in-law the earl of Pembroke wins appointment as lord Chamberlain to King James–securing control of the future of the Shake-speare plays, to be shared between the two earls (as well as, one suspects, Susan).
1619	Publisher William Jaggard dedicates book to de Vere's daughter Susan and her husband, imploring them to pick the "fairest fruitages" and "bestow [them] how and when you list"–requesting access to unprinted Shake-speare texts.
April 1622	18th earl of Oxford back in Tower; threats emerge of his execution.
1622	Jaggard's shop begins hurried production of complete works of Shake-speare.
Nov. 1623	Publication of Shake-speare "First Folio" dedicated to anti-Spanish Marriage crusaders earls of Montgomery and Pembroke.

DRAMATIS PERSONAE

CHAPTER 1:
THE EYE OF CHILDHOOD [1550–1562]

EDWARD DE VERE, Lord Bolbec, [post-1562] seventeenth earl of Oxford, Lord Great Chamberlain of England (1550–1604)–A.k.a. "Pasquill Caviliero," "William Shake-speare."

JOHN DE VERE, sixteenth earl of Oxford, Lord Great Chamberlain of England (1516?–1562)–A.k.a. "Earl John," Lord Edward's father.

MARGERY (GOLDING) DE VERE, countess of Oxford (1525?–1568)–Lord Edward's mother.

SIR THOMAS SMITH, [1548–53, 1572–77] Secretary of State (1513–1577)–Lord Edward's tutor (c. 1554–1562).

"THE FIGHTING VERES": HORACE ("HORATIO") VERE, [post-1596] Sir Horatio (1565–1635), and **Francis Vere,** [post-1588] Sir Francis (1560–1609)–Lord Edward's revered military cousins.

MARY DE VERE, [post-1578] Mary Bertie (1554?–1624)–Lord Edward's sister.

KATHERINE DE VERE, Lady Windsor (1541?–1600)–Lord Edward's half-sister.

EDWARD TUDOR, [post-1548] King Edward VI of England (1537–1553).

MARY TUDOR, [post-1553] Queen Mary I of England (1516–1558).

ELIZABETH TUDOR, [post-1558] Queen Elizabeth I of England (1533–1603).

SIR ROBERT DUDLEY, [post-1564] earl of Leicester (1532?–1588)–Princess/Queen Elizabeth's lifelong favorite.

JOHN BALE (1495–1563)–Playwright, author of *King Johan,* employed by Earl John, perhaps the first playwright Lord Edward ever met.

SIR WILLIAM CECIL, [post-1571] Baron (Lord) Burghley (1520–1598)–Queen Elizabeth's principal advisor and spymaster; Lord Edward's guardian (1562–71), Lord Edward's father-in-law (1571–88).

HENRY HASTINGS, [post-1560] earl of Huntington (1535–1595)–Heir presumptive

to English crown circa 1561, when he arranged a marriage match between one of his sisters and Lord Edward–a nuptial that never came to pass.

Chapter 2: EVERMORE IN SUBJECTION [1562–1569]

Laurence Nowell (1530–c. 1570)–Anglo-Saxon scholar; de Vere's tutor (1563).

Robert Cecil, [post-1591] Sir Robert, [post-1603] Baron Cecil, [post-1604] Viscount Cranborne, [post-1605] earl of Salisbury (1563–1612)–Grew up in Cecil House along with de Vere; [post-1571] de Vere's brother-in-law.

Arthur Golding (1536?–1606)–Classical scholar and antiquarian; de Vere's uncle; translator of Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (among other works); de Vere's tutor (?) c. 1563.

Richard Edwards (1525–1566)–Playwright and editor of poetry anthology *The Paradise of Dainty Devices* (published 1576), containing some of de Vere's earliest poetry.

Edward Manners, [post-1563] earl of Rutland (1549–1587)–Classmate of de Vere's from Cecil House; juror on Mary, Queen of Scots trial, 1586.

Philip Sidney, [post-1583] Sir Philip (1554–1586)–Courtier, poet, scholar, soldier, longtime de Vere rival.

George Gascoigne (1535?–1577)–Poet, playwright, author of enigmatic collection *Hundreth Sundry Flowres* (1573–75), to which de Vere may have contributed.

Thomas Brincknell (d. 1571)–Undercook at Cecil House killed by de Vere in fencing accident.

Charles Tyrell (d. 1570)–Horsemaster for Dudley family; married de Vere's mother, Margery, within a year of Earl John's death.

Anne Cecil, [post-1571] countess of Oxford (1556–1588)–De Vere's foster sister after de Vere's 1562 move to Cecil House; married de Vere in 1571; de Vere accused Anne of cuckolding him in 1576, and the two were separated until 1582.

Chapter 3: TREASONS AND VILE INSTRUMENTS [1569–1572]

Thomas Radcliffe, third earl of Sussex, [post-1573] Lord Chamberlain (1527?–1583)–De Vere's military commander, mentor, and court advisor; likely one of de Vere's earliest theatrical producers (in his capacity as master of the Lord Chamberlain's Men).

Mary Stuart, Queen of Scots (1542–1587)–Great-granddaughter of King Henry VII and heir presumptive (to many English subjects, at least) to the English throne.

"The Northern Earls": Charles Neville, [post-1564] earl of Westmorland (1543–1601), and **Sir Thomas Percy**, [post-1557] earl of Northumberland (1528–1572)–Rose up in 1569–70 in favor of Mary, Queen of Scots, and against Queen Elizabeth; de Vere participated in the suppression of the Northern Rebellion.

Thomas Howard, [post-1554] fourth duke of Norfolk (1536–1572)–De Vere's cousin and the highest-ranking nobleman in Elizabethan England.

Christopher Hatton, [post-1578] Sir Christopher, [post-1587] Lord Chancellor (c. 1540–1591)–One of Queen Elizabeth's favorites, whom she nicknamed "Lids," "Mutton," and "Sheep"; one of de Vere's rivals at court.

Henri Valois, [post-1575] King Henri III of France (1551–1589)–Son of Catherine de Medici, aided his mother in the St. Bartholomew's Day Massacre of 1572.

Philip Hapsburg, [post-1556] King Philip II of Spain (1527–1598)–Briefly married to Queen Mary Tudor (1554–58); Elizabethan England's greatest and longest-standing enemy.

Francis Walsingham, [post-1577] Sir Francis (c. 1532–1590)–English spymaster with international espionage networks to rival that of the Cecils.

Rowland Yorke (d. 1588)–De Vere's associate and servant (?); believed to have been the (double?) agent who whispered rumors of Anne Cecil's infidelities into de Vere's ear in 1576 that unleashed de Vere's jealousy and paranoia.

Chapter 4: FOR MAKING A MAN [1573–1575]

Thomas Twyne (1543–1613)–Medical student de Vere patronized who published the book *A Breviary of Britain.*

Thomas Bedingfield (1545–1613)–Scholar and friend of de Vere's; translated the book *Cardanus's Comforte* into English at de Vere's command; retrieved de Vere from the Lowlands when the earl ran away there in 1574.

William Byrd (1543?–1623)–Composer; recipient of de Vere's patronage; wrote "The Earl of Oxford's March"; defrauded of an estate de Vere had given him by one of de Vere's servants.

Mildred (Cooke) Cecil (1526–1589)–William Cecil's wife; [post-1571] de Vere's mother-in-law.

Gabriel Harvey (1553–1631)–Cambridge scholar and pedantic pamphleteer; eulogized de Vere at a time (1578) when de Vere was hiring a private secretary; mocked de Vere afterward as an Italianate fop; traded pamphleteering jabs in 1590s with satirist Thomas Nashe [q.v.].

George Baker (1540–1612)–Physician to de Vere and his wife; practitioner of new "Paracelsian" medicine; dedicated medical books to both de Vere and Anne.

Don John of Austria (1547–1578)–Bastard brother to Spain's King Philip II, military commander for Spanish and Catholic forces in Italy, the Lowlands, and the Mediterranean; de Vere may have met Don John amid the civil strife brewing in Genoa in 1575–76.

François Valois, duc d'Alençon, [post-1576] duc d'Anjou (1554–1584)–Younger brother to King Henri III of France; longtime suitor for Queen Elizabeth's hand; de Vere allied with supporters of Alençon marriage match.

Johan Sturmius (1507–1589)–Renowned classical scholar in Strasbourg; de Vere studied under Sturmius in 1575.

Orazio Cuoco (fl. 1575–76)–Venetian page whom de Vere hired in Venice and brought back with him to England.

Virginia Padoana (fl. 1575–76)–Venetian courtesan whom de Vere reputedly hired during his yearlong stay in Venice.

Chapter 5: THE FABLE OF THE WORLD [1575–1578]

Titian (Tiziano Vecellio) (c. 1488–1576)–Venetian master painter whom de Vere may have met during his Venetian sojourn.

Alessandro Piccolomini (1508–1579)–Sienese playwright and author of comedy *The Deceived (Gl'Ingannati)*, staged in Siena every year on the twelfth night after Christmas.

Anthony Munday (1560–1633)–Dramatist, poet, pamphleteer, translator, and de Vere's private secretary (on and off) from the 1580s onward.

Hélène de Tournon (d. 1577)–French noblewoman whom de Vere likely met on his return journey from Italy.

Jan Casimir (fl. 1576)–German duke who led an army toward Paris that de Vere encountered in 1576.

Prince William of Orange ("William the Silent") (1533–1584)–Protestant defender of the faith in civil wars in the Lowlands.

Charles Arundell (1540?–1587)–Catholic conspirator with whom de Vere had once coplotted but whom de Vere turned in to the authorities in 1580; Arundell viciously libeled de Vere for months thereafter; in 1584 Arundell (who had escaped to France) published and is the likely author of a similarly vicious screed against the earl of Leicester, *Leicester's Commonwealth.*

Sebastian Westcote (c. 1515–1582)–Leader of the Children of St. Paul's, a drama troupe that de Vere was affiliated with.

Peregrine Bertie, [post-1580] Baron Willoughby de Eresby (1555–1601)–Swashbuckling soldier who wed de Vere's sister Mary in 1577; ambassador to the Danish court at Elsinore, 1582 and '85.

Katherine Willoughby, duchess of Suffolk (1519–1580)–Peregrine Bertie's mother; strong-willed woman who contrived to woo de Vere back to his wife by showing him the infant daughter Elizabeth, who de Vere claimed was not his.

William Howard (1563–1640)–Youngest of the duke of Norfolk's three sons; de Vere attended Howard's wedding in 1577; Howard fought a protracted inheritance battle with his family and his wife's family (that of Elizabeth Dacre) that ended in 1600.

Martin Frobisher (1535?–1594)–Navigator and adventurer; de Vere invested in Frobisher's attempts to find the fabled "Northwest Passage" to the Orient.

Chapter 6: IN BRAWL RIDICULOUS [1577–1582]

Henry Howard, [post-1604] earl of Northampton (1540–1614)–One of Catholic coconspirators (along with Charles Arundell) whom de Vere turned in in 1580; leveled malicious slanders at de Vere in order to discredit de Vere's testimony.

Thomas Nashe (1567?–1601)–Satirist and pamphleteer; sometime compatriot (and secretary?) to de Vere; dedicated 1592 pamphlet *Strange News* to de Vere using moniker "Gentle Master William."

Edmund Spenser (c. 1552–1599)–Poet and author of *The Faerie Queene;* may have been one of the applicants for the job of de Vere's secretary c. 1578.

John Lyly (1554–1606)–Playwright and novelist; author of the popular *Euphues* novels; de Vere's secretary.

Abraham Fleming (c. 1552–1607)–Amanuensis, author, editor, and de Vere's secretary.

Walter Raleigh, [post-1584] Sir Walter (1554–1618)–Explorer, author, and military commander; de Vere's courtly friend and foe throughout the 1580s, '90s, and early 1600s.

Jean de Simier (fl. 1579–1582)–The duc d'Alençon's charming nuptial negotiator to Queen Elizabeth in Alençon's absence; became a royal favorite unto his own.

Fulke Greville, [post-1621] Lord Brooke (1554–1628)–Ally of Sir Philip Sidney's, sole witness to infamous "tennis court fight" between de Vere and Sidney in 1579; owner of King's Place, Hackney, after de Vere's widow sold it in 1609.

Edmund Campion (1540–1581)–Jesuit missionary to England; arraigned for treason in a trial in which Anthony Munday [q.v.] was a witness.

Sebastian, king of Portugal (1554–1578)–Portuguese king who had disappeared after leading a raid against Morocco; rumors abounded for years that Sebastian had survived and was returning to reclaim the Portuguese throne.

Don Antonio (1531–1595)–Pretender to the Portuguese throne whose cause many English nobles supported, in opposition to Philip II of Spain's uniting of the Portuguese and Spanish kingdoms in 1580.

Thomas Churchyard (1523?–1604)–Soldier, poet, and sometime servant to de Vere.

Thomas Watson (1556–1592)–Poet and compiler of *The Hekatompathia* (1582), a collection of sonnets dedicated to de Vere.

Robert Greene (1558?–1592)–Pamphleteer, poet, playwright, and likely hanger-on at de Vere's 1580s bohemian pleasure garden Fisher's Folly.

Anne Vavasour (fl. 1580–1621)–De Vere's mistress c. 1579–82.

Thomas Knyvet (1546–1622)–Vavasour's uncle who challenged de Vere to a duel to right his niece's wronged honor; Knyvet's and de Vere's retainers battled in London street fights for more than a year afterward.

Francis Southwell (fl. 1580)–Third Catholic coconspirator whom de Vere turned in in 1580s; issued a series of more tame libels against de Vere (compared to the flaming libels of Howard and Arundell).

Edward Veer, [post-1607] Sir Edward (1581–1629)–De Vere's natural son by Anne Vavasour [q.v.]; scholar, poet, and soldier.

Sir Henry Lee (1533–1611)–Tiltyard champion who was Anne Vavasour's [q.v.] next known lover after de Vere.

Chapter 7: FORTUNE'S DEAREST SPITE [1582–1585]

Rocco Bonetti (fl. 1580s)–Italian fencing master who set up a fencing school at the Blackfriars, London; frequently accosted by de Vere's men.

"Gastrell" and "Horsley" (fl. 1582)–Two Londoners claiming to be de Vere's retainers who fought in the de Vere–Knyvet street brawls and were caught and arraigned for the transgression.

Thomas Edwardes (fl. 1587–1595)–Elizabethan poet who memorialized the de Vere–Knyvet street brawls in the envoy to his 1595 book *Narcissus.*

Richard Mulcaster (1532–1611) Master of the Merchant Taylors' Boys drama troupe, another company that de Vere likely used in 1583 to perform one of his courtly masques.

Henry Evans (fl. 1583–84)–Welsh scrivener and playmaster who, with John Lyly [q.v.], supervised dramatic troupes sponsored by de Vere in 1583 and '84.

Frederick, [post-1559] King Frederick II of Denmark and Norway (1534–1588)–De Vere's brother-in-law Peregrine Bertie [q.v.] visited Frederick at Castle Elsinore twice, in 1582 and '85, to invest the Danish king in England's Order of the Garter and to negotiate a commercial treaty with the monarch.

Tycho Brahe (1546–1601)–Danish astronomer whom Bertie [q.v.] visited with King Frederick II [q.v.] at Brahe's observatory.

George Peele (1556–1596)–Playwright and poet with whom de Vere (and his servants John Lyly [q.v.] and Henry Evans [q.v.]) shared the Blackfriars playhouse in 1583.

Albert Laski (fl. 1583)–Polish prince and general who visited Oxford University in 1583 as part of a courtly entourage that de Vere likely joined.

Giordano Bruno (1548–1600)–Free-thinking Italian philosopher, also on hand during the 1583.

Philip Howard, [post-1580] earl of Arundel (1557–1595)–Eldest son of the executed duke of Norfolk [q.v.], like his younger brother William [q.v.] married to a Dacre (Anne Dacre); de Vere sat on the jury that condemned Howard for treason in his plotting for the success of the Spanish Armada–although Howard's death sentence was never carried out.

Chapter 8:
TO THY RUDDER TIED BY TH' STRINGS [1586–1589]

Anthony Babington (1561–1586)–Catholic conspirator who was caught in a plot that would have deposed Queen Elizabeth and crowned Mary, Queen of Scots; Mary was also arraigned for the "Babington Plot" and found guilty of treason.

Elizabeth de Vere, [post-1595] countess of Derby (1575–1627)–De Vere's first daughter, whose paternity de Vere disputed in 1576; affianced c. 1590–93 to Henry Wriothesley, earl of Southampton.

Bridget de Vere, [post-1599] Lady Norris of Rycote (1584–1620?)–De Vere's second daughter; initially affianced in 1598 to William Herbert (later earl of Pembroke).

Susan de Vere, [post-1605] countess of Montgomery (1587–1629)–De Vere's youngest daughter, likely played a role in supervising the transfer of her father's manuscripts to her husband and brother-in-law the earl of Pembroke to be turned into the Shake-speare First Folio in 1623.

Francis Drake, [post-1581] Sir Francis (1540–1596)–Circumnavigator and admiral; co-led the initial naval expedition to seek out the Spanish Armada before it reached English shores in early summer of 1588.

Charles Howard, [post-1573] Lord Charles, [1574–85] Lord Chamberlain, [1585–1618] Lord Admiral (1536–1624)–Legendary naval and military commander; co-led pre-Armada expedition in early summer 1588 with Sir Francis Drake [q.v.].

Angel Day (fl. 1583–1595)–Author and secretary; dedicated his *English Secretary* to de Vere in 1586.

Thomas Lodge (1558–1625)–Poet, playwright, and novelist and likely hanger-on at Fisher's Folly, lamenting the Folly's demise as a mythical place called "Silexedra."

Christopher Marlowe (1564–1593)–Poet, playwright, and spy; artistic peer to Shake-speare; killed by three fellow spies in a suspicious tavern brawl.

Chapter 9:
GENTLE MASTER WILLIAM [1589–1593]

Henri de Lorraine, duke of Guise (1550–1588)–One of the French nobles vying for the crown (the "War of the Three Henries") with Henri of Navarre and Henri III. Assassinated in 1588; de Vere had sent servants to fight on Guise's behalf in 1577.

"Martin Mar-prelate" (fl. 1589–91)–Puritan pamphleteer, probably a pseudonym for Job Throkmorton, MP (1545–1601).

Robert Devereux, [post-1576] earl of Essex (1565–1601)–Stepson to Robert Dudley, earl of Leicester [q.v.]; polarizing figure at court who led a faction that opposed the power of the Cecil family, especially Sir Robert [q.v.]; de Vere famously disliked Essex–but did not extend this ill feeling toward Essex's ally the earl of Southampton [q.v.]; Essex led a rebellion with Southampton in 1600 that resulted in his being tried for treason and beheaded.

Henry Wriothesley, [post-1581] earl of Southampton (1573–1624)–Affianced to de Vere's eldest daughter, Elizabeth (she of the disputed paternity), c. 1590–93; later became close with de Vere's son, Henry, eighteenth earl of Oxford; Edward de Vere appears to have been besotted with Southampton–the "Fair Youth" of Shake-speare's *Sonnets;* de Vere sat on the jury that condemned Southampton (and Essex [q.v.]) to death for treason in the Essex Rebellion; Queen Elizabeth commuted Southampton's death sentence; Southampton later led the coalition of earls opposing King James's proposed Spanish Marriage alliance c. 1620–23.

Julia Penn (fl. 1590)–Landlady whom de Vere owed for London flat that Thomas Churchyard (and other writers) rented out citing de Vere's promise to pay.

Elizabeth Trentham, [post-1592] countess of Oxford (1559?–1612)–De Vere's strong-willed and businesslike second wife.

John (Giovanni) Florio (1553–1625)–Poet and Italian dictionary editor; de Vere may have contributed a sonnet (under the pen name "Phaeton") to Florio's 1591 *Second Fruits.*

Thomas Howard, [post-1597] Baron Howard de Walden, [post-1603] earl of Suffolk (1561–1626)–Second son of executed duke of Norfolk.

William Shakspere (1564–1616)–Stratford-upon-Avon–native actor, broker, and entrepreneur; first noted appearance in London in 1592 by pamphleteer Robert Greene as a literary pretender; ultimately became known as the author of the plays and poems written by de Vere.

Henry de Vere, Lord Bolbec, [post-1604] eighteenth earl of Oxford (1593–1624)–De Vere's son and heir by his second wife, Elizabeth; joined anti-Spanish Marriage coalition with the earls of Southampton [q.v.], Montgomery [q.v.], and Pembroke [q.v.], circa 1620–23.

Chapter 10:
THE SHARP RAZOR OF A WILLING CONCEIT [1593–1598]

Robert Poley (fl. 1586–93)–Spy for Robert Cecil's network; murderer of Christopher Marlowe?

King James VI of Scotland, [post-1603] King James I of England (1566–1625).

Mary Browne Wriothesley, dowager countess of Southampton (fl. 1572–1594)–Henry Wriothesley's mother; remarried into Cecil faction in 1594 at a wedding that scholars suspect featured the debut of *A Midsummer Night's Dream.*

Sir Thomas Heneage, [post-1589] vice-chamberlain of England (c. 1532–1595)–Mary Browne Wriothesley's second husband.

The Lord Chamberlain's Men– "Shakespeare's troupe"; many first editions of Shake-speare plays advertise that the Lord Chamberlain's Men performed the text; Will Shakspere was exclusively associated with this troupe from 1594 onward; featured some of the best actors in the country (Richard Burbage, Will Kemp).

William Stanley, [post-1594] earl of Derby (1561–1642)–Court playwright who married de Vere's eldest daughter, Elizabeth de Vere [q.v.]; may have worked with de Vere in revising de Vere's courtly interludes from the 1570s and '80s into the "Shakespeare" canon.

Nicholas Hill (1570–c. 1610)–Pioneer in atomic philosophy; one of de Vere's secretaries during de Vere's final years.

Chapter 11:
BURIED BE [1598–1604]

Hugh O'Neill, earl of Tyrone (1550?–1616)–Irish rebel whom the earls of Essex and Southampton led a force in 1599 to fight.

Mary Sidney Herbert, countess of Pembroke (1561–1621)–Sister of Sir Philip Sidney [q.v.]; talented scholar and poet with whom de Vere was friendly; mother of William and Philip Herbert–de Vere daughters had been affianced to both, and both were later the patrons of the Shake-speare First Folio (1623).

Francis Norris, [post-1600] Baron Norris of Rycote (1579–1622)–In 1599, married to Bridget de Vere [q.v.].

Pierce Edmonds (fl. 1600)–English officer with whom the earl of Southampton had become intimate during the Irish campaign.

Ben Jonson (1572–1637)–Satirist, poet, and playwright on friendly terms with Henry de Vere [q.v.]; railed against Will Shakspere as a "poet-ape" and a great pretender; hired in 1623 to work on the Shake-speare First Folio (1623).

Robert Armin (1563–1615)–Comic actor for Lord Chamberlain's Men beginning in 1599; wrote of serving his "Lord in Hackney"–de Vere.

Thomas Grey, [post-1593] Lord Grey de Wilton (1575–1614)–Served under Essex and Southampton [q.v.] in Ireland; imprisoned for insubordination; sought revenge against Southampton in 1601 in London street brawl that prefigured the Essex Rebellion.

Edward Somerset, earl of Worcester, [post-1601] Master of the Horse (c. 1550–1628)–Ambitious courtier who, after the Essex Rebellion, amalgamated the moribund Earl of Oxford's Men into his troupe and rehearsed their courtly performances at the Boar's Head Inn in London.

FOREWORD

BY SIR DEREK JACOBI

AN ACTOR FACES ALMOST CONSTANT CRITICISM—ALL THE MORE SO when one advocates that Edward de Vere wrote under the pen-name "Shakespeare." Some of the more popular accusations today include charges of the wildest eccentricity, outrageous snobbery, and downright heresy. It's pointless, of course, to engage these unbecoming personal attacks. Fortunately, serious academic debate is triumphing while orthodoxy continues its retreat behind a facade of mind-numbing vilification. Herein, dear reader, you will find a book that performs the important, often fraught, always contentious, but necessary service of turning the spotlight full on the breathtaking discrepancies and shining anomalies in the accepted version of the creation of the Shakespeare canon.

So what does the Shakespeare authorship controversy mean for the poor player that struts and frets his hour upon the stage? It means, in brief, that we happy few have the opportunity at last to make contact with the original fount of thought and reason, to comprehend the hand that wrote, the eye that saw, the brain that forged, the heart that conceived, and the being that transformed a monumental life into an immortal corpus of literature.

An actor's instincts and the evidence of a growing body of research convinces me that de Vere was–along with being a scholar, patron, and author par excellence–an actor. The troupe kept by Edward de Vere's father had influenced his early childhood. De Vere's own troupe had nurtured those interests, and acting and stagecraft became intrinsic to his talents. Hence the precise and very special observation of the mechanics and meaning of the world of the theater are everywhere expressed in the plays, often as instinctive comments on more serious topics.

In *"Shakespeare" by Another Name,* Mark Anderson demonstrates the intense intellectual energy and attention to factual detail that are required to unravel what, to honest minds, is an obvious mystery. *"Shakespeare" by Another Name* presents the logical, valid, and excitingly precise arguments for recognizing that de Vere, like all writers, drew from his own experiences, interests, accomplishments, education, position, and talents, and that he invested his writing with universal truths, emotional reality, and recognizable humanity drawn from his own unique life. Just as de Vere uses theatrical phrase and metaphor naturally and easily, so, too, his wide-ranging education and ingrained knowledge of many subjects flow effortlessly through his writing. Contrast this with the lack of any evidence which places a pen in the hand of William of Stratford (except, of course, on a dubious monument!).

The great excitement of this seminal work is the precise relationship between de Vere's life and his art, unveiling many thrilling revelations of how much of himself de Vere put into his characters. This book, with fascinating specificity, suits "the action to the word, the word to the action." Innumerable instances of de Vere's experiences, his relationships, his travels, and his unusual circumstances find expression in his plays and poems. *"Shakespeare" by Another Name* is one of the very best whodunnits you will ever read.

The game's afoot!

Sir Derek Jacobi
London
February 2005

INTRODUCTION

"A human being is the best plot there is."
–John Galsworthy

Every author's life tells a story. According to the conventional biography, William Shakespeare was born in Stratford-upon-Avon in 1564; he moved to London sometime in the late 1580s or early 1590s and soon enjoyed great success as an actor and playwright, authoring some 37 or more plays, 2 epic poems, 154 sonnets, and assorted other verse that have become the crowning works of the English language. He retired to his hometown sometime around 1612, and he died in 1616. Seven years after his death, the first edition of his collected plays appeared in print. Although no authenticated portrait from his lifetime exists, the 1623 folio of Shakespeare's works features the above image on its opening page.

Yet this image and this conventional story have confounded many great minds over the years.

The novelist Henry James remarked in a 1903 letter to a friend that he was "haunted by the conviction that the divine William is the biggest and most successful fraud ever practiced on a patient world." In Sigmund Freud's 1927 essay "An Autobiographical Study," the founding father of modern psychology stated, "I no longer believe that William Shakespeare the actor from

Stratford was the author of the works that have been ascribed to him." Mark Twain published an entire book in 1909–*Is Shakespeare Dead?*–that tore the conventional Shakespeare biography to tatters. Walt Whitman told a confidant in 1888: "It is my final belief that the Shakespearean plays were written by another hand than Shaksper's [*sic*]. . . . I do not seem to have any patience with the Shaksper argument: it is all gone for me–up the spout. The Shaksper case is about closed."

Doubts about the Shakespeare story emerged less than a century after the first conventional biography appeared. In 1709 the dramatist Nicholas Rowe first sketched out "Some Account of the Life, *&c.* of Mr. William Shakespear [*sic*]." In 1747, the antiquarian Joseph Greene came across a copy of Shakespeare's will and was singularly unimpressed, calling the document "so absolutely void of the least particle of that spirit which animated our great poet." In 1767, the theatrical impresario David Garrick launched the Shakespeare industry in Stratford-upon-Avon with a three-day jubilee that transformed the backwater Warwickshire town into the literary tourist mecca that Stratford has remained to this day. During the same year, Garrick's friend, the physician Herbert Lawrence, wrote an allegory, *The Life and Adventures of Common Sense,* accusing "Shakespear" of stealing other people's works. In 1786, the American statesman John Adams, upon visiting Stratford, echoed a growing skepticism of the validity of the Shakespeare story. "There is nothing preserved of this great genius which is worth knowing," Adams recorded in his personal travelogue. "Nothing which might inform us what education, what company, what accident, turned his mind to letters and the drama." Early in the next century, the novelist Washington Irving continued the thread of doubt with his own semiautobiographical account of a visit to Stratford. "The long interval during which Shakespeare's writings lay in comparative neglect has spread its shadow over his history," Irving wrote in his 1820 *Sketch Book of Geoffrey Crayon, Gent.* "And it is his good or evil lot that scarcely anything remains to his biographers but a scanty handful of conjectures."

Throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Walt Whitman, Mark Twain, and Henry James had joined a chorus of doubters who all expressed the same grave reservation: The conventional biography of Shakespeare is simply wrong; the ghost of another man haunts the canon.

In 1920, this ghost materialized in a revolutionary work of investigative scholarship by the British educator J. Thomas Looney. Looney's *"Shakespeare" Identified in Edward de Vere, seventeenth Earl of Oxford* gained early converts such as Sigmund Freud and the actor and director Leslie Howard–both of whom proclaimed their conviction that the Elizabethan courtier Edward de Vere was "Shakespeare." In establishment circles of Shakespeare scholarship, however, Looney's book was met with a resounding harrumph. (Looney's detractors' most consistent critique was also their most effective: He has a funny name.)

De Vere (1550–1604) was a courtly poet and playwright who, as one literary critic in 1589 put it, would be recognized as perhaps the finest of his age "if [his] doings could be found out and made public with the rest." Although some sixteen to twenty youthful poems have been attributed to de Vere–some of notable quality, some not–none of his mature dramatic or poetic works have survived under his own name. The young de Vere was an active patron of literature and drama and a sponsor of theatrical troupes. And, this book proposes, de Vere added to and revised his early courtly masques and interludes, eventually transforming them into the plays and poems published under the byline "William Shakespeare."

"I think [the earl of] Oxford wrote Shakespeare," the filmmaker and leading Shakespearean actor and director of the first half of the twentieth century Orson Welles told an interviewer in 1954. "If you don't, there are some awful funny coincidences to explain away." In the half century since the screen legend uttered these prophetic words, countless scholars and investigators have compounded those "awful funny coincidences" to the point that every corner of the Shakespeare canon has now been found to contain snippets or passages from de Vere's life and times.

De Vere became entangled in a love affair that led to an interfamilial war–Elizabethan Montagues and Capulets. While traveling in France, de Vere suffered the devilish whisperings of his own IAGO, who ignited de Vere's jealousy over his wife's alleged infidelities. De Vere lived in Venice and went into debt borrowing from the local loan merchants. De Vere's first marriage produced three daughters who inherited their alienated father's family seat while he was still alive *(King Lear)*. He had a close but rocky relationship with Queen Elizabeth–whom he portrayed variously as the witty and charming OLIVIA *(Twelfth Night)*, the powerful vixen CLEOPATRA, the cloying VENUS, and the compromised CRESSIDA. De Vere's father-in-law was the historical prototype for POLONIUS; de Vere's brother-in-law was the original for PETRUCHIO; de Vere's sister the model for PETRUCHIO's KATE; his first wife for OPHELIA, DESDEMONA, and HERO (among many others); de Vere's second wife for PORTIA; his eldest daughter for MIRANDA; her husband for MIRANDA's FERDINAND.

Perhaps the most autobiographical play in Shakespeare is *Hamlet,* with multifarious connections to de Vere's life that are discussed in nearly every chapter of this book. For example, when de Vere was traveling through France at age twenty-six, he encountered a Teutonic prince who paraded his troops before de Vere's eyes. Soon thereafter, de Vere boarded a ship that was overtaken by pirates, and de Vere was stripped naked and left on the English shore. In Act 4 of *Hamlet,* in a sequence that is in no known source text for the play, HAMLET first witnesses the invading PRINCE FORTINBRAS's troops and then boards a ship that is overtaken by pirates, in an ordeal that leaves a humiliated HAMLET stripped naked on the Danish shore.

"Shakespeare," it turns out, was one of the most autobiographical authors who ever took pen to paper. To recognize this, one need only redefine "Shakespeare."

The best place to begin is with the name itself: Shake-speare.* The hyphen appears in many of the first publications of the plays and poems. Hyphenated phrases in an author's name often suggested a concealed author–in an age rife with political and religious intrigue, when picking the wrong alliance or offending the wrong official could mean imprisonment, torture, forfeiture of one's properties to the crown, or a death sentence. In the words of literary historians Archer Taylor and Frederic J. Mosher, "In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the Golden Age of pseudonyms, almost every writer used a pseudonym at some time during his career." During the Elizabethan Age (the period spanning the reign of Queen Elizabeth I of England: 1558–1603), hyphenated pen names included "Martin Mar-prelate," a pamphleteer who railed at Anglican prelates; "Cuthbert Curry-knave," a satirist who savaged ("curried") his knavish pamphleteering opponents; and "Tom Tell-truth," a supposedly truth-spouting polemicist.

William Shake-speare is no exception. According to ancient Greek myth, the goddess Athena–divine protectress of learning and the arts–was born from the forehead of her father, Zeus, fully dressed and armed for battle. At birth, she is said to have shaken her spear, and authors looking back upon this legend associated her with the act of spear shaking. As a deft allusion to the classical goddess affiliated with the theater, "Shake-speare" was in fact a perfect pen name for a playwright.

Numerous candidates for the authorship of the Shake-speare canon have been suggested over the years, including Edward de Vere, Francis Bacon, Christopher Marlowe, the countess of Pembroke, Edward Dyer, the earl of Rutland, the earl of Derby, etc. The academic establishment has largely ignored the heretics, assuming that only the incumbent could have written the plays. But the Stratford native Will Shakspere–as the actor preferred to spell it–is not as inevitably "Shakespeare" as he first appears.

To begin with, no original playscripts exist. The greatest literary manhunt in history has yielded no manuscripts, no diaries, and no correspondence issuing from Will Shakspere's pen. The only known letter written to him, concerning a loan, was never sent. Despite the enormous economic incentive that

* This book will use two different spellings to distinguish between the man and the myth: *Shake-speare* with a hyphen will signify the author, who this book hypothesizes was Edward de Vere, earl of Oxford (1550–1604); *Shakspere* will be used for Will Shakspere (1564–1616), the Stratford-upon-Avon–born actor, theatrical entrepreneur, and hypothesized literary front man.

has existed for centuries to find any scrap of paper with Will Shakspere's handwriting on it, scholars have authenticated only a few signatures on legal documents written by other people and two words, *By me,* signed on his will. These scratchings are all that has ever been found from the pen of the man presumed to be the greatest literary genius in the Western world.

Then there is the matter of Will Shakspere's last will and testament. In it, the Stratford actor detailed his worldly possessions down to his silver gilt bowl and second-best bed. An interlineation in the will bequeaths money to three actor friends for mourning rings. But nowhere does Will Shakspere mention any literary or theatrical properties. No books, no manuscripts, no plays–the most precious things in a dramatist's life–and one is to believe that not a scrap of it merited mention in his will?

Since great writers are invariably great readers, a further question emerges: Where are Will Shakspere's books? Public libraries did not exist in Elizabethan England. Unless one had access to university libraries or other private collections, what was in your household was what you read. Approximately 150 books were printed in Elizabethan England per year. (By comparison, 40,000 books per year are printed today in the United States.) A vast majority of Elizabethan titles concerned matters of religion, law, or medicine. Assembling a library of more than a hundred volumes–especially a secular library containing plays, poems, and other works of fiction–was an impressive, time-consuming, and costly feat. Books were cherished commodities.

More than two hundred books survive from each of the libraries of the of the early seventeenth-century playwright Ben Jonson and poet John Donne. The Shake-speare plays and poems reveal that the author was a voracious reader–citing over two hundred books, some of which were untranslated works published on the Continent in Greek, Latin, French, Italian, and Spanish. Yet, scholars have never authenticated a single book, play, pamphlet, or broadsheet that ever belonged to Will Shakspere. Some Shake-speare plays, such as *Hamlet* and *Macbeth,* draw characters and story lines from unpublished manuscripts in private archives. But there is no explanation for how Shakspere could have gained access to restricted aristocratic family libraries.

The erudition on display in Shake-speare is wide-ranging and profound. Studies of the Shake-speare canon by lawyers, theologians, physicians, astronomers, philosophers, linguists, military tacticians, sailors, historians, botanists, literary scholars, musicians, and classicists conclude that Shake-speare manifests a ready knowledge of their respective fields. All find the author anywhere from competent to expert in these varied disciplines. The myth that Shake-speare had "small Latin and less Greek"–stemming from a misreading of a poem by Ben Jonson–has inhibited the natural conclusion of these studies: Shake-speare was one of the most learned and broadly educated authors in history.

Even if Will Shakspere had attended the Stratford Grammar School as a child, a supposition for which there is no evidence, it would not have provided him the kind of myriad-minded expertise one finds in abundance in Shake-speare. Will Shakspere's documented biography is extensive, but it is all commercial activities, lawsuits, and entrepreneurial ventures. It reveals no formal education, tutelage, or apprenticeship in his presumed craft.

Shake-speare's works also convey a familiarity with specialized knowledge of places and cultures that could not have been found in books or taught in school. The plays and poems reveal a well-traveled world citizen–one who had an intimate familiarity with Italian and French culture unattainable at second hand. Shake-speare sets as many plays in France and Italy as he does in England. *Henry V* contains a scene written entirely in courtly (and bawdy) French, while the characters and situations of *Love's Labour's Lost* reveal a familiarity with French manners, mannerisms, and courtly culture. Shake-speare knew that Florence's citizens were recognized for their arithmetic and bookkeeping *(Othello)*; he knew that Padua was the "nursery of arts" *(The Taming of the Shrew)* and that Lombardy was "the pleasant garden of great Italy" *(Taming of the Shrew)*; he knew that a dish of baked doves was a time-honored northern Italian gift *(The Merchant of Venice)*. He knew Venice, in particular, like nowhere else in the world, save for London itself. Picayune Venetian matters scarcely escaped his grasp: the duke of Venice's two votes in the city council, for example, or the special nighttime police force–the *Signori di Notte*–peculiar to Venice, or the foreign city where Venice's Jews did most of their business, Frankfurt.

The cornerstones of the case for Will Shakspere as "Shakespeare," in fact, constitute one meager docket:

Greene's Groatsworth of Wit: In 1592, the playwright Robert Greene allegedly lashed out in print at Shakspere. Greene's posthumous pamphlet *Greene's Groatsworth of Wit* chastised someone nicknamed "Shake-scene" as an "upstart crow . . . an absolute *Johannes factotum*" who "supposes he is as well able to bombast out a blank verse as the rest" of London's top dramatists. Because Shakspere "supposes" that he was as capable a composer as his fellow playwrights, *Greene's Groatsworth* would appear to deliver crucial testimony that Shakspere was, in fact, an author–however much Greene did not like him.

A closer reading of *Groatsworth,* however, discredits Shakspere as a writer of any capacity. In Aesop's *Fables,* the crow was a figure that disguised itself in the plumage of other birds. A "*Johannes factotum*" in sixteenth-century usage was a braggart and vainglorious dilettante. And according to the *Oxford English Dictionary,* Elizabethans often used the word *suppose* to mean, "To feign, pretend; occasionally, to forge." Shakspere, *Greene's Groatsworth* suggests, was actually an impostor.

The Return from Parnassus: This anonymous comedy staged by students at Cambridge University in 1600 pokes fun at an oafish actor, the clown Will Kemp. Kemp is made to say, "Few of the university men pen plays well; they smell too much of that writer Ovid and that writer Metamorphosis." The joke here is that Kemp doesn't know the difference between an author (Ovid) and the title of his work *(The Metamorphoses)*.

In the next breath, Kemp says, "Why here's our fellow Shakespeare puts them all down!" With these words, Kemp glorifies the playwright "Shake-speare," a "fellow" actor. But the joke is on Kemp. A sophisticated Elizabethan university audience would understand that if Kemp doesn't know that "Metamorphosis" wasn't the name of a writer, he would have zero credibility to talk about the actor Shakspere as a writer.

Venus and Adonis* and *The Rape of Lucrece: These two Shake-speare poems from 1593 and '94 are dedicated to the earl of Southampton, a high-ranking Elizabethan courtier. Southampton is conventionally assumed–upon no further evidence–to have been Shakspere's patron. A number of scholars over the past two centuries have devoted countless man-hours to discovering other evidence of Southampton's patronage of Shakspere. They have found none. As will be seen in Chapter 9, the *Venus and Adonis* and *Lucrece* dedications actually make more sense coming from Edward de Vere's pen than from Shakspere's. For one, at the time of the dedications, Southampton was being considered as a possible husband for de Vere's daughter Elizabeth.

"Terence": In a pamphlet published in 1611, the poet John Davies described "Shake-spear" [*sic*] as "Our English Terence." Terence is known today to have been both an actor and a playwright.

However, this is not what many in the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries believed. According to the essayists Cicero, Quintilian, and Montaigne, as well as a leading literary textbook of the Elizabethan Age, the actor Terence was actually a front man for one or more Roman aristocratic playwrights. Although most scholars today dismiss the possibility, many of Davies's learned contemporary readers would have recognized the allusion: Shakspere was an actor who pretended to be an author. The author Shake-speare was someone else altogether.

The Book and the Monument: Shakspere's funerary monument in Stratford-upon-Avon's Trinity Church, constructed sometime before 1623, ostensibly suggests he was a writer. (The statue is of a man using a pillow for a desktop, holding a quill pen over a blank piece of paper; the cryptic inscription beneath the statue reads, in part, ". . . all [that] he hath writ leaves living art but page to serve his wit"–although exactly what these words mean has long been a mystery and will be discussed later.) The first edition of the complete plays of Shake-speare in 1623 alludes to the Trinity Church bust (". . . when time dissolves thy Stratford monument . . .") and to the river in

Shakspere's hometown ("...sweet swan of Avon..."). Together, the 1623 First Folio and the Stratford monument would appear to deliver prima facie evidence for Shakspere as Shake-speare.

However, both date to a period (circa 1623) when Edward de Vere's children and in-laws were waging a brutal campaign in the court of King James I against a controversial British royal marriage alliance with Spain. This book argues de Vere's children and in-laws used the works of Shake-speare as part of a propaganda war during the "Spanish Marriage Crisis" of the early 1620s–and that the Stratford monument and publication of the Folio constituted a last-ditch maneuver to preserve de Vere's literary legacy, even if it meant burying his identity.

And that's the whole of it. There are abundant additional references in sixteenth- and early seventeenth-century writings to Shake-speare's plays and poems, none of which connect to Shakspere of Stratford. There are also contemporary allusions to Shakspere's business investments and theatrical activities at the Globe Theatre and elsewhere. But these don't connect to Shake-speare the author.

So far as is known and can be proved, Shakspere never traveled anywhere beyond the roads connecting London to Stratford-upon-Avon. So far as is known and can be proved, he did not even attend Stratford Grammar School. So far as is known and can be proved, Shakspere never wrote a complete sentence in his life. Shakspere's wife and daughters were, like his parents and siblings, either illiterate or close to it.

"We are the reasoning race," Mark Twain wrote in *Is Shakespeare Dead?* "And when we find a vague file of chipmunk tracks stringing through the dust of Stratford village, we know by our reasoning powers that Hercules has been along there. I feel that our fetish is safe for three centuries yet."

Edward de Vere was a brilliant and troubled man with whom one might enjoy sharing a beer but loathe sharing a house. He was at times a cad and a scoundrel. He also was a notorious teller of tall tales. One of his contemporaries recorded a fable de Vere recited about his adventures in Italy: "In it [de Vere] glories greatly. Diversely hath he told it, and when he enters into it, he can hardly out, which hath made such sport as often have I been driven to rise from his table laughing."

Despite his tall tales, it was actually de Vere's truthfulness that ultimately necessitated his taking refuge behind the Shake-speare mask. De Vere spent nearly his entire life in Queen Elizabeth's court, portraying this world and its key figures unflinchingly. He skewered such powerful men as Sir Christopher Hatton (MALVOLIO in *Twelfth Night*), Sir Philip Sidney (SLENDER in *The Merry Wives of Windsor*; SIR ANDREW AGUECHEEK in *Twelfth Night;* MICHAEL CASSIO in *Othello*), Lord Robert Dudley (CLAUDIUS in *Hamlet;* JUSTICE SHALLOW in *The Merry Wives of Windsor*), William Cecil, Lord Burghley (POLONIUS), the earl of Southampton (PATROCLUS in *Troilus and Cressida*), and the earl of Essex (CORIOLANUS). De Vere also exposed the court's dirty laundry, accusing Dudley of being a poisoner *(Hamlet)*, turning Cecil into a veritable pimp (PANDARUS in *Troilus and Cressida*), and even portraying the sacred Virgin Queen as a vain and fickle tease with a Jezebel streak (CLEOPATRA, GERTRUDE, CRESSIDA, VENUS). "Shakespeare" was a subterfuge that distanced the scandalous works from its primary subjects: the queen and her powerful inner circle of advisors. The "Shakespeare" ruse enabled de Vere to write till the end of his days in 1604. However, the bargain was a Faustian one, depriving de Vere of the immortality due him for his literary accomplishments and foisting upon the world a monumental myth.

The Shake-speare canon, informed by de Vere's life story, paints a vivid and complex picture. He was both a defender and critic of the state, a bohemian and a statesman, an outlaw and an enforcer of the law, a comic and a quintessentially tragic figure, a patron and an artist seeking patronage. He was an athletic figure with military aspirations who also was effeminate and inhabited a small frame.

But de Vere's most striking physical characteristic was his eyes. His extant portraits (two of which are pictured on the cover of this book and discussed in Appendix D) all find the sitter, eyebrows arched, fixing a piercing gaze out of the canvas and through the ages. Behind those windows lay the cagey intellect of a man who knew he knew too much.

USAGE NOTE

THE INTRODUCTION HAS ALREADY EXPLAINED THE USAGE OF *Shakspere* (meaning the Stratford-upon-Avon–born actor and hypothesized front man) and *Shake-speare* (meaning the hypothesized author, Edward de Vere). Spelling has been modernized in the letters, poems, plays, and other documents quoted herein—except for a few instances in which retaining Elizabethan spelling adds useful color or character. Where available, original spelling is used in the notes. Inside the quotation marks, confusing Elizabethan syntax has been slightly updated with the addition of missing names, titles, articles, and conjunctions in square brackets. Glosses of antiquated words or phrases appear in square brackets in italic type.

A few other anachronisms and simplifications have been introduced to assist the reader in remembering family alliances and navigating a sea of shifting titles, names, and offices: The female leads in this story retain their maiden names after marriage. The subject of this biography will be referred to as "Lord Edward" while his father is still alive and, simply, "de Vere" once he becomes the seventeenth earl of Oxford. (De Vere's children will also be referred to using the surname "de Vere" as opposed to just "Vere." Although some American authors capitalize the *d,* this book retains the convention of keeping the honorific "de" in lowercase.) Queen Elizabeth's paramour and potential husband the French duc d'Alençon will be referred to throughout the book as "Alençon"—even though he held other titles (such as duc d'Anjou) later in his life. To help the reader keep track of the key players and their various offices and titles, this book's prefatory materials also feature a *Dramatis Personae* and time line.

In this book, the new year always begins on January 1. (In many, though maddeningly not all, original documents from the period, the year didn't

change over till March 25.) Other than this modernization, all dates in this book remain "old style"–as heedless as Elizabethans were of the ten-day calendrical shift Pope Gregory XIII introduced in 1582.

Small caps will be used to distinguish the names of characters from the Shake-speare canon: FALSTAFF, HAMLET, PORTIA, etc.

CHAPTER 1

THE EYE OF CHILDHOOD

[1550–1562]

ON APRIL 12, 1550, IN THE PRIVATE APARTMENTS OF A BRITISH stone-walled medieval fortress, a lord and lady welcomed their heir into the world. If the boy survived, the child's father–John de Vere, sixteenth earl of Oxford–could henceforth rest assured that when he died, his own son would carry forward the title of seventeenth earl.

From the moment of christening at Castle Hedingham in the eastern county of Essex, Edward de Vere would be known as Viscount Bolbec. Lord Edward's high birth would place him in adulthood among kings and queens and the powerful men around them who ran the state. His fate was to be their gadfly and fool, a black sheep of this ancient and revered family. But nothing at the time of his birth would have led anyone to suspect that such a strange and ungainly future awaited.

This biography will proceed under the assumption that, by himself or in collaboration, Edward de Vere wrote under the name William Shake-speare. He is not the Shakespeare with whom we are familiar.

Edward de Vere's ancestors had, for four hundred years, played a leading role in the wars and politics of England. In an uninterrupted succession from the Norman Conquest onward, de Veres had served the crown as statesmen and military commanders. After 1142, de Veres also wore the coronet of the earldom of Oxford. The first earl of Oxford had supported Empress Matilda's (unsuccessful) claim to the throne against King Stephen; the second earl had served under King John; the third earl had taken up arms against John; the seventh earl led a naval fleet against the French at Calais and laid siege to Rheims. The ninth earl, the most infamous of his line, had been a consort and royal favorite of the homosexual king Richard II, and had forfeited his lands on Richard's fall. The eleventh earl had served Henry V at Agincourt. The

twelfth earl had fought in the Wars of the Roses and was executed by King Edward IV.

The history of the fifteenth earl is intimately bound up with the history of Tudor England. The fifteenth earl had supported the divorce of King Henry VIII's queen Catherine and carried the crown for the coronation of Anne Boleyn, mother of the future queen Elizabeth. Edward de Vere himself was named after Henry's only son, England's king Edward VI. The 13-year-old king Edward sent a gilded chalice for Lord Edward's christening on April 17, 1550.

Infant mortality rates demanded that children be baptized soon after birth, lest they die in the nursery without being blessed by holy water–dooming their souls to limbo. Then again, limbo was just the sort of idolatrous belief that the reformist king Edward was working to abolish. When Henry VIII founded the Church of England in 1534, it was little more than a British denomination of Catholicism. Communion still assumed the physical transformation of wine into blood and bread into the body of Christ. Much of the Mass in Henry VIII's day was still read in Latin. Saints and sacraments of yore–blessing of the candles at Candlemas, releasing of the doves from the roof of St. Paul's on Whit Sunday–remained firmly in place. Henry's son, on the other hand, was a reformer. Edward VI set out to smash all remaining vestiges of Catholic beliefs. He enacted new laws to support Protestant reformers. He commissioned new books of homilies and a Book of Common Prayer; and in a bold stroke of radicalism, his government made English the primary language of the church service.

In the mid-sixteenth century, the ancient earldom of Oxford was a vestige of a bygone age. The earldom's seat was a place called Castle Hedingham in East Anglia, northeast of London, set on a hill near the river Colne. The river wound through East Anglia, past another de Vere estate at Earls Colne, and into the North Sea via Colchester. Hedingham had been built within the first century after the Norman Conquest (1066), when the family's ancestors came across the channel from their home in the Côtentin Peninsula of Normandy. William the Conqueror granted Castle Hedingham and thirteen other estates to the de Veres for their military service in helping the Normans overrun the Saxons. Castle Hedingham's central Norman keep–the one building that remains today–was a foreboding stone fortress roughly 60 feet on each side and 110 feet tall. Built to withstand the engines of a medieval siege, the keep sheltered five stories that included soldiers' quarters, a munitions room, and a banquet hall and armory beneath a twenty-one-foot-high Norman arch. Brick walls around the entire hilltop estate formed a first defense against attackers. Inside stood the keep, a stable and barnyard, a brewhouse, a granary, a chapel, a tennis court, lodgings, kitchens, and pantries. In its exemplary battle, the castle was besieged in 1216 by King John himself.

Edward de Vere's father owned some three hundred castles and mansions across England. But each of these medieval manors generated enormous bills

as well as a dwindling supply of income. Many properties were forever in the red. Feudal estates had been ideal holdings to command in the centuries after the Conquest, when the government required its lords to provide armies for crusades and wars. The Tudors, on the other hand, needed money. Those who could generate a steady stream of income were the new men of the age. A keen business manager might have spent a career making the holdings of the earls of Oxford productive and profitable once again. But John de Vere, sixteenth earl of Oxford–or Earl John, as he was commonly called–was no businessman.

Personally, John de Vere seems to have been a man both boorish and cultured. His relationships with women can only be described as rocky. Earl John abandoned, but did not divorce, his first wife. One of his mistresses, to whom he may have been bigamously married, was beaten up by his in-laws and other associates. He abandoned a second mistress and left a woman to whom he was engaged, on the day before their wedding.

And yet Earl John was also a generous patron, sponsoring a dramatic troupe (the Earl of Oxford's Men) that featured some of the finest actors in England. According to the scholar and diplomat Sir Thomas Smith, "I think no man of England . . . could do so much and so readily with threatenings, imprisonments, and pains as my lord doeth here with the love that the gentlemen and the whole country beareth to him."

A story survives of Earl John hunting wild boar in France. His French companions were armed as if for war, while he was "no otherwise attired than as when he walked in his own private bedchamber, only a dancing rapier by his side." When the hunting party cornered the beast, Earl John dismounted and attacked the boar with his inferior blade–much to the consternation of his fellow hunters. "My lords," he replied to his astonished companions, "what have I done of which I have no feeling? Is it the killing of this English pig? Why, every boy in my nation would have performed it. They may be bugbears to the French: to us they are but servants."

Of Margery, Earl John's second wife and Lord Edward's mother, few records survive. What she thought about her husband's romantic history is unknown but probably not hard to guess. Countess Margery's two known references to her son, both found in letters written to the Secretary of State Sir William Cecil, appeared at a time when the young lord Edward had been moved out of the house. These missives give only passing mention of her child and do not request any information about his life or well-being. The countess, it appears, lived out the teachings of the sixteenth-century humanist Juan Luis Vives, whose popular book *Instruction of a Christian Woman* told mothers that "cherishing marreth the sons and it utterly destroyeth the daughters."

This skewed philosophy of mothering consistently appears as the norm in Shake-speare. Lord Edward would grow up to portray caring and nurturing

mother figures almost as emissaries from an alien world–loving LADY MACDUFFS in a land where brutal LADY MACBETHS command center stage. A third of the Shake-speare canon features no mothers whatsoever.

While the author named characters after other family and friends–his cousins Horatio and Francis Vere, for instance, are known to eternity as *Hamlet's* HORATIO and FRANCISCO–the name Margery gets only a passing mention, in *The Merchant of Venice:*

> LAUNCELOT I am LAUNCELOT, your boy that was, your son that is, your child that shall be.
> OLD GOBBO I cannot think you are my son.
> LAUN. I know not what I shall think of that. . . . I am sure Margery your wife is my mother.

At the time of Edward's birth, the sixteenth earl and his countess had one other child, Katherine, from the husband's first marriage. Katherine was approximately nine years older than Edward. (Her exact birth date is unknown.) She, too, never appears to have been close to her half-brother and would later file a slanderous lawsuit against her sibling accusing him of being a bastard. Sometime around Lord Edward's fourth year, his other sister, Mary, was born.

As Castle Hedingham was the family seat, it is safe to assume that no small part of Lord Edward's early childhood was spent there. As a toddler inside this ancient castle, Edward's formative years were probably quite lonely ones, living with an indifferent mother and a distant, feudal lord of a father. During the winter months, when the sixteenth earl's dramatic troupe was not touring the provinces, the players would have stayed at the castle to entertain the family and revel away the long, cold nights–while the troupe's fool (some have suspected the otherwise unemployed jester from Henry VIII's court Will Somers) would naturally have been a magnet for a precocious and lonesome child with a budding sense of verbal foolery. HAMLET's heartfelt words over Yorick's skull certainly suggest an author reflecting on his earliest days:

> Alas, poor Yorick! I knew him, HORATIO; a fellow of infinite jest, of most excellent fancy. He hath bore me on his back a thousand times, and now how abhor'd in my imagination it is! my gorge rises at it. Here hung those lips that I have kiss'd I know not how oft. Where be your gibes now, your gambols, your songs, your flashes of merriment that were wont to set the table on a roar?

By the great stone fireplace in this ancient Norman keep, the players and the patriarch no doubt favored the young heir with tales of his ancestors' exploits.

Such accounts of de Vere family successes and failures would color how Lord Edward would later portray the story of England in the Shake-speare history plays. Shake-speare's histories reveal an acute sense of de Vere family legend: the Shake-speare canon rewrites English history not only to glorify the Elizabethan dynasty (the House of Tudor) but also to amplify some of the earls of Oxford's greatest accomplishments and paper over some of the earls of Oxford's greatest embarrassments.

Robert, the third earl of Oxford, living in the time of King John (1199–1216), had helped to force the monarch to sign the Magna Carta at Runnymede. There the earl was elected one of the Great Charter's twenty-five guardians. Excommunicated by the pope for insolence, the third earl committed treason when he joined a rebellion to hand the throne over to the French dauphin. In response, King John laid siege to Castle Hedingham–a military campaign that ended in the French dauphin returning to his home country and John retaining the throne. In Shake-speare's account of this era *(King John)*, the traitor third earl is never even mentioned.

On the other hand, the thirteenth earl of Oxford brought fame to the annals of family legend. He patronized leading men of letters, including the translator and printer William Caxton. The thirteenth earl also helped depose the Yorkist king Richard III in the storied battle of Bosworth. A stone bas-relief now thought to have hung in Castle Hedingham tells the tale of this battle, with an unhorsed Richard III–one can almost hear him crying, "My kingdom for a horse!"–grasping at his crown while a victorious Henry Tudor rides triumphantly with the earl of Oxford close at his side.

Shake-speare is hardly subtle about the esteem he accords this illustrious de Vere: In the Shake-speare *Henry VI* plays, the thirteenth earl becomes "valiant OXFORD" and "brave OXFORD, wondrous well belov'd." Shake-speare's *Henry VI* plays have the EARL OF OXFORD retreating from one battle only to take up arms against the Yorkists at Dorset. At the Battle of Tewksbury, "sweet OXFORD" determines the place where the enemies will be fought. In reality, the historical thirteenth earl of Oxford was neither at Dorset nor at Tewksbury–and was certainly not worthy of the undying praise Shake-speare heaps upon him. Shake-speare also poked fun at his own infatuation with his ancestor, inserting a gratuitous joke into *Henry V* about the thirteenth earl of Oxford's most inglorious moment–a friendly-fire incident that led to an embarrassing defeat at the Battle of Barnet.

In the winter of 1552–53, King Edward VI fell ill with what doctors now think was a virulent strain of pneumonia. On July 6, 1553, the prophecies of a long and illustrious Edwardian Age did not come to pass. The sixteen-year-old monarch had died. Next in line to the throne–after a botched attempt to

crown the Protestant sympathizer Lady Jane Grey–was King Edward's half-sister Mary, as zealously Catholic as her brother was Protestant.

Mary hated her younger half-sister Elizabeth, who the new queen thought was just a bastard child of her father's strumpet Anne Boleyn. Elizabeth assured her elder half-sibling that she celebrated Catholic Mass with an honest and open heart. But, according to one eyewitness, Princess Elizabeth was also "very timid and trembled when she spoke" with Mary.

As England's Protestants had feared, "Bloody" Mary, as she would soon be known, wanted foremost to return England to the Roman faith. The tools of the Spanish Inquisition awaited the application of her reactionary zeal.

Smart courtiers who valued their lives and lands discovered in themselves a renewed love of Catholicism. Protestants-at-heart learned to keep their antipapist curses to themselves. Earl John was one of many nobles drafted into supervising Mary's burnings of Protestant heretics.

Sometime during Lord Edward's youth–when is not precisely known–the child was moved out of Castle Hedingham and into the household of Sir Thomas Smith. Former Secretary of State to the late king Edward, Smith was a Protestant friend of the family. According to a letter written years later between two of Smith's courtly colleagues, Smith had, at some point during Lord Edward's youth, made Lord Edward his "scholar." During Queen Mary's reign, Smith was otherwise unemployed, enjoying a prosperous country life at his riverside estate of Ankerwicke in Buckinghamshire, near Windsor Castle. Smith had also recently married into a family that owned an Essex estate named Hill Hall, a day's ride from Castle Hedingham.

Smith would later write to the Lord Treasurer of England that Lord Edward was "brought up in my house." By this statement, Smith likely meant that he home-schooled his young student at either Hill Hall or Ankerwicke. However, since Hill Hall was under construction during much of the 1550s, Smith's Buckinghamshire estate is the more likely site of a rigorous classical and Renaissance education for one precocious earl-in-waiting. The former statesman and Cambridge University regius professor of civil law may have felt that the task of tutoring a mere child was a demotion. But Smith's instruction of Edward de Vere would, in the end, prove to be an inestimably generous gift to the world of English letters.

Ankerwicke was a manor that overlooked the Thames and stood an hour's walk from Datchet Mead, Frogmore House, and the town of Windsor, all part of the local color that form the backdrop of Shake-speare's *Merry Wives of Windsor*. Although Ankerwicke was pulled down in the nineteenth century, inventories of the twenty-room domicile survive–detailing a comfortable but still modest household containing such curious items as a "picture in a table," "a hanging of cosmography," and three unidentified "painted pictures." In 1555, the forty-two-year-old Smith, who had recently served as

provost of nearby Eton College, was settling into Ankerwicke with his new wife, Philippa Wilford, the childless widow of an Essex landowner.

The Smiths' marriage remained childless, too, although the husband had an illegitimate son, Thomas, three years older than Lord Edward, who may have spent some time in the family household. Disburdened of raising her own brood, Philippa Smith, in her early thirties at the time, was probably the closest the former Hedingham resident ever had to a caring mother figure in his life. When, as a young adult, Edward de Vere was recuperating from a deadly illness, he holed himself up amid surroundings that must have sparked childhood memories of a nurturing environment–the nearby town of Windsor.

Nurturing, however, would only have consumed a small portion of the day's agenda in the Smith household.

Education started early in those days. In one extreme example, the French essayist Montaigne was already fluent in Latin by the age of six. Nobles in particular were given little time to enjoy childhood. In the words of the handbook on upper-class child-rearing, Thomas Elyot's *Boke Named the Governour* (1531), "That infelicity of our time and country compelleth us to encroach somewhat upon the years of children, and especially of noblemen, that they may sooner attain to wisdom and gravity." What a student might today encounter in college was deemed appropriate for elementary-school-aged children.

Some of Lord Edward's earliest lessons were at the hands of a truly gifted educator. According to Smith's twentieth-century biographer Mary Dewar, "There is evidence that [Smith] was an outstanding teacher. Apart from his brilliant formal 'oratory' he held strong views on the techniques of teaching and thorough study. His recommendations to young students intending to apply themselves to the law in his inaugural lecture are formidable." One contemporary even compared Sir Thomas Smith to Plato.

The analogy was apt–and not just for Smith's tendency to surround himself with the brightest young minds. Intellectually, Smith was also an insatiable omnivore. In his biographer Dewar's words, "[Smith's] colleagues and students were always dazzled by his wide range of interests and impressed by his capacity to discuss any topic and pronounce learnedly in almost any field of study." One of Smith's students called Smith "the flower of the University of Cambridge." According to Smith's seventeenth-century biographer John Strype, Smith was "reckoned the best scholar [at Cambridge] University, not only for rhetoric and the learned languages, but for mathematics, arithmetic, law, natural and moral philosophy."

Lord Edward, as his "scholar," would have had access to Smith's library of hundreds of books. In 1566, Smith inventoried his collection at more than four hundred titles–quite sizable for its day–in theology, civil law, history, philosophy, mathematics, medicine, grammar, and literature. Nearly all these

works were in foreign tongues. Smith was fluent in Latin, Greek, French, Italian, Spanish, and Hebrew; it's likely that the scholar introduced his student to these languages via the cornucopia of culture at his fingertips. Works by Livy, Tacitus, Virgil, Plutarch, Saxo Grammaticus, Edward Halle, Plato, Pliny, Homer, Ovid, Pindar, Aristophanes, Sophocles, Plautus, Petrarch, Dante, and Boccaccio lined Smith's bookshelves. Modern scholars have found all of these authors inspiring and informing the writings of Shake-speare.

In 1554, Smith was working on what would become an influential tract concerning international economics, "For the Understanding of the Exchange." Smith also interested himself in mathematics, geography, and astronomy and indulged these scientific instincts with projects (erecting sundials and constructing geographical globes) and experiments (he would conduct his own observations of the supernova of 1572). Smith's textbook on government and politics *De Republica Anglorum* would influence the Shake-speare history plays as well as *Measure for Measure* and *Julius Caesar*. Observations Smith recorded about Spanish pronunciation show up in *Love's Labors Lost*. Smith's fascination with horticulture, pharmacology, and medicine is shared by Shake-speare, who specialists in these fields say must have been an "expert gardener" and "an apothecary and a student of medicine." Smith did not shy away from heretical writings, either, carrying both Copernicus's revolutionary tract on cosmology *De Revolutionibus* and the complete works of Niccolò Machiavelli in his library.

At the center of Smith's universe, though, was the law. Legal studies represented to Smith an ideal playground for the true Renaissance intellect. The educator reserved contempt for lawyers who practiced as if the law were an isolated subject unto itself. Following Justinian's *Pandects*, the classic treatise interpreting Roman law, Smith believed legal training first required a mastery of subjects including philosophy, rhetoric, language, and history. One of Smith's later students, the Cambridge academic Gabriel Harvey, recorded in his journals his frustration at the reading Smith mandated before a student could even crack the spine on Justinian.

For nearly two centuries, eminent lawyers and judges have recognized in Shake-speare a fellow man of the craft, someone whose unerring legal allusions and metaphors betrayed an expertise that can only have come from years of study in the field. With Sir Thomas Smith as his earliest teacher, it is little wonder that Shake-speare used legal terminology, in the words of the nineteenth-century legal historian Richard Grant White, "as if it were a part of the language of his daily life, making no mistakes that can be detected by a learned professional critic."

Beyond the rigors of legal studies, Lord Edward would also have learned the forms of recreation that rounded out a gentleman's education. Chief among those were hawking and hunting. Commoners were traditionally prohibited

from either hunting deer or keeping a bird of prey–although these prohibitions did not prevent hunting from becoming a popular Elizabethan sport. The arcane terminology of hunting and hawking–intentionally kept arcane to enforce the conventional class distinctions–serves as fodder in Shake-speare for vivid metaphors concerning love, marriage, death, war, and sex. The hunt and the law both represented worlds apart from the experience of many English subjects. Both would have become firsthand knowledge at Ankerwicke.

The year 1558 marked two major events in Edward de Vere's life: He began his brief university career, and his queen came to the throne. The two were probably connected. As a Protestant and a former Secretary of State, Smith expected that he would hold government office again under the Protestant Elizabeth. When Queen Mary was discovered to be suffering from cancer, Smith prepared to return to the seat of power. In October 1558, a month before Queen Mary's death, de Vere was enrolled at Smith's alma mater, Queens' College at Cambridge University. Men typically went to college in their early teens. As de Vere was only eight, he was entered as *impubes*, too young to take the university's oath of fidelity. Three months later, de Vere also enrolled at St. John's College, although he continued to reside at Queens' College.

De Vere's curriculum at Cambridge does not survive. Only one record–concerning the replacement of a broken windowpane in de Vere's Queens' College dormitory room–taunts the ages with its inconsequence.

The turbulence of a Catholic nation turned Protestant turned Catholic about to turn Protestant again was mirrored in the Cambridge University campus. Once the nation's wellspring of higher learning, Cambridge under Mary Tudor had become a reactionary government institution given over to despotism. To be admitted for a degree, Cambridge students in Queen Mary's day had to swear an oath of papal supremacy and condemn as "pestiferous heresies" the teachings of Martin Luther and his ilk. Two years before Edward de Vere's enrollment, the King's College scholar John Hullier was arrested for nonconformity and burned alive by the banks of the river Cam. In an even more ghastly display of Marian barbarity, the bodies of two recently deceased foreign Protestant professors had been exhumed, chained together, and publicly burned on the university's Market Hill.

Nonetheless, the eight-year-old's brief stay on campus was probably enlightened by Cambridge's one beacon of learning during the dark decade of the 1550s, Dr. John Caius. Caius was a cosmopolitan and moderate Catholic professor of medicine, who had studied anatomy under Andreas Vesalius at the University of Padua in that faraway Italian Renaissance utopia, the Republic of Venice. De Vere would later reencounter Caius once the doctor had

been appointed court physician to the soon-to-be-crowned queen Elizabeth. Caius (d. 1573) would twice be memorialized by name in Shake-speare, both in the character of the French doctor in *Merry Wives of Windsor* and in the alias the EARL OF KENT assumes during his period of exile in *King Lear*.

Also in 1558, state records reveal the hiring of the tutor Thomas Fowle for de Vere. The post carried with it a handsome annuity of £10. Fowle was a hot-blooded Protestant, like Smith, although less distinguished in his erudition. Fowle's scholarly record and curriculum with de Vere do not survive, nor do accounts of his teaching style.

On November 17, 1558, cancer retrieved Bloody Mary from her missionary calling on this earth. The passing of Mary Tudor marked the third British royal death in nearly twelve years. The prospects for yet another short-lived Tudor monarchy tainted the enthusiasm that greeted the wan and frail-looking Elizabeth as she entered London six days later. The twenty-five-year-old queen consulted her astrologers for the most auspicious date to be crowned Elizabeth I of England, Ireland, and France. (England still hadn't come to grips with its loss of the last patch of French soil, Calais, earlier in the year.) Her Majesty waited until after the Christmas season had passed.

During December and January, foreign visitors to London could be forgiven for believing that the city was under siege. Cannon fire from the Tower and from specially equipped barges on the Thames punctuated the young queen's frequent visits throughout the city and Westminster. From Elizabeth's first days on the throne, she was no cloistered royal, sheltered from her subjects like a precious work of art. Elizabeth was a true politician, in the modern sense of the word, and she could win over a room or work a crowd like any of the best vote-seekers today.

Practically evey nobleman and -woman in the nation–and not a few of the thousands of English gentry, too–attended Queen Elizabeth's coronation and banquet on January 15, 1559. The eight-year-old Lord Edward undoubtedly made the pilgrimage with his fellow Cambridge students to Westminster sometime in early January. Earl John had claimed his ancestral right as Lord Great Chamberlain of England to serve as royal water-bearer, enabling Her Majesty to symbolically wash herself before and after the coronation feast. De Vere's mother, Countess Margery, served as one of the queen's numerous ladies-in-waiting at the Westminster Abbey service.

As if inaugurating the stylistic Renaissance her reign would usher in, Elizabeth had four complete outfits made for each portion of the day's proceedings. In her city processional gown, Her Majesty frequently stopped the royal train along the parade route to converse with subjects presenting Christian tableaux and allegories of time and justice. Elizabeth's remarkable gift for oratory is preserved in this, her first official day as monarch addressing her subjects. "I will be as good unto you as ever queen was to her people," she told the assembled crowds in London's Cheapside. "No will in me can

lack. Neither, do I trust, shall there lack any power. And persuade yourselves that for the safety and quietness of you all, I will not spare, if need be, to spend my blood."

Her coronation service, complete with two costume changes, featured a monarch for the first time swearing the oath of office on an English Bible. Bowing to Catholic tradition, some of the ceremony was read in Latin. The archbishop also elevated the bread and wine into the body and blood of Christ. But, although she took communion, the Anglican Elizabeth withdrew herself behind a curtain during the elevation of the Host. The feast that followed, celebrating a newly crowned monarch resplendent in violet velvet, carried on from three P.M. till one o'clock the following morning.

As an introduction to the woman who, in concert with her chief ministers, would map out the terrain that Lord Edward would be navigating for the rest of his life, the festivities of January 15 must have been as overwhelming and exhausting as the voluminous accounts of the day that soon appeared in London booksellers' stalls.

The following fall, Queen Elizabeth gave Sir Thomas Smith, Earl John, and the queen's handsome favorite, Lord Robert Dudley, an assignment. She had already begun entertaining suitors for her hand in marriage, and the duke of Finland would soon sail to England to press the case for his elder brother Eric, king of Sweden. In early October of 1559, the group rode to Colchester to greet the duke. Lord Edward probably joined his tutor and father on the journey.

With the accession of Queen Elizabeth, Dudley had vaulted to a position of unrivaled power unlike any other during the whole of the Elizabethan age. He was also emerging as a serious candidate for Elizabeth's hand. Dudley's greatest hindrance at the time was the inconvenient fact that he was already married.

Dudley, Smith, and Earl John escorted the Swedish noble through Colchester, parading their train through the hilly town with all the ceremony befitting royalty. Hundreds rode in formation, with eighty men displaying gold chains and the tawny livery of the earls of Oxford. Following the train were two hundred more yeomen bearing an embroidered emblem of the blue boar, the earl of Oxford's heraldic badge, on their left shoulder. The columns of horses, men, and military hardware then set off for London, where the journey would end at Oxford House near London Stone.

Both court and Parliament were working to ensure that Elizabeth marry soon. All but perhaps Elizabeth herself hoped that, within a few years at most, a sensible husband–not the Master of the Horse Dudley–could be settled upon. Then the real business of running England could begin. And Elizabeth could concern herself with the proper role of queens: delivering heirs to the throne.

That Her Majesty would soon marry was taken as a given. The disastrous reign of Elizabeth's predecessor Mary only reinforced the prevailing prejudice that a woman was simply incapable of running a country by herself. As the Protestant polemicist John Knox wrote in 1558, "To promote a woman to bear rule, superiority, dominion, or empire above any realm, nation, or city, is repugnant to nature, contumely to God, a thing most contrary to his revealed will and approved ordinance; and finally, it is the subversion of good order, of all equity and justice." Quotations from the Bible and from Aristotle buttressed Knox's *ad feminam* attack, which was repeated in more muted tones by authors such as Thomas Becon and even Sir Thomas Smith.

However, Elizabeth confounded the pundits of her day. Her refusal to marry Sweden would be the first of many nuptial evasions.

When news arrived in 1561 that the still unmarried queen would be visiting Castle Hedingham in August, little in the eleven-year-old Edward's life could have been more exciting. For a few glorious days, all the power and stature belonging to this realm would be contained within the walls of his family's ancestral estate. His father would be the center of the court's attention.

The Elizabethan royal summer progress, of which the 1561 Hedingham visit played just one small part, was the queen's great annual outreach campaign. In July, Elizabeth would depart from the city–which during the summer became more subject to plague outbreaks anyway. Her Majesty would invite herself into the country seats of ten or fifteen noble families. The queen and the hundreds of retainers and courtiers that made up her royal household would take over their hosts' estates for several days of feasting, hunting, and entertainments. As one Puritan critic wrote, during the annual progress season Elizabeth was "entirely given over to love, hunting, hawking, and dancing, consuming day and night with trifles [*plays*]. . . . He who invents most ways of wasting time is regarded as one worthy of honor." And it was the progress that made each of these diversions a full-time job that carried on into the fall.

More than three hundred carts, stretching down the road as far as the eye could see, trucked luggage and provisions from site to site.

At each stop, the queen would address and mingle with hundreds of locals from the surrounding shires. It appealed to her notorious vanity to be treated like an earthbound deity by a new phalanx of admirers every few days. Simply by visiting a household, she paid her host family a singular honor. However, each household also tried to outdo all others in extravagance. All parties thus conspired to maximize the estate-crushing magnitude of their burden. In her wake, Elizabeth often left behind a family whose purse had been ransacked. And the deer population in her hosts' parks, decimated by the wholesale slaughter that was the typical royal hunting party, might take years to restore.

Elizabeth's 1561 progress worked its way northeast from greater London

and Havering into Chelmsford and to the city of Colchester–where Sir Thomas Smith, Earl John, and Lord Robert Dudley had met the Swedish embassy to England two years before. Britain's oldest recorded town, Colchester was once the capital of Roman Britain, with ruins dating back to the pre-Christian era.

On August 6–9, Queen Elizabeth and her roving train of opulence–which, one is tempted to suppose, included an eleven-year-old heir to the region's great earldom–descended upon Ipswich.

Although the Ipswich city fathers entertained the court with all the customary pageantry, the queen still lost her temper at her hosts. Her Majesty was shocked to find widespread "undiscreet behavior" among the ministers and readers at the colleges. There was, as one courtly correspondent lamented to the archbishop of Canterbury, a "great variety in [ad]ministration" of communion, including clerics giving the sacrament in their street clothes. "The ministers follow the folly of the people," the letter writer added, "calling it charity to feed their fond humor." Elizabeth was most shocked by the presence of women and children in the sacred spaces of the colleges and cathedral closes. Then and there she wanted to prohibit clergy from marrying altogether. But she was talked down to proclaiming an edict that only prohibited women from lodging at the universities. This measure would later come back to haunt the queen–and provide inspiration for the comedy *Love's Labor's Lost.*

Also at Ipswich, Elizabeth and her assembled throng took in one or more plays written by the former Carmelite monk John Bale. The Ipswich players, it is now thought, staged his history of the reign of King John. Bale's *King Johan* was a work of Protestant propaganda that had debuted before the court of Elizabeth's father twenty-five years before. Scholars have long noted Bale's likely influence on the Shake-speare play *King John,* even though Bale's *King Johan* was available only in manuscript and never, so far as is known, staged anytime after the early 1560s. If the young de Vere were not in the audience that night in Ipswich, he would at least have had access to Bale's manuscript, since Earl John had been one of Bale's longtime patrons.

King Johan purports to tell the history of England's legendary thirteenth-century king–a man most famous today for his reluctant signing of Magna Carta. However, *King Johan* in no small part is also about sixteenth-century England. Since King John's claim to the throne was often compared to Queen Elizabeth's, any play celebrating John's reign was, by extension, a public affirmation of Elizabeth's sovereignty.

The Protestant propaganda in Bale's *King Johan* is impossible to miss. Throughout the play, Bale's righteous, antipapist king opposes such transparently Catholic villains as Sedition, Dissimulation, Treason, Usurped Power (symbolizing the pope), and Private Wealth (a cardinal). Sedition and Dissimulation ultimately succeed in assassinating the king, but the noble hero Verity (Bale's tip of the hat to his patron) emerges to defend the king's good name

and to help his colleague Imperial Majesty (the House of Tudor) carry John's anti-Catholic crusade forward. "He that condemneth a king condemneth God without doubt," says Verity. "...I charge you, therefore, as God hath charged me, to give to your king his due supremity–and exile the pope [from] this realm for evermore."

Though the play seems heavy-handed today, *King Johan* was in fact a groundbreaking piece of drama for its time. It departed from the traditional morality plays by dramatizing contemporary politics, drawing upon English history–not just biblical tales or folklore–as the playwright's polemical tool. It was also the first English play to cast a historical English king as a character onstage and to portray a tragic hero as a man of essential virtues, not just vice.

One can readily picture Bale, a learned and contentious sixty-five-year-old, greeting the heir to his patron's earldom. The eleven-year-old child had probably never met a playwright before this moment. The young de Vere would certainly have been impressed by the royal and courtly attention lavished upon the dramatist. Whether at Castle Hedingham or later, after he'd inherited the family's papers and manuscripts, de Vere could also have read Bale's other writings, including his history of a knight from King Henry V's day. Bale's *Chronicle of the Blessed Martyr Sir John Oldcastle* exhorts English authors to retell English history with a decidedly Protestant slant now that England has thrown off the yoke of Rome. "Set forth the English chronicles in their right shape," Bale urges his readers. De Vere would, in fact, grow up to do just this, crafting an entire epic of history plays that refocused and distorted English history so as to, as Bale puts it, discard old "Romish lies and other Italish beggaries." The most celebrated character from the Shakespeare history plays, SIR JOHN FALSTAFF, would be based in part on Oldcastle.

Also on hand during the August 1561 progress to Castle Hedingham was a man Sir Thomas Smith had known since his earliest days at Cambridge. Much to Smith's frustration, Sir William Cecil had advanced in government far beyond him. During Mary's reign, Cecil had helped to orchestrate Princess Elizabeth's survival and ultimate rise to power. While outwardly conforming to Catholicism–one contemporary called Cecil a "creeper to the cross"–Cecil had also maintained a secret correspondence with the princess, providing her with insider knowledge from the court and valuable counsel. As an administrator, Cecil proved to be an undisputed master. At times strategically savvy and sly as a fox, he could also be a maddeningly plodding and unoriginal thinker. But it was his keen instinct for political survival that made him Elizabeth's closest and dearest advisor and, as she put it, her "code of laws." The queen would keep this wily statesman, a man she would nickname "Sir Spirit," by her side until his dying day.

A crafty, scheming, and disarmingly politic man, Cecil at age forty had already become the most powerful man in England short of Elizabeth's favorite, Dudley. Earlier in the year, before his appearance at Castle Hedingham, Elizabeth had appointed Cecil to the coveted post of Master of the Court of Wards and Liveries. The court of wards was an institution set up to supervise the lands and wealth of underage heirs and to arrange their marriages. It was a plum of an assignment, since the Master of Wards had notorious leeway to tap into and otherwise manipulate some of the country's richest estates. The office had been profitable for Cecil's predecessor Sir Thomas Parry, and Cecil would harvest this cash farm to his own financial and political advantage.

At the time of the queen's Hedingham visit, Cecil's son Thomas was living in Paris. According to intelligence Cecil had gathered, Thomas was also gaining a reputation as a lout. As the elder Cecil wrote in a letter posted from Hedingham, he had learned that his child was becoming "sloth[ful] in keeping his bed, negligent and rash in expenses, careless in apparel, an immoderate lover of dice and cards; in study soon weary, in game never." De Vere would later caricature Cecil as *Hamlet*'s officious and manipulative court counselor POLONIUS–who sends his spies to check on his wayward son LAERTES, living in Paris.

Sometime around or soon after the departure of the queen's train from Hedingham, Earl John began to negotiate with a family of royal lineage for marriage with Lord Edward. On July 1, 1562, Earl John and Henry Hastings, earl of Huntington, drew up a marriage contract. This agreement ensured that Edward, once he turned eighteen, could choose one of Henry Hastings's younger sisters–Mary or Elizabeth–to be his bride. The twenty-seven-year-old earl of Huntington was descended of royal blood from a brother to Richard III and was considered at the time the most likely inheritor of the throne should Queen Elizabeth die childless. Earl John had secured a step up in the world for his son, enabling Edward to marry into a potential future royal family of England.

At twelve, Edward was still two years shy of the legal age of consent for marriage contracts. The Hastings–de Vere deal was not legally binding in 1562. However, to ensure that the Hastings–de Vere marriage go through, the two patriarchs would only need to reaffirm the contract in April 1564, once Edward had reached the age of consent. If he played the courtly game right, Edward's children or grandchildren might someday look forward to sitting on the throne of England themselves.

But those royal progeny were not meant to be. Mary Hastings would, in fact, die years later, an unmarried woman. Yet this tall, lean and fair-haired beauty exerted enough of a sentimental tug on the author's heartstrings that he would later look fondly back upon her as one that got away, a love's labor lost. Hastings would later cause a scene at court when she publicly refused a

marriage offer by the czar of Muscovy's envoy. The event gained so much notoriety that *Love's Labor's Lost* spoofs it. The play's wooing lords (FERDINAND, LONGAVILLE, BEROWNE, and DUMAINE) disguise themselves as ambassadors from Muscovy and try to win over the mistress MARIA (Mary Hastings) and her friends. But just as Mary Hastings dressed down the real-life Russians, in *Love's Labor's Lost* MARIA and her three friends rebuke the supposed Muscovites.

The Hastings daughters would constitute the final image of de Vere's childhood. Mary's eyes may have uttered "heavenly rhetoric" and she may have been the "empress of . . . Love"–to quote the infatuated suitor describing MARIA in *Love's Labor's Lost.* But the "vapor vow" to Mary/MARIA would soon be broken, though it was, as the forsworn suitor says, "no fault of mine." Only a month after Earl John had sealed the marriage contract with the Hastings family, a new and unexpected shock wave would shake the foundations of Lord Edward's world.

On August 3, 1562, at Castle Hedingham, Edward's father died. Earl John was forty-three years old. He'd prepared a will–his second known will–less than a week beforehand. Although this act might seem like hasty preparations for the hereafter, the historical record suggests Earl John was neither ailing nor on death's doorstep at the time. In late June, the sixteenth earl had accompanied his dramatic troupe on a tour to Ipswich and had adjudicated day-to-day business of the local government, collecting fees from the local "alehouses and tipling houses." The language of the earl of Huntington marriage contract also suggests the father of the presumptive groom anticipated a long life–stipulating provisions presuming a time when Earl John would have other male children of his own and even when he would become a grandfather.

Before his father's death, life was good with all the prospects only getting better. Lord Edward looked forward to his teenaged years, free from the burdens of labor, enjoying some of the finest opportunities the Elizabethan Age had to offer in learning and leisure.

But now, whether he wanted the title or not, the twelve-year-old Edward de Vere had become the seventeenth earl of Oxford. Because he was still in his minority, Lord Edward would now be under the administration of the royal Court of Wards and Liveries. His marriage would become a commodity to be bought or sold like property by Sir William Cecil, Master of the Court of Wards. With Earl John's death, the Hastings marriage deal was effectively over before it had even been made official. Any fantasies of marrying into a potential royal family of England were now just so much faerie dust.

The love's labor that de Vere had lost was not just Mary Hastings or her sister Elizabeth. It was also an entire alternate universe wherein de Vere had remained the master of his own fate into his young adulthood.

But how much had the twelve-year-old boy come to know the foreboding

figure of his father? Behind the Shake-speare mask, he would twice portray Earl John's passing–in *All's Well That Ends Well* and *Hamlet*–as something that takes place before the play's action begins, an event that carries less significance in itself than it does in its aftermath. Edward knew his father in death, one suspects, as he did in life: a specter to be contemplated from a distance.

Edward, Countess Margery, and several trusted servants were brought in as executors of the sixteenth earl's will. Earl John left household items, livestock, several manors, and money to various friends, servants, family, and charities.

Earl John had also vested a "use" on his properties wherein he conveyed them in trust to the duke of Norfolk–a twenty-six-year-old nephew–and to the queen's favorite, Sir Robert Dudley. It was a legalistic trick sometimes used to avoid the possibility of a child losing his inheritance in the Court of Wards bureaucracy.

However, from a child's perspective, the "use" surely looked like trading one swindle for another. For in short order, records of the Court of Wards reveal that Dudley had been rewarded with "all . . . the lands . . . and all and singular there appertaining in the counties of Essex, Suffolk, and Cambridgeshire, late the inheritance of the Right Hon. John de Vere, earl of Oxford." In scarcely more than a year after Earl John's death, Edward's mother was complaining about Dudley's diversion of revenues from the farm income of Earls Colne to line his own pockets.

In 1562, Dudley was worrying other courtiers, since his wife, Amy Robsart, had recently been found dead at the bottom of a staircase. Dudley was now available to marry Elizabeth and become King Robert.

It doesn't take a paranoiac to piece together Dudley's gains derived from Earl John's death–both de Vere family properties and the nullifying of Edward's marriage match with potential royal significance–and wonder whether the usurper was also a murderer.

In *Hamlet* the theft of family inheritance and the murder of a father achieve tragic grandeur. Shake-speare's HAMLET is concerned, not only with the passing of his father, but also with his lost family properties. As HAMLET notes, "I can say nothing–no, not for a king upon whose *property* and most dear life a damned defeat was made" (emphasis added); the PRINCE later adds that his father was poisoned "for his estate."

Edward's noninheritance would be his first taste of the brutal and backstabbing world of the Tudor court. To survive, he, too, would learn the language of courtly realpolitik–a dialect that he would ultimately translate for the stage under the Shake-speare guise. This "riotous inn," this "palace of tongues," would be home for the rest of de Vere's life. And the author would soon enough find that "the art o' the court," in the words of a banished courtier in *Cymbeline,* is "as hard to leave as keep, whose top to climb is certain falling, or so slippery that the fear's as bad as falling."

Earl John's body lay at Castle Hedingham for twenty-two days as the family made funeral arrangements. Noble funerals were events of consequence and pomp, like a wedding, that required weeks of planning. Heralds from the Royal College of Arms were typically called in as freelance consultants–funerals were an important source of income for them–to plan the ceremony and prepare the many heraldic banners and badges that would festoon the church and adorn the liveries of the servants performing their various ceremonial duties. In the words of the diarist Henry Machyn, Earl John's funeral at the end of August, held probably at the parish church at Earls Colne, featured "three Heralds of Arms . . . with a standard and a great banner of arms, and eight banner rolls, crest, target, sword, and coat armor, and a hearse with velvet and a pall of velvet and a dozen of scutcheons [*heraldic shields*] and with many mourners in black; and a great moan was made for him."

Three days after burying his father, de Vere prepared to leave the quiet world of country estates and hilltop luxuries behind. The knowledge he had absorbed after years of intensive schooling, under the likes of Sir Thomas Smith and Thomas Fowle, would now lie offstage. At the other end of his journey, as the child readied his train of servants to depart out of the Castle Hedingham gates, stood a world of power, mystery, and romance that the boy must have dreaded as much as he yearned for it.

His immediate future was now to serve as a ward of the crown, living in the household of that strange, officious man whom the boy had seen the year before spying on his own son. Sir William Cecil was to be the child's new foster father. The halcyon days of youth had come to an abrupt end. He would depict this moment, in its shocking starkness, in the opening lines of *All's Well That Ends Well:*

> COUNTESS In delivering my son from me, I bury a second husband.
> BERTRAM And I in going, madam, weep o'er my father's death anew; but I must attend His Majesty's command, to whom I am now in ward, evermore in subjection.

CHAPTER 2

EVERMORE IN SUBJECTION

[1562–1569]

ON THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 3, 1562, THE LONDON DIARIST HENRY Machyn recorded that between five and six o'clock in the afternoon, the twelve-year-old earl of Oxford came riding out of Essex "with seven-score horse all in black through London and Cheap and Ludgate and so to Temple Bar." The child's parade was hundreds of feet long as it progressed over the drawbridge and through the arches of London's Aldgate, on the eastern side of the city. With 140 horsemen riding behind the youth bearing the colorless cast of mourning, de Vere took his entrance onto the worldly stage as the boy in black.

As his procession made its way into London, the first sensations that would have struck a child from the country were the swarming noise and the powerful smells. Elizabethan London was a loud and odiferous city, hemmed in by the Thames to the south and a wall in all other directions that was broken every quarter mile by gates–Aldgate, Bishopsgate, Moorgate, Cripplegate, Aldersgate, Newgate, and Ludgate. The scents of a summer's worth of garbage and filth perfumed Aldgate Street as Londoners no doubt paused to observe such an opulent procession of mourning forging its way west. De Vere's train would in a matter of minutes have converged onto Cheapside, a wide thoroughfare and shopping district featuring vendors offering up everything from breads and puddings to live peacocks and apes. The commercial traffic and racket of haggling would have only taken on a more polyglot air as de Vere's parade headed down Paternoster Row near St. Paul's Cathedral. St. Paul's was London's largest church, and its yard was also the site of the city's booksellers, who hawked their literary wares in competition with hellfire preachers, and, often, public executions. Every day the courts were in session, men hung for their crimes–with pronounced traitors suffering the

posthumous indignity of having their bloody heads displayed on pikes at London Bridge.

Down Fleet Street toward Temple Bar, de Vere approached a more affluent section of the city. As the road, which became the Strand, veered closer to the Thames, de Vere would have heard the echoes of the boatmen–the mass transit operators of their day–cry out, "Eastward ho!" and "Westward ho!" And as the river's path flowed closer to the Strand, the houses got richer. Leicester House, Arundel House, Somerset House: All these mansions abutted the Thames, eliminating any worries of waste disposal and, since they were upstream from London, (somewhat) clean water. De Vere's dark parade would have ended with a right turn off the Strand near an apartment complex called the Savoy. Situated behind the north side of this prosperous section of the Strand was the earl of Oxford's destination.

Cecil House, Sir William Cecil's estate at the edge of Covent Garden, was to be de Vere's new home. (Pulled down in the late seventeenth century, the former Cecil House grounds are now in the heart of the West End theater district–roughly where the Lyceum Theatre now stands.) As master of the Court of Wards, Cecil was now master of an underage aristocrat whose life and lands would never be wholly returned to him.

Although Cecil would later write of it disparagingly, Cecil House was hardly a property to be ashamed of. The philosopher John Locke, when he lived in the same house a century later, spent the most productive years of his middle age amid the greenery of the estate's spacious gardens, enjoying the intellectual climate of this prosperous neighborhood. When the twelve-year-old de Vere moved into Cecil House in the autumn of 1562, the grounds and gardens were being expanded.

One late Elizabethan writer spoke of Cecil House as "very fair . . . raised with bricks, proportionately adorned with four turrets placed at the four quarters of the house; within, it is curiously beautified with rare devices and especially the oratory, placed in an angle of the great chamber." No further clues identify Cecil House's ornaments, although at the same time Cecil was also ordering busts of twelve Roman emperors, marble pillars, and other classically inspired artifacts and artworks for Burghley, his country estate in Stamford, Lincolnshire.

Gardens and libraries distinguished Cecil House. The master of the household afforded himself some of the finest and most extensive of both. For two decades, Cecil employed the noted horticulturalist John Gerard to design and maintain his numerous gardens at Cecil House and elsewhere. De Vere must have taken solace in Gerard's company, continuing the botanical education begun under that noteworthy pharmaculturalist Sir Thomas Smith. *Love's Labor's Lost* even uses Gerard's floral imagery from his pamphlet *Herbal: Or General History of Plants* to pinpoint the seasonal emergence of the cuckoo bird–associating the late spring "cuckoo" with the blooming of silver-white lady-smocks.

Then there was the library. The variety of books kept within Cecil House was truly astonishing for those fortunate few who enjoyed access. If the library of Sir Thomas Smith offered a broad-ranging introduction to the great works of Western culture, Cecil's library provided the encyclopedic resources for de Vere's graduate studies. Some 1,700 titles and 250 manuscripts lined the walls of this idyllic scholarly retreat. While the straightlaced Cecil paid little mind to contemporary plays and poetry, Cecil House's stock of classics and tomes from the Continent was something to behold. Scores of Shake-speare's primary sources can be found within its catalog, many of which were in the original Latin, Greek, French, Italian, and Spanish editions.

The physical environment would have been welcoming for an intellectually engaged young prodigy from the hinterlands of Essex.

But less than two months after de Vere arrived at court, the government faced a crisis. In October, Queen Elizabeth was diagnosed with smallpox. The deadly and disfiguring disease had only recently killed the countess of Bedford, so fears were heightened that, like Mary and Edward before her, Elizabeth would die young and childless, leaving behind a country without a clear line of succession. The queen's death would have introduced just the sort of royal discontinuity that civil wars were fought over. Factions had already begun to emerge for at least three rival claimants to the throne.

Lord Robert Dudley was making his own claims as well. In 1562, the usurping holder of many of de Vere's lands also came closest to marrying royalty. The previous January, the political tragedy *Gorboduc* had been staged for the queen as part of a propaganda campaign to promote Dudley as Her Majesty's future husband. Soon thereafter, a majority vote of the prestigious Order of the Garter had endorsed Dudley's marriage bid. And now that Elizabeth was flirting with the Grim Reaper, she wanted to name Dudley the lord protector of England–effectively rendering him executor of the throne in the event of Her Majesty's death.

This moment, with the prospect of Dudley as magistrate two months after Earl John's death, must have burned into de Vere's mind: "That it should come to this!" HAMLET muses in his opening soliloquy. "But two months dead, nay, not so much, not two."

Yet the child enjoyed few idle moments to ponder treacheries of state. Upon arriving at Cecil House, de Vere led a strictly regimented life. His lesson plan at Cecil House was

7:00–7:30	Dancing
7:30–8:00	Breakfast
8:00–9:00	French
9:00–10:00	Latin
10:00–10:30	Writing and drawing

Common prayers and so to dinner

1:00–2:00	Cosmography
2:00–3:00	Latin
3:00–4:00	French
4:00–4:30	Exercises with his pen

On holy days this timetable was to be modified so that the young earl would "read before dinner the Epistle and Gospel in his own tongue and the other tongue [*Greek*] after dinner. All the rest of the day [is] to be spent in riding, shooting, dancing, walking, and other commendable exercises, saving the time for prayer."

Historians who have studied the intellectual climate of Cecil House conclude there was nothing like it in its day. De Vere's new home was, says G.P.V. Akrigg, "the best school for boys to be found in Elizabethan England." Joel Hurstfield calls Cecil House "the best school for statesmen in Elizabethan England, perhaps in all of Europe." J. A. van Dorsten adds, "Cecil House was England's nearest equivalent to a humanist *salon*. . . . As a meeting place for the learned it had no parallel in early Elizabethan England."

And not just in its syllabus did de Vere's education prove worthy of such endorsements. The scholars and tutors who surrounded the young earl combined medieval traditions with the latest trends in Renaissance pedagogy. The superlative talent first hired to supervise de Vere's curriculum at Cecil House, Laurence Nowell, would introduce the child to the riches of the native English culture and language as well as a prized pearl from its literary history.

Nowell–often mistaken for a cousin of the same name who was dean of Lichfield Cathedral–was a cartographer and expert in pre-Norman England. Having learned of Nowell through a scholarly friend, Cecil hired the Saxonist and mapmaker for both his teaching and map-making skills. De Vere's daily afternoon studies in "cosmography" were undoubtedly supervised by Nowell, who was then creating the most detailed map of the British Isles ever drawn.

The map Nowell eventually drew, which today can be found at the British Library, is an impressive piece of Renaissance cartography. It was also the first map of the British landscape drawn from scratch since the fourteenth century. So far as is known, it was never copied or printed. Cecil was so impressed with the document that he filled the blank side of the map with his own copious handwritten notes and is said to have "carried this map always about with him." The map may also have inspired a series of cartographical jokes in *The Comedy of Errors* about maps of England, Ireland, and other nations.

However, cosmography was a more all-encompassing discipline than the name might imply. To the Renaissance imagination, cosmography was about cataloging all of the earth's cultures as well as the entire history of human

civilization. Cosmography was history, sociology, economics, geology, astronomy, linguistics, English, comparative literature, geography, classics, and political science all in one. To the sixteenth-century French scholar François de Belleforest, cosmography meant "catalogs of lawmakers, philosophers, poets, orators, historians, nymphs, muses, sybils; also myths, oracles, rites, idols, marvels, and other prodigies surpassing nature. . . ."

Cosmography was, in essence, a more wide-ranging version of what is called "social studies" today–an omnibus field of learning that relied heavily upon the specializations of the instructor teaching the course. Today, Nowell is widely recognized as a founding father of Anglo-Saxon studies. Nowell would go on to collect and edit Old English ballads and chronicles and compile the first Anglo-Saxon dictionary, the *Vocabularium Saxonicum*. And for at least part of the time Nowell was revolutionizing the field, he had a young intellectual prodigy at his side.

Nowell also had at his disposal perhaps the single most important Anglo-Saxon manuscript of all time. Sometime in 1563, the same year he was tutoring de Vere, Nowell signed his name in a volume of manuscripts containing the only known copy of *Beowulf*. In addition to *Beowulf*, the manuscript volume (the "Nowell Codex") contains handwritten accounts of such myths, oracles, and prodigies surpassing nature as "The Passion of Saint Christopher," an alliterative English poem based on the biblical figure Judith and "The Wonders of the East."

Beowulf was as inaccessible as the crown jewels to anyone outside of Cecil House. With an author whose childhood education would have exposed him to *Beowulf*, the ancient poem's influence on Shake-speare becomes not inexplicable but rather expected. Scholars have already ferreted out a few initial connections between the *Beowulf* saga and *Hamlet*. One may reasonably expect this trend to continue.

Beowulf and the original Hamlet myth ("Amleth") are cousins from the same family of Scandinavian folklore. Shake-speare uses both as sources for *Hamlet*. Once HAMLET kills his uncle CLAUDIUS, Shake-speare stops following "Amleth" and starts following *Beowulf*. It is Beowulf who fights the mortal duel with poison and sword; it is Beowulf who turns to his loyal comrade (Wiglaf in *Beowulf*; HORATIO in *Hamlet*) to recite a dying appeal to carry his name and cause forward; and it is *Beowulf* that carries on after its hero's death to dramatize a succession struggle for the throne brought on by an invading foreign nation.

Laurence Nowell's time as the young earl of Oxford's tutor was to be brief. In June 1563, at the completion of roughly one school year, Nowell wrote in Latin to his employer that he wanted to return to full-time research. He notified Cecil that he wished to map all of England and embark on new Anglo-Saxon scholarship. And then, using words whose meaning has long been debated, Nowell said, "I clearly see that my work for the earl of Oxford

cannot be much longer required." Some may read this statement as a testament to de Vere's impossible temperament or Nowell's frustration at teaching a thirteen-year-old child unwilling to learn. However, Sir Thomas Smith expressed nothing but praise and admiration for de Vere as a student. More likely, Nowell meant simply that his student had already mastered more than what the Saxonist could reasonably expect to impart. Pure scholarship beckoned, and Nowell parted ways with his young scribe.

De Vere later memorialized his tutor Laurence as *Romeo and Juliet*'s learned FRIAR LAURENCE–a character that conflated Nowell with de Vere's other illustrious teacher, Sir Thomas Smith, who, like the friar, was notoriously adept at concocting tinctures and tonics.

In June of 1563, Sir William Cecil's second wife gave birth to her only surviving son, Robert. De Vere, an illustrious earl who had probably come to be the star of the household, now saw the attention shift from him. Robert Cecil would become one of the great Machiavellian figures in de Vere's life, a sly and complex character with whom his foster brother Edward would share a conflicted relationship until his final days.

Sometime during Robert's infancy, his nurse accidentally dropped him on the floor. The child would be indelibly marred by this accident–growing up stunted with a crookback and a hobbled gait. The hunchback, duplicitous usurper, and sympathetic victim of fate, would become a primal inspiration for Shake-speare's RICHARD III.

Also in June of 1563 de Vere's elder half-sister, Katherine, and her husband, Edward, Lord Windsor, threatened to file a lawsuit against de Vere and his sister Mary. Katherine had accused her half-brother of being a bastard and thus an illegitimate claimant to inherit Earl John's estates and riches. Katherine, it seems, believed that her father was already wed when he married Edward and Mary's mother, Margery.

Although the plaintiffs' allegations do not survive, a legal statement filed in Edward and Mary's defense does. The defendants' uncle Arthur Golding lodged the response on June 28, 1563. The plaintiffs, Golding noted, had petitioned the archbishop of Canterbury–the leading ecclesiastical authority in the land–to produce witnesses to prove that Edward and Mary were legitimate heirs to the de Vere estate.

Golding's defense was successful, but later in de Vere's life, the bastardy lawsuit would once more be unsuccessfully resurrected. Moreover, Queen Elizabeth would at least once call de Vere a bastard. It was rumored that for so besmirching his legitimacy, de Vere said he "would never love her and [would] leave her in the lurch one day." Twice in the Shake-speare canon, anxiety bubbles to the surface for a character being branded a bastard by a

legitimate sibling. In *King Lear,* the bastard EDMUND spends most of the play conniving to disinherit his legitimate half-brother EDGAR from the earldom of GLOUCESTER. "Why bastard? Wherefore base?" asks EDMUND.

> When my dimensions are as well compact,
> My mind as generous, and my shape as true
> As honest madam's issue? . . .
> Fine word, *legitimate*!
> Well, my legitimate, if this letter speed
> And my invention thrive, Edmund the base
> Shall top the legitimate. I grow, I prosper:
> Now, gods, stand up for bastards!

In *King John,* PHILIP THE BASTARD gallops through his play like a Greek chorus, uttering most memorable speeches and immortal lines along the way. (Shake-speare inflates PHILIP's role immensely; the historical Philip the Bastard from the actual reign of King John was inconsequential.) At the beginning of *King John,* PHILIP is introduced to court via a disinheritance scheme not unlike the 1563 de Vere case. Into PHILIP THE BASTARD, the plum role in *King John,* de Vere poured his own bastard cauldron of angst, pride, wit, and fortune-snatching vainglory.

These plays came later in life, as the earl looked back on his questioned legitimacy–and on a bastard son he himself would father one day. Closer to the date of the actual lawsuit, de Vere also wrote a juvenile lyric, titled "Loss of Good Name," that may well have been inspired by his sister's accusations. The following excerpt sounds a familiar Shake-spearean alarum–albeit in an adolescent voice given to tub-thumping meter and alliterative excess:

> Help Gods, help saints, help sprites and powers that in the heav'n do dwell,
> Help ye that are aye wont to wail, ye howling hounds of hell;
> Help man, help beasts, help birds and worms, that on the earth do toil,
> Help fish, help fowl, that flock and feed upon the salt sea soil,
> Help echo that in air doth flee, shrill voices to resound,
> To wail this loss of my good name, as of these griefs the ground.

In the summer of 1563, after Nowell's departure, Cecil was in the market for tutors to advance de Vere's knowledge of French. On August 23, 1563, de Vere wrote a letter to Cecil in fluent French, wherein he diplomatically urged his foster father to mind his own business. The letter reveals a compositional sophistication beyond the author's thirteen years. As translated into English, de Vere wrote:

MY VERY HONORABLE SIR:
Sir, I have received your letters, full of humanity and courtesy, and strongly resembling your great love and singular affection towards me, like true children duly procreated of such a mother, for whom I find myself from day to day more bound to Your [Lordship]. Your good admonishments for the observance of good order according to your appointed rules, I am resolved (God abiding) to keep with all diligence, as a thing that I may know and consider to tend especially to my own good and profit, using therein the advice and authority of those who are near me, whose discretion I esteem so great (if it suits me to say something to their advantage) that not only will they comport themselves according as a given time requires it, but will as well do what is more, as long as I govern myself as you have ordered and commanded. As to my curriculum, because it requires a long discourse to explain it in detail, and the time is short at the moment, I pray you affectionately to excuse me therefore for the present, assuring you that by the first passerby I shall make it known to you at full length. In the meantime, I pray to God to give you health.

EDWARD OXINFORD

De Vere, who typically wrote out his title using the Old English "Oxenford" (or "Oxinford"), was in August 1563 clearly studying under a rigorous new curriculum. Who de Vere's new tutors were is uncertain. One likely candidate is the legal defender of de Vere's legitimacy, his uncle Arthur Golding. Golding was an extraordinary twenty-seven-year-old scholar employed by Cecil to supervise the day-to-day details of managing those de Vere family estates not held by Dudley. As Golding's modern biographer notes, "It has been assumed that [Golding] acted as tutor to his nephew Edward. No definite record has been found indicating such a connection which, however, would appear reasonable in view of the factor of relationship as well as the fitness of the one and the youth of the other." In addition, Cecil's household had recently acquired a second ward, the fourteen-year-old Edward Manners, third earl of Rutland; Golding's services as a tutor would have been doubly in demand.

If "Orders of the Earl of Oxford's Exercises" offer any guidance, Golding was probably teaching between nine and ten in the mornings and two and three in the afternoons. Latin was Golding's subject, and in 1563 he translated one of the greatest Latin poems ever written, Ovid's *Metamorphoses.* The poet Ezra Pound once pronounced, with characteristic hyperbole, that Golding's Ovid is "the most beautiful book in the [English] language."

Golding's edition of *The Metamorphoses* is also widely regarded by scholars of all persuasions as the single most influential source for Shake-speare, other than the Bible. The hundreds of interlocking parallels between Ovid

(especially Golding's Ovid) and Shake-speare have been studied and discussed for centuries. As the eminent literary critic Sir Sidney Lee wrote, "The phraseology of Golding's translation so frequently reappears in Shakespeare's page . . . as almost to compel conviction that Shakespeare knew much of Golding's translation by heart."

It is a fascinating and likely connection: The boy who would become Shake-speare was being tutored by the man who translated Shake-speare's favorite nonbiblical work. Shake-speare quotes from every one of *The Metamorphoses*'s fifteen books, and there is hardly a single Shake-speare play or poem that does not owe character, language, or plot to Ovidian mythology.

De Vere's personal recollections of his uncle probably stretched back as far as the child could remember. Golding was de Vere's mother's half-brother, an Essex native who spent much of the 1550s and early '60s in and around the neighborhood of Castle Hedingham. Golding was a good friend of Sir Thomas Smith, and it may have been through Golding that Earl John first heard about Smith's talents as a tutor. De Vere hints at his maternal ties to Ovid's translator in *Titus Andronicus.* At a moment when *Titus*'s plot calls for a copy of Ovid to be brought onstage, the book is introduced by a school-aged BOY who notes, "'Tis Ovid's *Metamorphoses.* My mother gave it me."

In 1564, Golding dedicated to his nephew his English translation of Justin's *Abridgement of the Histories of Trogus Pompeius.* This condensation of a longer history of the world was the sort of book that would appeal to a young student of cosmography. As Golding wrote,

> It is not unknown to others, and I have had experience thereof myself, how earnest a desire Your Honor hath naturally grafted in you to read, peruse, and communicate with others as well the histories of ancient times, and things done long ago, as also of the present estate of things in our days—and that not without a certain pregnancy of wit and ripeness of understanding.

This was the first of twenty-eight books dedicated to de Vere during his lifetime. Already, one discerns a thumbnail sketch resembling what would be expected of a young Shake-speare: a precocious intellect with an avid love for studying history coupled with a talent for mellifluous and witty retellings of that history. The Shake-speare canon resounds with echoes from the Justinian lessons Golding translated. *Henry VI, Part 1; Titus Andronicus; The Taming of the Shrew; Henry V;* and *The Winter's Tale* all cite characters, lessons, and plotlines that derive from *Trogus Pompeius.*

However, Golding's dedication also highlights what would become a significant difference of opinion between the scholar and his nephew. The purpose of history, Golding explained in his dedication, is to adduce "a variety and multitude of examples [that] tend all to one end—that is, the advancement

of virtue and the defacing of vice." Golding held a Puritanical view of both history and contemporary affairs, while de Vere most certainly did not.

De Vere's juvenile poetry (the sixteen to twenty poems published in contemporary anthologies and/or found in Elizabethan manuscript collections that were signed either "Earle of Oxenford" or "EO") is noteworthy for its lack of moralistic or religious proselytizing. Whereas many of de Vere's contemporaries published pious or morally didactic verse–and Golding practically devoted a career to moralistic prose–the teenaged de Vere was already exploring such Shake-spearean themes as honor and revenge. These decidedly amoral interests can be seen in the "Loss of My Good Name" stanza quoted above or in another juvenile poem by de Vere that concludes:

> My heart shall fail and hand shall lose his force,
> But some device shall pay despite his due.
> And fury shall consume my careful course,
> Or raze the ground whereon my sorrow grew.
> Lo, thus in rage of ruthful mind refused,
> I rest revenged of whom I am abused.

Within a few years, Golding appears to have regretted that he had ever introduced his nephew to that libertine poet Ovid. In 1571, Golding dedicated a sober translation of John Calvin's commentaries on the Psalms to his nephew. This time, Golding's dedicatory preface takes on a tone that is almost scolding in its moralizing: "I beseech Your Lordship consider how God hath placed you upon a high stage in the eyes of all men," Golding wrote to de Vere. "... But if you should become either a counterfeit Protestant or a perverse papist or a cold and careless neuter (God forbid), the harm could not be expressed which you should do to your native country." To his Puritanical uncle, de Vere was, in the end, a wayward soul. Though Golding would outlive de Vere by two years, their paths diverged after the early 1570s.

Between 1564 and 1569, de Vere's studies go mostly unchronicled. That de Vere was studying during much of this period is likely, given his guardian's interest in education. Cecil believed that the nobility and gentry owed it to their country to study as diligently as possible in their teenaged years, for they would soon be representing England as generals, ambassadors, and functionaries of state. It was a point of pride to Cecil that his wards would become some of the most rigorously trained highborn men in all of Europe.

The years 1563–65 were also rife with plague, when those who could get out of the city did. During some of this period, de Vere was out of London. Perhaps the conceit of *Love's Labor's Lost,* wherein a clique of noble French youth sequester themselves at the KING OF NAVARRE's country estate to study for three years, is not so far-fetched. It was standard practice for aspiring professionals in their middle teens to pack off to the university, although noble

students typically worked independently of Cambridge or Oxford. Their tutors were often some of the best the university had to offer, as in the case of Sir Thomas Smith. But even if a young aristocrat was affiliated with a university, as de Vere was at Cambridge in 1558, he rarely took a degree. A bachelor's degree was more of a professional certificate, relevant to middle-class life and careers, than it was any mark of prestige for the entitled classes.

One fact about de Vere's activities from this period does survive. From August 5 to 10, 1564, de Vere lodged at St. John's College, Cambridge University. De Vere, his housemate the earl of Rutland, de Vere's cousin the duke of Norfolk, and other prominent men at Elizabeth's court were to receive Master of Arts degrees from the university. Cecil himself, who had been chancellor of the university for the past five years, would also receive an M.A.

The queen was scheduled to participate in these celebrations. However, Elizabeth faced one small problem: She had furiously proclaimed at Ipswich in 1561 that no woman would ever be permitted to stay overnight at an English university or abbey. And yet here Her Majesty was, lodging at Cambridge University for five nights.

Her chroniclers kindly overlook this moment of royal hypocrisy. But Shake-speare does not. *Love's Labor's Lost,* a play in which the primary theme is oath breaking, takes Elizabeth to task for her 1561 proclamation. The sequestered scholars of *Love's Labor's Lost,* who have pledged not to fraternize with women, face a host of problems when the PRINCESS OF FRANCE (a stand-in for Queen Elizabeth) and her train pay a visit. The princess's loyal attendant BOYET (a lighthearted caricature of Cecil) announces the arrival of the royal entourage but is sent back to inform Her Highness that, essentially, no girls are allowed. The scholars, BOYET regretfully notifies the PRINCESS, intend "to lodge you in the field."

The shocked PRINCESS's repartee with her host the KING OF NAVARRE spoofs what Elizabeth *would* have faced had the Cambridge University officials actually held the queen to her 1561 edict. *Love's Labor's Lost*'s exchange certainly never happened in reality, but such an exchange also offered up the kind of ribbing that Elizabeth would have enjoyed.

> KING Fair Princess, welcome to the court of Navarre.
> PRINCESS Fair I give you back again; and welcome I have not yet: the roof of this court is too high to be yours, and welcome to the wide fields too base to be mine.
> KING You shall be welcome, madam, to my court.
> PRIN. I will be welcome, then: conduct me thither.
> KING Hear me, dear lady; I have sworn an oath.

It was the thirty-year-old queen's first visit to a university, and her five-day stay was recorded at length by at least four contemporary chroniclers.

Cecil took great pains to arrange for lavish entertainments and spectacles to delight and stimulate Her Majesty and the court. As the bishop of London wrote in a July 1564 letter to the university officials, Elizabeth's visit would include "all manner of scholastical exercises–*viz.* with sermons both in English and Latin, disputations in all kinds of faculties, and playing of comedies and tragedies."

On the afternoon of Saturday, August 5, the queen and her entourage arrived at Cambridge and retired to their lodgings–Elizabeth at King's College with de Vere, Rutland, and Cecil up the street at Cecil's alma mater, St. John's. The following night, King's College Chapel was converted into a theater with, in the words of one contemporary account, "a great stage containing the breadth of the church from the one side unto the other that the chapels might serve for houses. In length, it ran two of the lower chapels full, with the pillars, on a side." Cecil and the other attendees, presumably including de Vere, entered with guards bearing torches. The guards stood by the stage, providing the only source of illumination for the play. The queen and her attendants then entered and took their seats, with Her Majesty watching the play from a special throne onstage. She was, after all, still the center of attention.

The following day was given over to public debates at St. Mary's Church on such topics as art, the superiority of monarchy to a republic, and the merits of simple over complicated foods. The evening's performance was Edward Haliwell's tragedy *Dido*. A marginally anti-Catholic play followed on Tuesday night, Nicholas Udall's drama about the biblical king Hezekiah and his destruction of idolatry. By the following evening, after another day of disputations and an extemporaneous speech of her own in Latin, Elizabeth was too worn out to enjoy any more entertainments. So she awarded honorary degrees to the fourteen-year-old de Vere and others the next morning and then decamped for the nearby priory of Hinchinbrook.

A troupe of players from the university, however, followed the queen's train. De Vere, who probably departed Cambridge with Elizabeth, would have watched as these presumptuous undergraduates overtook the massive convoy of horses and carts. The players begged Elizabeth to let them perform just one masque. After some pleading, she finally consented.

Perhaps emboldened by the mildly anti-Catholic Hezekiah play two nights before, the student players proceeded to lampoon a group of Catholic bishops who were then being held in prison. The play provoked such an uproar that the queen's chroniclers omit any mention of it. The tale survives only in the correspondence of the Spanish ambassador, who was in the business of reporting courtly scuttlebutt back to his king.

According to the ambassador, the students in the drama "came in dressed as some of the imprisoned bishops. First came the bishop of London carrying a lamb in his hands as if he were eating it as he walked along, and then others with devices [*props*], one being in the figure of a dog with the Host in his mouth."

Elizabeth was so outraged at this breach of civility that she stormed out of the performance. (In 1559, she had issued a proclamation outlawing any discussion of religion or politics on the popular–as opposed to courtly–stage.) The queen spared no words. The Spanish ambassador adds that "the men who held the torches, it being night, left them [*the rest of the court*] in the dark, and so ended the thoughtless and scandalous representations."

De Vere must have marveled at the visceral response a simple skit had produced. These players, ham-fisted though their farce was, had truly caught the conscience of the queen. Such an explosive response to a theatrical performance never happened again in Elizabeth's court. (Henceforth the queen's handlers would vet court dramas more carefully.) But once was enough, and *Hamlet* preserves this very moment of royal distemper:

OPHELIA The king rises....
POLONIUS Give o'er the play.
KING Give me some light! Away!
POLONIUS Lights, lights, lights!

In 1565, de Vere and his housemate the earl of Rutland served as pages for a prominent Protestant wedding in London between Ambrose Dudley, earl of Warwick, and Anne Russell, daughter of the stalwart antipapist earl of Bedford. On the morning of Sunday, November 11, 1565, de Vere and Rutland escorted the bride from her guest suite at Westminster Palace to the queen's receiving room (her "great closet"). There, with the queen and her maids of honor in yellow satin trimmed with green velvet and silver lace, the ceremony began. Robert Dudley, the groom's purple-satin-bedecked younger brother, who had recently been named earl of Leicester, gave away the bride. According to a chronicle of the event, after the vows and benedictions, the wedding party then repaired to the council chamber to dine "at a long board well set with lords and ladies." For two days following, the wedding party held jousts and tournaments in honor of the nuptials.

The wedding celebration also featured plays and revels, supervised by Richard Edwards, director of the Children of the Chapel Royal. At the time, Edwards was also compiling a collection of court poetry and songs, and it was probably at this wedding that he met de Vere. Edwards's *The Paradise of Dainty Devices* would later be published containing eight of de Vere's youthful poems–signed "E.O." for Edward Oxford/Oxenford.

On the wedding night, Dudley's military colleagues celebrated with three

volleys of cannon fire. However, the second volley splintered the cannon's barrel, killing the queen's chief master gunner, Robert Thomas. As one chronicler observed, the evening ended on a note of "great sorrow and lamentation."

In the first week of September 1566, at the end of an excessively hot summer, de Vere, Cecil, and ten other courtiers and diplomats arrived at Oxford University to receive master's degrees. As with the Cambridge diploma presented two years before, de Vere's Oxford M.A. was probably honorary. This degree did carry more academic weight, though, since Oxford had recently tightened its rules to ensure that a recipient's learning equaled or surpassed the requirements of the degree being conferred.

The queen had arrived at Oxford on August 31 for a six-day royal visit, culminating in the cap-and-gown ceremony on Friday, September 6. (Once again, she was violating her own prohibition against women lodging at the universities–and, once again, no one but Shake-speare would ever dare call her on it.) De Vere was awarded his M.A. at the refectory at Christ Church. One of the dons then launched into a Latin oration at the cathedral, which the queen slipped out of–from the heat as well as the exhaustion of attending so many academic disputations.

In all, Elizabeth's visit to Oxford was much like the Cambridge festivities two years before. Naturally, Oxford wanted to outdo its sister university. The university's purses were thus opened to present a festival of drama and debate that outstripped Cambridge's 1564 revels. Richard Edwards, whom de Vere had met at the Dudley–Russell wedding, was tapped to organize and stage the plays at Oxford.

As the English novelist Evelyn Waugh describes Elizabeth's 1566 Progress to Oxford,

> The visit lasted for six days. There were some lighter moments: a Latin play in Christ Church Hall, called *Marcus Geminus,* which the queen did not attend (the Spanish ambassador spoke so highly of it that she resolved to lose no more sport thereafter); an English play acted in two parts named *Palamon and Arcite,* at the first night of which the stage collapsed, killing three people and injuring five more; on the second night a pack of hounds was introduced into the quadrangle, which moved the young scholars, confined to the upper storeys, to such excitement that the queen expressed her fear that they would fall out of the windows; there were several elaborate dinners; but for the most part the entertainment was strictly academic; orations, sermons, debates, the presentation of Latin verses translated from the Hebrew, the conferring of honorary degrees.

The original texts of the plays presented at Oxford do not survive. However, several in attendance at the performances recorded plot summaries and

a few excerpts of dialogue. Edwards is conventionally assumed to have been the author of these entertainments.

This assumption, however, needs to be reassessed. The surviving excerpts of *Palamon and Arcite* strongly resemble de Vere's early poetry. Also, Shake-speare's *The Two Noble Kinsmen* tells the same story with the same characters as *Palamon and Arcite.* The prologue to Shake-speare's *The Two Noble Kinsmen* suggests it was the author's first dramatic work ("new plays and maidenheads are near akin"), which it almost certainly would have been had it originated in de Vere's pen in 1566.

De Vere's academic load soon shifted from the world of cosmography, languages, philosophy, and physic to the common law. His legal training under Sir Thomas Smith and others would have centered around civil (i.e., Roman) law and perhaps some ecclesiastical law as well. Both of these legal fields were the province of the university and its tutors. But study of the common law, the day-to-day stuff that most citizens came into contact with, took place at the Inns of Court in London. And just as Cecil had definite plans for the tutors to be hired for de Vere, there was no second-guessing which law school de Vere would be attending: Cecil's alma mater, Gray's Inn, where Cecil would also send his own sons and his son-in-law Lord Wentworth. In February 1567, de Vere matriculated at Gray's Inn, around the same time as another young and charming prodigy–the frequent guest at Cecil House, Philip Sidney.

The distance from Cecil House to Gray's Inn was less than a mile, from the hubbub of the Strand to the bucolic northwestern outskirts of the city. Unlike law schools today, the Elizabethan Inns of Court provided both traditional legal training and a courtly finishing school, with revels and theatrical entertainments as part of the curriculum. Some of the finest English poets and playwrights of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries had Inns of Court educations–including Francis Beaumont, John Ford, John Marston, Sir John Davies, Thomas Campion, and John Donne. And to that list may now be added the name Shake-speare.

Sometime between January of 1566 and March of 1567, the celebrated dramatist George Gascoigne staged two plays for the students at Gray's Inn: *Jocasta* and *The Supposes.* De Vere was related to Gascoigne by marriage, and the two may also have ridden into London together during de Vere's triumphal entrance onto the city scene in 1562. If de Vere had missed the original performance of Gascoigne's plays, he would have had ready access to the play manuscripts either via the school's archives or the author himself.

Jocasta was familiar stuff for an Inns of Court audience: a serious and stately tragedy with lengthy choruses and diatribes aplenty. However, Gascoigne's *Supposes* was more unusual for its law school audience. *The Supposes*

was a groundbreaking piece of theater–considered today to be the first work in the genre of Elizabethan comedy. It was a play staged on a lavish budget with a vast assortment of costumes and props, drawing from the best of contemporary Italian comedy, featuring a strong female protagonist and a risqué plot. To the young de Vere, *The Supposes* would become every part as inspirational as John Bale's *King Johan* in 1561 or the royal "lights, lights, lights!" fiasco three years later. De Vere would pilfer a subplot from *The Supposes,* and arguably the entire theme of the play, for *The Taming of The Shrew.*

The Supposes and *Jocasta* were almost certainly performed in the Great Hall at Gray's Inn's ancient manor house. Although its inhabitants and their entertainments were illustrious, Gray's Inn was still something of a rowdy school. Both the floor of the Hall and of the chambers were strewn with rushes. And because of their unruliness, students were given silver cups and plates; since the administrators figured that the expense of glass or earthenware, "from constant breaking, [would] exceed the value of silver."

Moreover, it was at Gray's Inn that de Vere would find one of the sources for *Hamlet*–in the case of *Hales v. Petit.*

The judge and Gray's Inn alum Sir James Hales had become a Protestant cause célèbre for continuing to punish Catholics even after Mary Tudor had become queen. Tortured and imprisoned, Hales drowned himself in a stream near Canterbury in 1554. Since his death was a suicide, some of Hales's possessions (including his leases) had been forfeited to the crown. The crown had then turned around and leased one of Hales's forfeited leases to a man named Cyriack Petit. The Hales family, wanting their lease back, argued that they'd inherited Hales's possessions at the moment of his death, before the state deemed it a suicide. Thus Petit had no right to be living on land that the Hales family had already inherited.

The tortured language of both sides in this case reads like a skit from *Monty Python's Flying Circus.* The documented arguments on behalf of the Hales family: "Sir James Hales was dead, and how came he to his death? It may be answered, by drowning. And who drowned him? Sir James Hales. And when did he drown him? In his life-time: So that Sir James Hales being alive caused Sir James to die and the act of the living was the death of a dead man." The documented arguments on behalf of Petit: "The Forfeiture of the Goods and Chattels, real and personal, shall have relation to the Act done in the Party's Life-time, which was the Cause of his Death; and upon this the parts of the Act are to be considered.... The Act consists of three Parts. The first is the Imagination, which is a Reflection or a Meditation of the Mind.... The second is the Resolution.... The third is the Perfection.... And this Perfection consists of two Parts, viz, the Beginning and the End."

Such legalistic hairsplitting must have made for entertaining table talk among the Gray's Inn students. As a student from Hales's alma mater, de Vere enjoyed ready access to the *Hales v. Petit* docket. Moreover, the theme of the

case–usurpation of family lands from a rightful heir–would certainly have resonated with the young earl, still disinherited from many of his own ancestral estates. When de Vere later wrote his masterpiece recalling the death of his father, he used *Hales v. Petit* to jab at a legal system that could strip a child of his rightful inheritance. *Hamlet*'s GRAVEDIGGERS comically rehash the arguments of *Hales v. Petit* as they muse over OPHELIA's death:

> FIRST CLOWN Is she to be buried in Christian burial that willfully seeks her own salvation?
>
> SECOND CLOWN I tell thee she is... the crowner hath sat on her and finds it Christian burial.
>
> FIRST How can that be, unless she drowned herself in her own defense?
>
> SECOND Why, 'tis found so.
>
> FIRST It must be *se offendendo;* it cannot be else. For here lies the point: if I drown myself wittingly it argues an act; and an act hath three branches: it is to act, to do, and to perform: *argal,* she drowned herself wittingly.
>
> SECOND Nay, but hear you, goodman delver–
>
> FIRST Give me leave: Here lies the water; good; here stands the man; good; if the man go to this water and drown himself, it is will he, nill he, he goes; mark you that? But if the water come to him, and drown him, he drowns not himself, *argal,* he that is not guilty of his own death shortens not his own life.
>
> SECOND But is this law?
>
> FIRST Ay, marry, is't; crowner's quest law.

Legal shenanigans of the contorted kind would soon enough be familiar terrain for de Vere. During the summer of 1567, the seventeen-year-old earl for the first time had a run-in with the law. Someone less politically connected could have been charged with murder.

On the evening of July 23, de Vere and a tailor named Edward Baynam were practicing their fencing moves in the backyard behind Cecil House. A third man, Thomas Brincknell, a cook from Cecil House, became involved. Here is what the coroner's inquest found:

> Along came Thomas Brincknell, drunk... who ran and fell upon the point of the Earl of Oxford's foil (worth twelve pence), which Oxford held in his right hand intending to play (as they call it). In the course of which, with this foil Thomas (Brincknell) gave himself a wound to the front of his thigh four inches deep and one inch wide, of which he died instantly. This, to the exclusion of all other explanations, was the way he died.

Either de Vere was fencing with an unbated sword–unlikely in a practice bout–or his sword broke, a common enough occurrence even in modern fencing. He seems to have pierced Brincknell's femoral artery. The scene would have been gruesome. No Elizabethan doctor could have saved him, and death would have come within minutes.

The body of the cook, lying in a pool of blood, must have drawn the entire staff of Cecil House into the courtyard to witness what horrendous mischief that unruly teen had just caused.

Under a more modern criminal justice system, such a reckless adolescent might expect to face charges of criminal negligence (if he was using an unguarded blade) and wrongful death. He might expect to be tried as a juvenile and face either juvenile prison or a suspended sentence.

However, no such leniency was available in sixteenth-century English courts. From his legal training, de Vere no doubt knew that what he had just done would technically be classified as murder. And a murder conviction carried with it a mandatory death sentence. Since 1547, English courts had begun to outline the lesser crime of manslaughter–drawing the distinction between killing "of malice prepensed" and accidental death "through chance medley." But in the 1570s, manslaughter trials remained dangerous and uncharted waters. A man who killed someone accidentally could still hang.

There was one legal trick, though, that saved defendants caught in binds such as this. For centuries, the only form of voluntary homicide that courts were permitted to forgive was homicide committed *se defendendo,* in self-defense. So accidental killings were sometimes twisted into cases of self-defense. In this kind of trial, an accidental death could technically be written off as the deceased running upon the blade of the defendant's weapon. The defendant, it would be argued, did not so much attack the deceased as the deceased threw himself upon the defendant's sword. This in turn converted the crime into *felo-de-se*–suicide. The deceased was now the criminal. But the deceased was also, conveniently, dead.

The only drawback to this clever bit of contortionism was that the heirs of the deceased would have to contend with the economic and societal stigma of a suicide verdict. The deceased's estate would be forfeit, and he could not be buried in sanctified ground. On the other hand, the *felo-de-se* chicanery prevented a second wrongful death–an unnecessary hanging–from stemming from the first.

Agnes Brincknell, the cook's widow, must have cursed de Vere's very soul. Because of this thoughtless boy, she had lost a husband and had to turn to charity both for herself and her fatherless child. And now, because of some fancy lawyer's shady trickery, her husband's death was going to be ruled a suicide? Was there any justice?

Cecil would later record in his journals that he did all he could to "find

the death of the poor man, whom [de Vere] killed in my house, *se defendendo*"–or, as *Hamlet*'s gravediggers invert the term, *se offendendo.*

The case of OPHELIA versus the river, as argued by GRAVEDIGGERS one and two, becomes an appellate court hearing for both the Brincknell coroner's inquest and *Hales v. Petit.* As with nearly all his crimes and misdemeanors, de Vere's acknowledgment of his rash and destructive behavior came later in life–in the form of words that are performed today on stages around the world.

❧

On December 2, 1568, de Vere's mother died. She was buried at Earls Colne next to Earl John. Sometime in 1562 or '63, the recent widow had remarried to a man well below her station–a former horse-master for the Dudley family named Charles Tyrell. Even after settling down with her second husband, Countess Margery had remained distant. She politely passed along her greetings to her son in letters addressed to William Cecil, but these were gestures no more loving than what one might expect of casual acquaintances. The only record of de Vere's reciprocal indifference to his mother and stepfather appears years later when he reportedly told his cousin Henry Howard–perhaps jestingly alluding to a play he was then cooking up–that a specter of the couple had paid a visit to the earl one haunted night. "Charles Tyrell appeared to him with a whip after he was dead," Howard recalled. "And his mother [was] in a sheet [*shroud*] foretelling things to come." HAMLET's droll banter with his father's GHOST was undoubtedly a familiar psychological defense mechanism for the author.

History does not record if de Vere made the pilgrimage to his mother's funeral. Whether or not he did, de Vere would have wanted to get away from Cecil House, where the fourteen-year-old Philip Sidney was planning to spend the Christmas holidays. That would have been impetus enough. Cecil doted on Sidney–telling the child's father that Philip was one "in whom I take more comfort than I do openly utter . . . and so I do love him as he were mine own." Where de Vere was abrasive and full of attitude, Sidney was the charming, well-scrubbed young champ who was every girl's father's dream. Sidney and de Vere were as destined to become rivals as the fox and the hound.

Sidney was also ill during the winter of 1568–69, and his visit to de Vere's home may have been the vector that brought sickness into de Vere's life. As the queen would later remark in a letter to Sidney's father, "dispersed in the country" was a "universality of sickness partly by agues, partly by the plague."

Whatever his malady and however he got it, in 1569 de Vere was sick for months on end. Just at the moment when de Vere most needed nurturing, his mother–detached though she may have been–had died. The deaths of both of his parents at sensitive moments in de Vere's life probably played a substantial role in transforming the precocious child into the driven man of

letters. The list of "eminent creators" in literature who had to learn to parent themselves–whether due to early parental death, such as August Strindberg, or parental lovelessness, such as Honoré de Balzac–is impressive. Eugene O'Neill's morphine-addicted mother was a cold and distant figure to him, and when he had to mother himself through a deadly bout with tuberculosis, it was the turning point that he later said made him a dramatist. Psychological studies of literary genius draw substantial emotional meaning out of this forced truce between superego and id.

Lying in his sickbed, de Vere might well have been shocked into early thoughts of his own mortality. Like George Bernard Shaw, whose bout with tuberculosis spurred a burning desire to marry, de Vere also began, during or soon after his illness, to cast his eyes about for a wife.

The girl nearest to de Vere was the thirteen-year-old Anne Cecil, who had herself suffered a recent brush with death when she came down with smallpox in 1566. Judging from both the historical records and her portraits in Shake-speare, Anne Cecil would have been a willing and likely attendant to the handsome young noble she had known since she was five. At thirteen, she was four years younger than de Vere. But she probably came as close to being a mother substitute for de Vere during his convalescence as did any adult woman in the Cecil household.

However, Anne's father–de Vere's guardian–had already begun to make marriage plans for his daughter. The charming and talented Philip Sidney was being groomed for Anne's hand in marriage as soon as the couple reached the age of consent. Sidney's uncle, Lord Robert Dudley (now earl of Leicester), saw a marriage between his fifteen-year-old nephew and Anne Cecil as an important political alliance. Leicester pressed hard for this nuptial union. However, Leicester needed to conceal the fact that Sidney had lands but little money to woo his bride with. The lengthy marriage contract, now in the Cecil family archives, details Sidney's modest income at the time, the modest financial gain he'd receive upon the death of his father–and the substantial boost in annual income (£325) Sidney would net when his mother passed away. Sidney also stood to gain in excess of another £300 annually if the marriage with Anne went through. On the other side of the bargaining table, the marriage contract stipulates that Anne had a £700 inheritance awaiting her.

The wedding never happened. But this didn't stop de Vere from lampooning the haggling. Substituting the characters ANNE PAGE for Anne Cecil, SLENDER for Sidney, and SLENDER's uncle SHALLOW for Sidney's uncle Leicester, Shake-speare's *Merry Wives of Windsor* plays out in comic detail precisely as outlined above.

SHALLOW (Leicester) backs his apathetic nephew SLENDER (Sidney) into wooing ANNE PAGE, who, like her prototype, is set to receive a £700 inheritance. But ANNE wants nothing to do with him. SLENDER admits to ANNE that

"Till my mother be dead . . . I live like a poor gentleman born." Two acts later, ANNE mutters to herself as she's summoned to speak with SLENDER:

> ANNE PAGE [*Aside*] This my father's choice.
> O, what a world of vile, ill-favor'd faults
> Looks handsome in three hundred pounds a year!

Sidney, so far as can be determined, was indifferent to marriage with Anne. As SLENDER tells ANNE PAGE, "I would little or nothing of you. Your father and my uncle hath made [the] motions."

De Vere may well have been jealous, especially as he watched Leicester use blood money, extracted in part from de Vere family properties, to win Anne's hand for Sidney.

At the same time, de Vere also heard the call of military service. The long and valiant line of earls of Oxford had distinguished themselves as leaders on the battlefields of legend. And now the Scottish borderlands were beginning to look like the place where the next generation of great men would be put to the test. Catholic nobles in northern England were rising up against the queen, threatening to spark a revolutionary war.

On November 24, 1569, de Vere wrote to Cecil, Anne's father, that his health was returning–something that the coming months would prove untrue. His letter to Cecil resounds with the voice of an eager adolescent, seeking his share of fame and glory:

> Sir, Although my hap hath been so hard that it hath visited me of late with sickness, yet thanks be to God through the looking to which I have had by your care had over me, I find my health restored. . . .
>
> At this present, desiring you if I have done anything amiss that I have merited your offence, impute [it] to my young years and lack of experience to know my friends. And Having no other means whereby to speak with you myself I am bold to impart my mind in paper, earnestly desiring your h[onor] that at this instant, as heretofore you have given me your good word, to have me see the wars and services in strange and foreign places, sith [*since*] you could not then obtain me license of the Queen's Majesty. Now you will do me so much honor as that by your purchase of my License I may be called to the service of my prince and country as at this present troublous time a number are. Thus leaving to importune at you with my earnest suit I commit you to the hand of The Almighty. By your assured friend this twenty fourth of November.
>
> EDWARD OXENFORD

CHAPTER 3

TREASONS AND VILE INSTRUMENTS

[1569–1572]

War coaxed, but illness commanded. Though de vere may have downplayed his malady to his guardian, some ailment in the first quarter of 1570 caused William Cecil to remit £15 15s 4d (15 pounds, 15 shillings, and 4 pence) to "Riche the apothecary for potions, pills, and other drugs for my lord's [*de Vere's*] diet in the time of his sickness." Cecil also noted the "hire of a hothouse"–an Elizabethan sweat lodge, sometimes involving chemical vapors such as mercury, that treated illnesses ranging from agues and consumption to venereal disease.

De Vere consumed prodigious amounts of cash. In his first four years as Cecil's ward he burned through more than £625 for apparel alone, including rapiers and daggers–upwards of $150,000 in today's currency. And even during the earl's winter of ill health, Cecil recorded de Vere's purchase of a cape and riding cloth for £6 5s, three doublets (waist-length jackets with high collars) for £12 13s, black velvet hose for £10 9s 2d, ten pairs of Spanish leather shoes and three pairs of mules (slippers) for £1 5s, handkerchiefs and velvet and satin for a Spanish cape for £15 10s 8d, and a rapier, dagger, and belt for £1 6s 8d.

De Vere lodged in a hired room in Windsor during his period of recovery. The town of Windsor, thirty miles west of London on the right (south) bank of the Thames, abutted the royal castle and park of the same name. A Windsor room-for-hire sets the scene for *The Merry Wives of Windsor*–the only Shake-speare play removed from de Vere's familiar world of court and castle. A ten-minute walk down the town's thoroughfare, Datchet Lane, leads a traveler toward Datchet Mead and the town of Frogmore. Near Datchet Mead, according to local lore, a hunter named Herne had hanged himself on a big oak tree. His ghost, naturally, haunted the woods. This local legend and these local landmarks appear in *Merry Wives.*

An ailing de Vere would have remembered childhood days cavorting through Windsor, taking breaks from his studies at Sir Thomas Smith's estate of Ankerwicke, an hour's walk away. Memories would have been all de Vere had, though. Smith and his wife, Philippa, had long since left Ankerwicke as their primary residence. The couple had first served as ambassadors and emissaries in Paris (1562–67) and then relocated to the Smiths' newly renovated Essex estate, Hill Hall.

As de Vere lay in his rented room in Windsor, bumping his head on the low ceiling beams and sending his servant down to the local tapster to fetch cakes and ale, his convalescence would have been rendered more enjoyable by writing and by the new books that were coming into his library at the time. Cecil recorded that in the first quarter of 1570, de Vere purchased two unspecified "Italian books" as well as "a Geneva Bible gilt, a Chaucer, Plutarch's works in French, with other books and papers." Of the hundreds of books de Vere could have bought in 1570, the Geneva Bible, Chaucer, and Plutarch are three of only a handful of volumes central to the Shake-speare canon. Entire treatises have been written about Shake-speare's use of Plutarch and of Chaucer, while one could fill a bookshelf with the studies that have been published about Shake-speare and the Bible.

As it happens, de Vere's "Geneva" translation of the Bible (1569–70) has survived the ages and now sits in the climate-controlled vaults of the Folger Shakespeare Library in Washington, D.C. De Vere's many handwritten markings within the covers of his Geneva Bible–and their profoundly Shakespearean character–are the subject of Appendix A.

By the early spring of 1570, de Vere was healthy again and eager to "see the wars and services in strange and foreign places." On March 30, Elizabeth sent de Vere northward, £40 in hand, to serve as an officer in a military campaign then afoot. His orders were to "remain with my Lord of Sussex." Thomas Radcliffe, third earl of Sussex, had recently been appointed lord lieutenant of the North to stamp out the unrest that had been growing in the strongly Catholic region. The insurrectionists wanted to wed the former Scottish queen Mary to the duke of Norfolk, who was de Vere's first cousin.

Mary Stuart, Queen of Scots, was great-granddaughter to King Henry VII, making her a clear contender for the English throne. She'd abdicated the Scots crown to her son in 1567 because of a murder scandal. Mary's second husband died in 1567 under suspicious circumstances, and suspicions were only heightened when Mary wed the suspected murderer, the earl of Bothwell, soon thereafter.

At the time of de Vere's northward voyage in 1570, Mary Stuart had been imprisoned at the estate of Chatsworth, southeast of Manchester. Bothwell had long since fled the country and his erstwhile queen only to end up in a Danish jail. Mary had applied to the pope for a divorce from Bothwell, an act that would have freed her to wed the recent widower Norfolk. Naïvely,

Norfolk thought he could convince Queen Elizabeth that his marriage to the Catholic Mary Stuart would be beneficial for everyone–that he and Mary could then beget heirs to the English throne in case Elizabeth died heirless.

If Norfolk actually believed this line, he did not know his queen. Elizabeth kept a close tally on any marriage with royal overtones; the heir presumptive to the English throne marrying a man with a minor royal claim himself was simply not permissible. Even if Norfolk and Mary harbored only innocent intentions, the couple could still have inspired Catholic insurgents to stage a palace coup. Norfolk ultimately left Elizabeth's court in disgrace, finding solace in two renegade northern nobles, the earls of Westmoreland and Northumberland. These two malcontent earls–and their ambitious countesses–used the political discord Norfolk had generated at court to advance their own agenda of weakening the power of Sir William Cecil and his increasingly centralized Tudor state. (The countess of Westmoreland was also Norfolk's sister and, thus, de Vere's first cousin.) The earls of Westmoreland and Northumberland also found allies in Scottish lairds who had helped the English nobles stage raids across the border.

Sussex and his officers planned a conference to discuss strategy beginning on April 5, 1570, at Newcastle-upon-Tyne, and this was where de Vere probably headed–with a party of servants and soldiers who'd embarked northward as part of a nationwide mobilization.

The 270-mile journey from London to Newcastle takes approximately ten days by horse. De Vere would have passed by Kimbolton Castle (which sets the scene for part of *Henry VIII*) and the city of York and the forest of Galtres (settings for both *Henry IV* plays and *Henry VI, Part 3*). To a young man from the south, the northern landscape was indeed a "strange and foreign place." Probably all of de Vere's life had been spent within a one or two days' ride from the queen and her court. His journey to the Scots border counties, a region where Catholicism still swayed many hearts and where feudal fiefdoms still defined the political power structure, was really a journey into the England of centuries past.

The commander of the English forces was–unlike Westmoreland, Northumberland, and Norfolk–a decisive and expeditious man. The earl of Sussex had served both Catholic and Anglican monarchs with distinction, helping to suppress a rebellion that opposed a Spanish marriage during Queen Mary's reign and helping to establish English settlements in Ireland under Elizabeth. The forty-four-year-old Sussex served as a counterbalance to the earl of Leicester and would be promoting French marriage matches in the years to come, matches that stood to unseat Leicester as Her Majesty's favorite.

Because of Sussex's strategic vision and military prowess, the Scottish and Northern Rebellion was virtually over before de Vere arrived at the front lines in mid-April.

For de Vere, Sussex's lifelong rivalry with Leicester made him a natural

ally–and his military might and power at court made him an attractive role model and mentor. De Vere passed his twentieth birthday (April 12, 1570) amid Sussex's entourage, as these victorious commanders reviewed their actions to date and pondered the campaign to come.

Five days later, on April 17, Sussex began a retribution campaign in southern Scotland. All who cared to see a Protestant monarch remain on the throne recognized that the citizenry needed to be awed, ensuring that they'd never harbor active English rebels again. "I trust," Sussex wrote in a letter to Cecil, "before the light of this morn be past to leave a memory in Scotland whereof they and their children shall be afraid to offer war to England." Sussex and his soldiers reportedly burned three hundred villages to the ground and sacked fifty Scottish castles. As de Vere was only recently recovered from illness, it's unlikely that he saw much action–although he may well have traveled across southern Scotland with the invading English soldiers during the various campaigns over the border during April, May, and June.

Elizabeth's maltreatment of the Catholic-sympathizing insurrectionists was to be the last straw. On April 27, the pope excommunicated Queen Elizabeth. The "papal bull" declared Elizabeth "to be deprived of her pretended title to the aforesaid crown and of all lordship, dignity, and privilege whatsoever." Loyal Catholics who wanted to depose the bastard Elizabeth were now given papal dispensation to use any means necessary to do so.

England needed a response. One means of getting back at Rome was as ancient as Rome itself: state-sanctioned propaganda. Books, while a substantial part of London culture, reached only the minority of the population who could read or afford these luxury items. The two primary vehicles for propagandizing the British public at large were the pulpit and the stage. Elizabeth's government availed themselves of both.

Vicars across England were required, every Sunday, to read state-composed sermons to their congregations. The Anglican authorities printed a book of twelve homilies in 1547 and another set in 1562–63. These homilies dealt with general topics such as salvation, misery, swearing, and perjury. However, one homily was published in direct response to the Scottish and Northern uprising. This text was unique in more ways than one. The anonymous *Homily Against Disobedience and Willful Rebellion* (1571) is a proto-Shake-spearean piece of prose–containing enough distinctive rhetoric and poetic flourishes to lead one to suspect the hand of a twenty-year-old Bard. The influence of the 1571 homily on Shake-speare has been widely chronicled. However, the possibility that it was actually written by Shake-speare has never before been suggested. Did de Vere record his theological reflections on rebellion for clergymen across the land to recite to their flocks?

Church attendance was mandatory for all English subjects, so 1571 may

have been the year de Vere first experienced the rush of addressing the entire nation–not just the elites at court for whom he had heretofore written.

> ... What a perilous thing were it to commit unto subjects the judgment which prince is wise and godly and his government good, and which is otherwise–as though the foot must judge of the head, an enterprise very heinous and must needs breed rebellion. For who else be they that are most inclined to rebellion but such haughty spirits? From whom springeth such foul ruin of realms? Is not rebellion the greatest of all mischiefs?
>
> ... How horrible a sin against God and man rebellion is cannot possibly be expressed according unto the greatness thereof. For he that nameth rebellion nameth not a singular or one only sin as is theft, robbery, murder and such like; but he nameth the whole puddle and sink of all sins against God and man, against his prince, his country, his countrymen, his parents, his children, his kinfolks, his friends, and against all men universally; all sins, I say, against God and all men heaped together, nameth he that nameth rebellion.

Shake-speare's *Henry IV, Parts 1* and *2* (staged in the 1590s, if not earlier) would immortalize this view of the Scots uprising. The focal point of both these Shake-speare histories is the squelching of a fifteenth-century rebellion–a rebellion that didn't quite happen the way Shake-speare tells it. Shake-speare's mishmash of the history of the reign of King Henry IV, however, presents a compelling allegorical retelling of the civil war that Queen Elizabeth almost faced in 1569. The 1569 Northern Rebellion's Bishop of Ross provides key inspiration for the charismatic religious leader, the ARCHBISHOP OF YORK, who spurs the rebels on. As Shake-speare's HENRY IV laments

> For that same word, *rebellion,* did divide
> The action of their bodies from their souls;
> ... But now the bishop
> Turns insurrection to religion.

The nineteenth-century historian Richard Simpson concluded that the *Henry IV* plays depict the context of the Northern Rebellion so accurately that the author must have consulted with a firsthand observer. In fact, Simpson was half right. The author *was* a firsthand observer.

Recognizing Sir William Cecil's "circumspection, stoutness, wisdom, dexterity, integrity of life, providence, care, and faithfulness," Elizabeth made her Secretary of State a baron on February 25, 1571. Henceforth he would be

known as William Cecil, Lord Burghley. "If you list to write truly, the poorest lord in England," the prosperous tycoon later wrote to a friend, with characteristic false modesty.

Cecil's brutal brilliance as a spymaster as well as diplomat, treasurer, and political advisor kept him a constant figure at Elizabeth's side no matter who else she fancied at the moment. That Burghley was also prolix, socially awkward, and lacking in wit's finer graces was, in Elizabeth's eyes, a bonus. She liked keeping unremarkable and colorless personalities close to her, so that her own courtly virtues could shine all the more brilliantly. Cecil possessed the right combination of drive, erudition, cunning, ruthlessness, pedantry, and conventionality to win him the queen's ear for a lifetime. He was also already enjoying the spoils of royal favor–building two palatial estates (Burghley and Theobalds) in addition to expanding Cecil House.

Cecil's investiture ceremony as Baron Burghley–which de Vere, Sidney, Rutland, and all the other Cecil House residents and regulars undoubtedly attended–took place in the Presence Chamber at Westminster. Elizabeth and her ministers read the Latin proclamation, draped the baron's cloak over Cecil's shoulders, and pronounced him *Très noble Seigneur Guilliaume Cecil, chevalier baron de Burghley.*

The newly entitled Lord Burghley was one of only two men in all of Elizabeth's forty-five-year reign elevated to the peerage without noble ancestry or a blood relationship to the queen. He was a nouveau riche who had been handed the key to an ancient order. This fact grated at de Vere's familial insecurities and brought out an unflatteringly snobbish conservatism. Watching the old nobility crumble around him arguably led the seventeenth earl of Oxford to over-identify with an aristocrat's most valued asset: the antiquity of his lineage. In part because he saw his writings as the dying expressions of a medieval way of life, Shake-speare was often strident in his feudalism–defending the very traditions of honor, name, and pedigree that his guardian and adopted family so besmirched. As Walt Whitman observed,

> Shakespeare ... is not only the tally of feudalism, but I should say Shakespeare is incarnated, uncompromising feudalism in literature.

On April 2, 1571, Elizabeth summoned the third Parliament of her reign. It would be de Vere's first as a sitting member of the House of Lords. (He would be twenty-one, the age of legal adulthood, ten days later.) Both Houses needed to address debts from the northern campaigns as well as an ongoing war in Ireland. In his ancestral role as Lord Great Chamberlain of England, de Vere served in the ceremonial opening of Parliament, which began with a royal procession from St. James's Palace to Westminster Abbey. This parade featured fifty gentlemen pensioners bearing gilded battle-axes, followed by a cortege of knights, barons, judges, attorneys, lords spiritual and lords temporal,

the archbishop of Canterbury, and the officers of state. The queen rode in her royal coach, followed by her favorite, Leicester. De Vere carried Elizabeth's train as she was then led into the House of Lords.

Elizabeth's previous two Parliaments (in 1563 and '66) had been contentious affairs, with ministers and MPs imploring her to marry or at least to name a successor. Such an act of self-demotion she refused to perform. The 1571 session, however, was united in its recognition of the Catholic threat from abroad, made manifest in the Northern Rebellion. God, one 1571 Parliamentarian said, had graced England with a "blessed bird," a rare phoenix. Elizabeth's image as the rising phoenix would remain with her for the rest of her reign.

Also passed by the House of Commons was a bill simply titled "Against Wednesdays." This proposed piece of legislation, which never survived its first reading in the House of Lords, would have rescinded a 1563 measure that Cecil had passed, mandating that all English subjects eat fish on Wednesdays. Cecil had cleverly devised this measure, nicknamed "Cecil's Fast," to build up England's fisheries and, as a consequence, its naval forces as well. HAMLET baits POLONIUS with the epithet "fishmonger." The word may crudely signify "pimp," but the implicit pun traces back to Cecil's Fast.

The following month, on May 7 and 8, 1571, de Vere competed in a knight's tournament at Whitehall. Dating from Henry VIII's years of voracious palatial development, Whitehall was a sprawling twenty-three-acre plot along the Thames north of Westminster that became, at its building in the 1530s, the largest royal palace in Europe. The tiltyard at Whitehall was a long and skinny field of grass behind the palace with a "barrier," a shoulder-high wooden jousting fence, stretching down the middle. Around the yard were wooden bleachers where onlookers paid eighteen pence for a seat. At the far end of the field stood the royal reviewing stand, where Elizabeth and her court looked down on the proceedings. Challenging knights would enter at the east gate and defending knights at the west. Upon entering they recited a formal chivalric challenge to the constable: "My name is Edward, Lord Oxford, and I am hither come armed and mounted to perform my challenge against ___ and acquit my pledges." De Vere rode in the costume of the Red Knight, an Arthurian legend from the ancient tales of the quest for the Holy Grail.

On either side of the barrier the opposing knights raced their ornately decorated steeds toward one another, bearing long lances made of soft wood. The joust included de Vere, Charles Howard–one of the generals in the recent northern campaign–and the queen's royal champion, Sir Henry Lee. Also riding the lists was a newly elected member of Parliament, Christopher Hatton, a charming and preening social climber who would soon be dancing his way into Elizabeth's affections and onto de Vere's bad side.

All participants in the two-day tourney, according to the chronicler John Stow, "did very valiantly. But the chief honor was given to the earl of Oxford."

De Vere had broken thirty-two lances and scored three direct hits ("attaints") on the head or chest.

At age twenty-one, the Lord Great Chamberlain of England had triumphed over an experienced general (the thirty-five-year-old Howard) and the president of the Society of Knights Tilters (the forty-one-year-old Lee). Brilliance and manifold talents, as well as rank and riches, certainly made Edward de Vere one of the country's most promising marriageable bachelors.

From his first days at Cecil House, the girl who had always been close by–and who had perhaps also tended to him during his illness–was his guardian's daughter, Anne Cecil. Anne had already come to be known at court as a young woman of great learning and decorum. In the words of twentieth-century literary historian Austin K. Gray,

> Anne Cecil was by nature as sedate and demure as [de Vere] was rash and heedless. If he was a songster, she was a bluestocking, and a pattern of wifely virtue to boot. As a maid of honor she had won the favor of the queen by her learning, her domestic accomplishments, and the general gravity of her demeanor. While other maids of honor philandered with the young nobles in the galleries of Richmond or made the palace melodious with madrigals and part-songs, Anne Cecil, it was observed, was always deep in some learned work or plying her needle or discoursing gravely with reverend signors in the embrasure of a window.

The two plays de Vere later wrote that most unambiguously recall his 1571 courtship with Anne–*The Merry Wives of Windsor* and *All's Well That Ends Well*–both place him as the groom of a higher caste than his prospective bride. They also tell conflicting stories, reflecting his varying perspectives on a tumultuous marriage. In *The Merry Wives,* the young and valiant groom (FENTON) eagerly and steadfastly woos the lovely young maid (ANNE PAGE), much to the consternation of her parents. The story ends happily ever after, with the young couple wedding in secret and the parents coming to accept the union only after the matrimonial bonds have been sealed.

On the other hand, in *All's Well,* the young and valiant groom (BERTRAM) is the pursued, not the pursuer. In *All's Well* the bride, HELENA, seeks and ultimately wins BERTRAM's hand, but not without first enduring five acts' worth of his kicking and screaming. BERTRAM objects to the match with HELENA because it constitutes what heralds called "disparagement"–marriage beneath one's rank in society. The play resolves this problem with a quick entitlement of HELENA's family and a harsh threat against the young man. The KING tells BERTRAM that he'd better marry HELENA or else

> . . . I will throw thee from my care forever,
> Into the staggers and the careless lapse

> Of youth and ignorance, both my revenge and hate
> Loosing upon thee in the name of justice,
> Without all terms of pity.

This act of intimidation was a stupid tactic, since it could have enabled BERTRAM to annul the marriage. According to sixteenth-century English law, at least, if either the groom or the bride could claim they did not give their "free and unforced consent," the marriage could later be dissolved. Annulment was also technically available for any couple who did not consummate their marriage for two years after the wedding–or three years if the groom or bride left the country. BERTRAM pursues neither of these routes. The events of the coming months, however, would make it clear that de Vere knew these back channels of nuptial law well.

If *Merry Wives of Windsor* suggests boy gets girl, while *All's Well That Ends Well* says girl gets boy, which was the truth? Courtly correspondence during the summer of 1571 leans toward the latter conclusion. The earl of Rutland was then in Paris and wanted to know the latest news about his former Cecil House friends. At the end of July, Rutland received a letter from a colleague at court, who noted, "The earl of Oxford hath gotten him a wife–or at least a wife hath caught him; this is Mistress Anne Cecil; whereunto the queen hath given her consent, and the which hath caused great weeping, wailing, and sorrowful cheer of those that had hoped to have that golden day."

Another letter suggests a different cause. On August 15, Burghley wrote to Rutland about the upcoming de Vere–Anne Cecil marriage. With a prolixity befitting POLONIUS, Burghley noted that after the Sidney marriage arrangements had fallen apart, he preferred to wait till his daughter turned the ripe age of sixteen before marrying her off. But then, with a creepy wink and a nudge, Burghley acknowledges another marriage possibility that he does not name–perhaps Rutland had had his sights set on Anne too. Burghley wrote:

> I think it doth seem strange to Your Lordship [*Rutland*] to hear of a purposed determination in my lord of Oxford to marry with my daughter. And so, before His Lordship moved it to me I might have thought it, if any other had moved it to me but himself. For at his own motion I could not well imagine what to think, considering I never meant to seek it nor hoped of it.... Truly, my lord, after I was acquainted of the former intention of a marriage with Master Philip Sidney, whom always I loved and esteemed, I was fully determined to have of myself moved no marriage for my daughter until she should have been near sixteen.... Truly, my lord, my good will serves me to have moved such a matter as this in another direction than this, but having more occasion to doubt of the issue of the matter, I did forebear. And in mine own conceit I could have

> as well liked there [*in that "another direction"*] as in any other place in England. Percase Your Lordship may guess where I mean, and so shall I, for I will name nobody.... And surely, my lord, by dealing with him [*de Vere*] I find that which I often heard of Your Lordship, that there is much more in him of understanding than any stranger to him would think. And for mine own part I find that whereof I take comfort in his wit and knowledge grown by good conversation.

"A purposed determination in my lord of Oxford to marry with my daughter." Here Burghley is being disingenuous. Without telling the outside world, Burghley had made marriage with his daughter extremely attractive to de Vere. Although unrecorded in Cecil's papers or in the state records, Spanish embassy correspondence avers that Burghley dangled a generous £15,000 dowry, four to six million dollars today, in front of de Vere's nose. (The word *OPHELIA* in Greek means either "profit" or "indebtedness." Anne had become both to the young free-spending and cash-strapped groom who came of age in her household.) De Vere may very well have originally loved Anne as *The Merry Wives of Windsor*'s FENTON does "sweet ANNE PAGE." But the treasure trove of a dowry and its subsequent disappearance from the records underscore the fact that marrying into the house of Cecil meant entering a world of political maneuvering and cutthroat gamesmanship. De Vere–headstrong though he was–was no match for a man whose grasp on the scepter of power never loosened. Many in Elizabethan England thought the country was becoming, as the agent provocateur William Herle reported, a "Regnum Cecilianum." De Vere merely lived under it.

The nuptials had been set for Burghley's estate at Theobalds in late September, but in the interim pressing matters of state had pushed the wedding date back. De Vere's cousin Thomas Howard, duke of Norfolk, had once again blundered his way onto treasonous terrain. Whereas, during the Northern Rebellion, Norfolk had managed to dodge the consequences, this time he would have nowhere to run.

On September 1, 1571, the "Ridolphi Plot" unfolded into plain view. Norfolk's secretary, bearing a bag of gold and a ciphered letter, had let his cargo slip into the hands of a suspicious tradesman, who notified the authorities of the incendiary materials he'd been given. The letter allegedly contained details of a conspiracy that involved an Italian banker named Ridolphi. Ridolphi, it was said, was financing and spearheading a campaign to launch a Spanish invasion of England from The Netherlands, while at the same time deposing Elizabeth and installing Norfolk and Mary, Queen of Scots, as the new king and queen of England. Sir Thomas Smith interrogated the go-betweens. Smith wrote to Burghley, "In my mind the matter being now so manifestly opened and the duke taken as it were επ αντοφωρω [*in the act*], it were very fit he were more safely kept."

On September 5, Norfolk was led to the Tower of London, where he would await a trial for treason. The circumstances surrounding the Ridolphi Plot have been fodder for numerous authors and historians, serving to populate their London of 1571 with various agents, double agents, heavies, dupes, and innocents. One likely scenario posits that Burghley, who had been trying for years to catch Mary and/or Norfolk red handed, had used his burgeoning spy network to frame the duo and rid England forever of the gravest threat to Elizabeth's throne that it would ever know. Another suggests that the foolish Norfolk was once again led astray by forces that he himself may not have fathomed–and England had Cecil's spies to thank that the Ridolphi Plot never made it off the drawing board.

In any case, at the very moment de Vere was preparing to wed, his prospective father-in-law had conducted a covert operation that would result in the last remaining duke in England being sacrificed at the altar of Elizabethan realpolitik. Wedding bells and funeral bells were about to be tolling simultaneously: the former for de Vere and his foster sister, the latter for his cousin as the by-product of a campaign led by his foster father. De Vere the groom was also de Vere the feudal sentimentalist and loyal cousin. His heart led him in two directions at once, yielding dark prospects for the months ahead.

De Vere married Anne Cecil at Westminster Abbey, on Sunday, December 16, 1571. According to one report, the event was a double wedding. Through a stroke of fate, de Vere also caught a glimpse of what his life might have been had his father not died in 1562. At the same place and time of his wedding, Elizabeth Hastings–one of the two sisters whom de Vere had long ago been contracted to marry–wed Edward Somerset, earl of Worcester. Irony glazed the meats on de Vere's wedding banquet plate.

As Anne Cecil recited her vows for the archbishop, the all-powerful lord Burghley looked down the bridge of his nose at this gadabout that his naïve daughter was about to call her husband.

Anne's wedding was, nevertheless, a big event for the family–as well as a prime opportunity for political maneuvering. Burghley was anxious to see that the treason case against Norfolk would not be softened into another clemency. Queen Elizabeth had rosewater blood for her peers in the upper ranks of the aristocracy, and if left to her own predispositions, Her Majesty was likely to believe that Norfolk had been duped. No outcome in Norfolk's case was certain. When better to press Burghley's case than at the wedding of his daughter, when the entire elite of the court would be gathering?

The wedding ceremony at Westminster Abbey, along with the subsequent feasting, feting, jousts, and tourneys, carried on with all the requisite pomp. Fawning verses to the groom, bride, and the bride's parents survive in

the Cecil family archives at Hatfield House, telling the part of the story that Burghley would have wanted to preserve. Would that history had also preserved the frenetic arguments that must have shuttled back and forth between the groom's party contending that cousin Norfolk was framed and the bride's party claiming that extending mercy would only encourage the pernicious agents of Rome.

And then there was the fifteen-year-old bride herself, perhaps sitting in the royal reviewing stand outside Whitehall with the newlywed countess of Worcester (Elizabeth Hastings Somerset) and the queen, as chivalrous knights jousted for the honor of the fair maidens being wed. Anne and the two Elizabeths would have waved and thanked the resplendent cavilieros as they raced across the Whitehall green, recalling the values of an earlier age that were soon to be put on trial.

The overshadowing of Anne's wedding day by family tension and court politics would foreshadow her entire married life. Throughout her dismal years with Edward, Anne would be, much like OPHELIA, forever caught between an officious and insincere father and a bullheaded and melancholic lover.

The unsuspecting Anne Cecil de Vere would soon be facing a hurricane of a force and variability that neither she nor her unpredictable husband could have anticipated. Anne's consolation for her suffering would be literary immortality: Eyes yet unborn would forever see her slandered as HERO, castigated as OPHELIA, brutalized as DESDEMONA, raped as LUCRECE–but then courted as ANNE PAGE, vindicated as HELENA, beloved as JULIET (both in *Romeo and Juliet* and *Measure for Measure*), and posthumously worshiped as HERMIONE.

The queen put it off for months, but Norfolk's trial was finally set for January 16, 1572. Gossip had been circulating concerning de Vere's past attempts to rescue his cousin. One of Burghley's agents in the Lowlands reported the rumors he was hearing locally that de Vere "hath been a most humble suitor for [Norfolk]," and that Burghley's role in Norfolk's predicament had resulted in de Vere forsaking Anne's bed. Another piece of scuttlebutt suggested that de Vere had "rail[ed]" at Norfolk for "coming at the queen's commandment"–i.e., for surrendering himself to the authorities. And another still suggested that just around the time of his wedding to Anne, de Vere had made a "certain proposal . . . to some of his friends" presumably related to Norfolk's imbroglio. Whatever substance, if any, supported these rumors, it was clear that de Vere wanted his cousin to be sheltered from the storm that had been brewing since the unrest of 1569. Simply by being single, the highest-ranking nobleman in England, and unwilling to forswear any interest in marrying Mary, Queen of Scots, Norfolk was already a marked man–especially after having been smeared by association with the blundering Northern Rebellion.

Before the trial began, de Vere loosed one final arrow into the enemy lines. It was carefully selected from his quiver–one designed to remind queen, court, and country just how crucial the feudal nobility was to the proper functioning of the Renaissance state. The Italian philosopher Baldassare Castiglione's book of court etiquette, *Il Cortegiano,* had been translated into English a decade before. In the intervening years, *The Courtier* had become akin to holy writ for English gentlemen seeking to emulate the sophistication of continental court culture. But de Vere was aiming for a larger and more important readership than simply his fellow countrymen. He sponsored *The Courtier*'s translation into Latin–thereby rendering it accessible to urbane readers throughout Europe. In publishing Bartholomew Clerke's Latin edition of Castiglione, de Vere had achieved two important objectives that would further the case for his cousin. First, it would flatter Her Majesty's intellect–always useful for winning her heart. Second, it would recount for her in the tongue of learned society the crucial role of the aristocracy in the queen's world.

The first objective was a natural consequence of the text itself. No philosophical tract more closely approximated life under Elizabeth. Castiglione's court was one presided over by a woman and in which all authority ultimately rested in women. Castiglione's duchess was, like Elizabeth, a figure to be platonically admired by the men surrounding her and yet adored and idolized like a terrestrial goddess of love. The second objective–underscoring the necessity of earls and dukes in a world that was increasingly giving them the squeeze–emerges from the lessons Castiglione teaches. The prince in Castiglione's universe is no autocratic agent. Rather, it is the courtier who leads the prince "through the rough way of virtue," who "distill[s] into his mind goodness and teach[es] him continency, stoutness of courage, justice." According to Castiglione, the courtier is effectively "more excellent than the prince."

On January 5, 1572, de Vere wrote a fluent prefatory letter in Latin to Clerke's edition of *The Courtier.* As translated into English, de Vere's preface reads:

> ...For what more difficult, more noble, or more magnificent task has anyone ever undertaken than our author Castiglione? Who has drawn for us the figure and model of a courtier, a work to which nothing can be added, in which there is no redundant word, a portrait which we shall recognize as that of a highest and most perfect type of man? And so, although nature herself has made nothing perfect in every detail, yet the manners of men exceed in dignity that with which nature has endowed them; and he who surpasses others has here surpassed himself, and has even outdone nature, which by no one has ever been surpassed.

Naturally, an author and thinker who was so highly esteemed would seep into the very fiber of de Vere's writings. And to assert that Castiglione's influence pervades Shake-speare's works is no exaggeration. (Indeed, anyone seeking to understand Shake-speare as a thinker would be well advised to first become acquainted with de Vere's three great intellectual forebears: Plato, Ovid, and Castiglione.)

In publishing the philosophical case for a thriving aristocracy, de Vere was second to none. But in actually protecting Norfolk from the Elizabethan state's Machiavellian machinery, de Vere was about as obscurantist and ineffective as Norfolk himself. Norfolk's legal defense referred back to a statute from 1352, which said that the state had to demonstrate that the alleged traitor had conducted acts, such as trying to kill the monarch, that were already on the books as being treasonous. Norfolk's crimes, in other words, did not rise to the level of treason, as the law had previously defined the term. He was right, but this defense was far ahead of its time. The proviso of 1352 would have to wait till the seventeenth century before it was revived as a credible defense in a treason trial.

Norfolk's trial, said historian Wallace MacCaffrey, was "as much a trial of the Scottish queen as of the duke of Norfolk." It was a metaphor of the modern Renaissance state versus the medieval feudal order, a show of judicial force by Burghley and his agents assiduously guarding the queen from all threats, whether perceived or real. Little wonder, then, that de Vere was one of the few ranking peers who did not participate in this kangaroo court. He knew, just as did everyone else in the drafty Westminster Hall, that the outcome was predetermined before the first witness even took the stand. Lawyers would have to wait more than a century before an accused traitor could mount his own defense with his own sworn witnesses; in an Elizabethan treason trial, the job of the accused was essentially to look valiant as the state, wary of entrusting a jury with potentially conflicting testimony, presented its one-sided case. The only practical option for a sixteenth-century peer accused of treason was to await the guilty verdict and then pull all the political strings he and his family could to convince the sovereign to overturn his death sentence.

The tribunal quickly concluded, and the condemned was led back to the Tower to await his execution. De Vere worked on his father-in-law, and perhaps the queen as well, to issue a royal pardon. Elizabeth signed a warrant for Norfolk's execution at the end of January, but then, after hearing the pleas of Norfolk's mother the countess of Surrey and his brother Henry Howard, the queen rescinded it. February came and went, with another death warrant followed by a reprieve. In late March Elizabeth fell ill, perhaps from food poisoning, and for five days she feared she might die. This naturally frightened the wits out of her Privy Council, because a new king or queen could be

called upon in only a matter of days. Parliament was convened. Although Elizabeth quickly recovered, the newfound urgency had not abated. Parliament returned to the unresolved issue of Mary, Queen of Scots, and revisited the question of the succession. Many MPs thirsted for Mary's as well as Norfolk's blood. Security, they said, could only be enjoyed if Mary was brought to the scaffold.

On April 9, the queen signed another warrant for Norfolk's execution. Two days later, at two in the morning, she presented Burghley with a note. The memo said she could not make her heart agree with her head. She had decided once again to countermand the execution.

Finally, the Protestant extremists in Parliament began to call for the head of Mary, Queen of Scots. This was one sacrifice Elizabeth was not prepared to make. But in turning down a second demand for blood, she had been backed into a corner with the first. At the very least, Her Majesty knew she must now feed a man they called "the roaring lion" to the Christians. The duke of Norfolk was told to prepare to meet his maker. On Saturday, May 31, the queen ordered that a scaffold be erected on Tower Hill. The next day, Elizabeth visited the Tower to ensure the preparations went smoothly. She did not visit with the condemned. Even though Burghley may well have engineered Norfolk's execution, Norfolk still made provisions for his three sons to be schooled at Cecil House.

On Monday at 7 A.M., as the morning sun cast long shadows across Tower Hill, the condemned was led to the execution block. Asked for his final words, Norfolk addressed the crowd assembled around the scaffold: "For men to suffer death in this place is no new thing, though since the beginning of our most gracious queen's reign I am the first, and God grant I may be the last." Norfolk's wish was not to come true. Tower Hill would be making more Elizabethan widows yet. With one decisive stroke of the executioner's ax, the head of Thomas Howard, fourth duke of Norfolk, fell to the ground. The bloody trophy was raised for the crowds to see.

While de Vere had attended parliamentary meetings in the Star Chamber on "the great matter touching the Queen of Scots," he had achieved nothing of substance regarding Norfolk's fate. De Vere had failed his cousin. All he had managed to secure out of Parliament or the queen was a seat on a minor committee in the House of Lords on "Triors of Petitions for England, Ireland, Wales, and Scotland." De Vere's conscience would nag him for years about his inability to save his cousin from the scaffold. The fate of Norfolk's three sons would remain on de Vere's mind for the rest of his life. Their ordeals would form the basis for *As You Like It*–a play about a deceased and nearly deified father, SIR ROWLAND DE BOYS, and the troubles his three surviving sons face in marriage, in inheritance, and in courtly life.

De Vere the poet and dramatist ultimately achieved the aesthetic justice that his earthly life seemed never to attain. The Lord Great Chamberlain of

England may have had noble intents. But, as the condemned Norfolk wrote to his children, de Vere was in the final analysis "too negligent of friends' causes, or he might do you more good than any kinsman you have."

Throughout her reign, Elizabeth was forever balancing and counterbalancing each action. Just as she was cracking down on any hint of Catholic uprisings–or, perhaps more accurately, not actively inhibiting Burghley and his associates from cracking down for her–she was also conducting propaganda campaigns designed in part to bolster her image as a tolerant friend of Catholicism.

This sovereign who famously refused to "make windows into men's souls" also championed the none-too-subtly Catholic tradition of the royal Order of the Garter. This elite society, given to elaborate ceremonies recalling archaic Romanist rites–celebrating the Catholic Saint George, introducing only nominal changes to an avowedly papist initiation service–was the most exclusive club in all of England. It consisted of the sovereign plus up to twenty-five "knights of the Garter" (KGs). Candidates could only be elected to fill the vacant seats of members who had died or otherwise been ousted. The members of the Order voted in new knights at their annual gathering in April. But Elizabeth had the final say, sometimes overruling the election results. In 1571, all ten members of the Order voted to admit the twenty-one-year-old de Vere. But the queen, who may have felt de Vere was too young for the honorary title, had exercised her veto. In 1572, when seven KGs voted to admit de Vere to the Order, Elizabeth opted instead to admit Viscount Hereford, who had received only four votes. Another courtier in 1572 who received a plurality of votes and was approved by the queen was de Vere's father-in-law.

Lord Burghley, Viscount Hereford, two other ranking peers, and the French duc de Montmorency, all gathered at Windsor Castle on June 17 for the Order of the Garter's induction ceremony. De Vere, pictured in a contemporary engraving of the Garter ceremony carrying the sword of state, headed up the rear of the procession, leading the queen into the Chapel of St. George and on to the Chapter House, where the exclusive club held their meetings and induction rites.

De Vere, outside the Order and outside the inner circle of Elizabeth's advisors, remained sidelined. His most pronounced concerns circa 1572–at least those that survive in the public records–are those of a disinherited noble trying to recoup his lost lands. In May, Elizabeth had awarded the twenty-two-year-old earl license to begin repossessing the estates that had been stripped away from him when his father had died. Even with a legal title in his hands, however, it still took years for any practical transfer of ownership to take place. The priory at Earls Colne, for instance, wouldn't officially revert to de Vere until May of 1588–nearly seventeen years after he had supposedly

regained ownership. De Vere would fritter away countless hours of his adult life attempting to rescue the inheritance he had lost at age twelve. Both HAMLET and the Norwegian prince FORTINBRAS express the author's anxieties over such legal quagmires. "I have some rights of memory in this kingdom," the latter declares, "Which now to claim my vantage doth invite me."

De Vere's father-in-law, on the other hand, continued to follow the path of a rising star. In July of 1572, Queen Elizabeth appointed Burghley Lord Treasurer of England–a promotion that effectively rendered him, in the words of his twentieth-century biographer Conyers Read, "an elder statesman, sure of his position, sure of his influence, beyond the reach of envy or Court intrigue–a unique figure on the political scene." Burghley had, in short, secured the role of POLONIUS. Sir Thomas Smith, recently returned from France after conducting a successful peace treaty with the rival Catholic nation, assumed Burghley's job as Secretary of State. But even in that capacity, Smith was hamstrung by the wide-ranging influence of his predecessor. The new Lord Treasurer still retained the power and influence he wielded in his previous role. As Smith would later write to Burghley, "I well perceive Her Highness is disposed to sign nothing except [if] Your Lordship be here."

In August, the queen went on progress into Warwickshire. De Vere joined the courtly train as it carted its tonnage of festoonery northwest and into the midland countryside. She and her court spent a week in and around the city of Warwick. She occupied her time partly with Leicester at his Kenilworth Castle, and partly at Warwick Castle. The progress was, by any objective measure, once again a public relations triumph. Elizabeth continued to wow her subjects with humility and grace–even as the courtiers around her also saw a woman transfixed by her own vanity. Idealized by poets and admirers as an earthly VENUS, the real-life Elizabeth was coming into her own as adroit but coquettish, demure but wildly changeable CLEOPATRA. The Warwick town recorder recited a lengthy ode to the queen, full of flattery. Elizabeth responded with words that have since become legend: "Come hither, little recorder. It was told me that you would be afraid to look upon me or to speak boldly; but you were not so afraid of me as I was of you; and I now thank you for putting me in mind of my duty."

This was a signature moment from the life of a political genius. Histories of the Elizabethan Age recite this moment as a token of "Gloriana's" magnanimity and political savvy. Yet, while Elizabeth was one of the canniest sovereigns who ever lived, closer scrutiny of her words reveals her greatest blind spot. The queen actually thanked the recorder for something he hadn't given. He had never uttered any advice. But she heard his obsequious praise as if he'd offered words of counsel. The exchange may offer an inadvertent glimpse into how Elizabeth rationalized her own self-infatuation: My subjects advise it of me.

The exchange recalls another shining moment of regal egotism. Years before, in 1564, Elizabeth had sent a messenger to meet with Mary, Queen of Scots. Upon his return, she demanded of him whether she or Mary had prettier hair, who spoke more beautifully and fluently, who danced better, who was more talented, who was taller. When the thirty-one-year-old Elizabeth learned that Mary was actually taller, she snapped, "She is too high, for I myself am neither too high nor too low." De Vere would later memorialize such moments of Elizabethan vainglory in *Antony and Cleopatra,* when QUEEN CLEOPATRA eagerly demands a description of her rival OCTAVIA.

CLEOPATRA Is she as tall as me?
MESSENGER She is not, madam.
CLEO. Didst hear her speak? Is she shrill tongu'd or low?
MESS. Madam, I heard her speak; she is low voic'd.
CLEO. ... What majesty is in her gait? Remember,
If e'er thou look'dst on majesty.

De Vere, like *Twelfth Night*'s FESTE, was becoming Her Majesty's "allowed fool." He capered and jested and was beginning to catch her eye with other spectacles too. During the same Warwick progress, de Vere also orchestrated an elaborate mock combat, once again revealing that his greatest talents in her service were those of the stage.

De Vere's youthful zeal got the better of him this time. On Sunday night, August 18, after she enlisted the country folk to watch her dance, Elizabeth repaired to a viewing stand that afforded her the best seat for the entertainment to come. De Vere ("a lusty gentleman," in the words of the chronicler) served as the general for a crew of other courtiers, who had assembled a fort representing the castle for one side in an incendiary war. Philip Sidney's good friend Fulke Greville played the general of the opposing force and fort. If de Vere ever enjoyed a HENRY V moment in his life, this was probably it: He led his two hundred soldiers into the breach several times over, each time charging with battering rams into the opposing castle. Each assault was accompanied by explosive flashes of fireballs lobbing into the sky, toward the opposing side. The pyrotechnical stage combat thrilled and amazed Elizabeth, although it was "terrible to those that have not been in like experiences, valiant to such as delighted therein, and indeed strange to them that understood it not."

The fireballs shot far and near and rolled down the hill into the Avon from the rocky eminence where Warwick Castle stood. Some flickering projectiles even flew away into the night, landing unannounced in the nearby town and suburbs. The flames that licked up from the floating embers in the river below served as footlights to the night's warfare–a battle so intense that

several of the mock combatants sustained real injuries. As a grand finale, de Vere and his men launched a large "dragon" into the air. The incendiary missile shot out flames as it traveled toward the opposing embattlement and turned Greville's fort into an inferno. However, the dragon ultimately overshot its mark, spewing a fireball onto a neighboring house, which in turn spread the fire to several other nearby houses. De Vere and Greville then ended the night leading their men to rescue the families and douse the blazes. (As HAMLET laments, "I have shot my arrow o'er the house and hurt my brother.") While the courtiers managed to rescue most residents and residences, there were also two likely fatalities. When all was over, and the *mêlée flambée* was merely a smoldering memory, four other houses in the nearby town and suburbs had suffered smaller fires, while one had a hole in its roof "as big as a man's head." The queen, de Vere, Greville, and other combatants paid out £25 12s 8d to the victims of their militaristic foolery.

August 1572 was to be an incendiary month. For even as de Vere and his fellow courtiers were occupying themselves in fireworks of Shake-spearean proportions, Paris proved to be the greatest tinderbox in all of sixteenth-century Europe. On the feast of St. Bartholomew, August 24, the French royal family (the Catholic House of Valois) celebrated a marriage to the Protestant king of Navarre. However, renegade Catholics had just two days before attempted to assassinate a prominent Protestant leader, Admiral Gaspard de Coligny. Fearing a Protestant campaign of revenge for the botched killing, the Catholic leadership–led by the sinister dowager queen Catherine de Medici–launched a preemptive slaughter of the Protestant grandees there assembled, including the Huguenot admiral Coligny. The massacre may have originally been planned simply to snuff out the opposition leaders, but it quickly spiraled out of control. Before the blood stopped flowing, four thousand Protestants lay dead in Paris, with an estimated six thousand more across France. Catholic Europe celebrated the slaughter. King Philip II of Spain would call news of the St. Bartholomew's Day Massacre "one of the greatest joys of my life."

One Englishman in Paris at the time, a man who helped to shelter whatever Protestants he could find on the city's deadliest night, would be transformed by the events of St. Bartholomew's Day. Ambassador Francis Walsingham was hardened by the atrocities he had witnessed and would devote the rest of his life to winning the war of attrition against the heartless papists at any cost. In his remaining eighteen years as Burghley's fellow spymaster, Walsingham would turn out to be one of England's most valuable assets in the coming cold war against Rome.

Protestant England was stunned by the news of this wholesale bloodshed. Refugees began appearing on England's shores on August 27, and by early September the court was abuzz with furor over the horrific events of the previous fortnight. De Vere perhaps captured the moment's drama and pathos most poignantly in a letter that he dashed off to Burghley. The two

may often have been at odds over matters at court, but they were both loyal to their Protestant queen. The St. Bartholomew's Day Massacre inspired the most admiring and heartfelt letter de Vere ever composed to his POLONIAL father-in-law:

> I would to God Your Lordship would let me understand some of the news which here doth ring dolefully in the ears of every man of the murder of the Admiral [Coligny] of France, and a number of noblemen and worthy gentlemen, and such as greatly have in their lifetime honored the Queen's Majesty, our Mistress; on whose tragedies we have a number of French *Aeneases* in this city that tell of their own overthrows with tears falling from their eyes–a piteous thing to hear, but a cruel and far more grievous thing we must deem it them to see....
>
> And sith [*since*] the world is so full of treasons and vile instruments daily to attempt new and unlooked for things, good my lord, I shall affectionately and heartily desire Your Lordship to be careful both of yourself and of Her Majesty....
>
> And blame me not, though I am bolder with Your Lordship than my custom is, for I am one that count myself a follower of yours now in all fortunes; and what shall hap to you I count it hap to myself....
>
> Thus, my lord, I humbly desire Your Lordship to pardon my youth, but to take in good part my zeal and affection toward you, as one on whom I have builded my foundation either to stand or fall. And, good my lord, think I do not this presumptuously as to advise you that am but to take advice of Your Lordship, but to admonish you, as one with whom I would spend my blood and life, so much you have made me yours.

The correspondence continued. Burghley replied to de Vere's grateful missive more than once–although these letters do not survive. The Lord Treasurer was discovering how thankless his job could be and was probably desperate for relief. As Burghley once noted, when suitors came to his office seeking lands and leases, "if the party obtain [the grant], I am not thanked; if not, the fault (though falsely) is imputed to me." No doubt recognizing the strain of Burghley's new job, de Vere wrote from London on September 22, 1572, "We do hope, after this, you having had so great a care of the Queen's Majesty's service, you will begin to have some respect of your own health, and take a pleasure to dwell where you have taken pain to build." Anne, de Vere noted, had just departed for "the country"–whether to de Vere's country estate at Wivenhoe or to Burghley's country estate at Theobalds, he does not say. De Vere added that he was planning on joining her "as fast as I can get me out of town."

Clearly, St. Bartholomew's Day was still on the young courtier's mind, because he also petitioned Burghley to pressure the queen to let him join the foreign service. The massacre had stepped up international tensions, and no one now knew what might be coming next. "If there were any service to be done abroad, I had rather serve there than at home where yet some honor were to be got," de Vere wrote. "If there be any setting forth to sea, to which service I bear most affection, I shall desire Your Lordship to give me and get me that favor and credit that I might make one. Which if there be no such intention, then I shall be most willing to be employed on the seacoasts, to be in a readiness with my countrymen against any invasion."

As a military commander or foreign agent, de Vere might have dazzled others with his wit, intelligence, and grace. But, lest one forget, this was also a man who was impulsive, irresponsible, and prone to fly off the handle. In a circle of artists, writers, and scholars, he may have been nature's lodestar. But among an officer corps or a foreign court full of backbiting politicians, some of whom could well be intimidated by his brilliance or set off by his mercurial nature, de Vere would have been a lodestone for trouble.

In requesting a "setting forth to sea," the twenty-two-year-old was probably responding in part to the romantic tales of naval adventures then circulating in London. In May, the explorer Sir Francis Drake had set out toward Panama, to plunder the Spanish way station that stored tons of treasure accumulated by the conquistadores. (Drake would return the following summer with £20,000 worth of stolen booty and a reputation as an English privateer second to none.) The earl also was seeking any means he could to explore Italy–that cornucopia of art and culture that he had read and studied so much about.

However, none of these options would be coming his way anytime soon. De Vere was having a hard enough time keeping a stable and marginally sane household. By the end of October 1572, the earl and his countess had taken refuge at his Essex estate of Wivenhoe. This estate, recently returned to de Vere's portfolio, had been in the family since at least the middle of the fifteenth century. Commanding an eminence on the river Colne's estuary as it flows into the North Sea, Wivenhoe Hall was, according to one account, a large and sumptuous house "having a noble gatehouse with towers of great height that served as a seamark."

According to charges laid out in a brief memorandum written by Burghley, de Vere was living during his Wivenhoe days like a wild man on a spending spree. Hundreds of pounds were flowing out of de Vere's accounts. One of the earl's riotous servants, Rowland Yorke, was reportedly barring Anne from her husband's chamber, presumably at de Vere's command. During much of the 1570s, Yorke would be to de Vere what Leicester was to Queen Elizabeth–a man given practical carte blanche by the commanding authority figure to exercise his will, his whim, and his underhanded tricks.

Other servants were practically running a bordello. Burghley reports that

two women were "gotten with child" with "men entertaining them in [the] chamber." Anne, Burghley notes, did not dare to object to this outrageous behavior because the servants were also on good terms with the master of the household. PRINCE HAL's pranks and transgressions with his low and lewd companions clearly had some basis in de Vere's reality. Only, the real-life inspiration was worse. Shake-speare's account has been sanitized for the ages.

Or has it? On the other hand, the earl steadfastly denied what would have been some truly reckless and destructive behavior. In a letter to Burghley on All Saints' Eve of 1572 (October 31, now known as Halloween), de Vere wrote

> Sith I have been so little beholding to sinister reports, I hope now, with Your Lordship's indifferent judgment, to be more plausible unto you than heretofore, through my careful deeds, to please you, which hardly, either through my youth, or rather misfortune, hitherto I have done.

Translation: Whatever you suspect, I didn't do it. De Vere noted that what he termed "backfriends" were spreading malicious rumors to undermine Burghley's opinion of the earl. With a manipulative spymaster on one side and a notorious delinquent on the other, it's impossible to know for certain who was distorting their side of the story more. The earl continues:

> Though perhaps by reason of my youth, your graver and severer years will not judge the same. Thus therefore hoping the best in Your Lordship, and fearing the worst in myself, I take my leave, lest my letters may become loathsome and tedious unto you, to whom I wish to be most grateful.

CHAPTER 4

FOR MAKING A MAN

[1573–1575]

In 1573, Edward de Vere rented two flats in an Elizabethan apartment complex near Cecil House, the Savoy, for two or more servants then working with him. Two translators the earl was then patronizing, Thomas Twyne and Thomas Bedingfield, make likely candidates for recipients of the earl's free lodging.

Twyne was a medical practitioner (not yet MD) whose poetry, as one twentieth-century critic put it, "ring[s] out with an eloquence that is as anachronistic as it is noble." Newly married at the time, the thirty-year-old Twyne was then working on two translations from Latin into English: one, *A Breviary of Britain,* was a tract about the history and geography of England; the other was the last three books of *The Aeneid.* A dedicatory letter Twyne wrote to de Vere, published in *A Breviary of Britain,* records the earl's continued fascination with cosmography:

> Hereon, when Your Honor shall be at leisure to look, bestowing such regard as you are accustomed to do on books of geography, histories, and other good learning, wherein I am privy Your Honor taketh singular delight, I doubt not but you shall have cause to judge your time very well applied.

Twyne's 1573 edition of *The Aeneid*–which he dedicated to Anne Cecil de Vere's uncle, Sir Nicholas Bacon–contains introductory matter that is equally revelatory. As a preface to the conclusion of Virgil's epic, Twyne attached a brief biographical sketch of *The Aeneid*'s author. Virgil, Twyne noted, once anonymously posted a few of his verses in a public forum in Rome; Augustus

Caesar was so enamored of the poetry that he demanded to know who wrote it. But before Virgil could step forward, a local hack named Batillus claimed *he* was the author. Batillus was rewarded generously for his supposed poetical efforts. Incensed, Virgil then posted a follow-up poem that read, in part:

> These verses I did make, thereof another took the praise.
> So you not for yourselves, poor birds, your nests do build in trees,
> So you not for yourselves, ye sheep, do bear your tender fleece,
> So you not for yourselves, your honey gather, little bees.

The honeybee, Virgil says, gathers its nectar for others to enjoy. A poem de Vere wrote in 1573 snatches this analogy–and then adds to it a haunting verse about those unrecognized authors who "take the pain to pen the book." Could he have known how prophetic his words would be?

The earl of Oxenford
To the Reader

The laboring man that tills the fertile soil
And reaps the harvest fruit, hath not indeed
The gain, but pain, and if for all his toil
He gets the straw, the lord will have the seed. . . .

The mason poor that builds the lordly halls
Dwells not in them, they are for high degree.
His cottage is compact in paper walls
And not with brick or stone, as others be.

The idle drone that labors not at all
Sucks by the sweet of honey from the bee
Who worketh most, to their share least doth fall,
With due desert, reward will never be.

The swiftest hare, unto the mastiff slow
Ofttimes doth fall, to him as for a prey.
The greyhound thereby, both miss his game we know,
For which he made such speedy haste away.

So he that takes the pain to pen the book
Reaps not the gift of golden goodly muse
But those gain that, who on the work shall look
And from the sour, the sweet by skill doth choose.

For he that beats the bush, the bird not gets,
But who sits still–and holdeth fast the nets.

De Vere had transformed Virgil's anxiety of anonymity into a manifesto, incorporating medieval notions of caste and the division of labor in the human and natural world. Dubious as the politics may be to modern eyes, de Vere's introductory stanzas were nevertheless expressions of a twenty-three-year-old aristocrat whose eyes were only beginning to open to his greater calling as a poet-philosopher to all humankind–not merely to his courtly peers. KING LEAR, raving on the heath, stripped of all regal trappings and exiled from his "lordly halls . . . for high degree," was still a long way off.

"The earl of Oxenford's" poem appeared in *Cardanus's Comfort,* translated into English by Thomas Bedingfield. Bedingfield dedicated the 1573 book to de Vere, and according to the book's title page, Bedingfield published the tome at de Vere's command. The Latin original for *Cardanus's Comfort (De Consolatione)* contains philosophical consolations for the melancholic soul written by the Italian philosopher, physician, and mathematician Gerolamo Cardano.

De Vere was probably attracted to Cardano for both his Renaissance mind and his outlandish character. Dubbed by his twentieth-century biographer Oystein Ore "the gambling scholar," Cardano applied his expertise in statistics to win at games of dice and cards. He had infamously cataloged the many ways to cheat at games of chance–such as marking cards and loading dice. He would, however, tolerate no flimflam when he was at the table. Cardano once told of a con artist he'd gambled with: "When I discovered that the cards were marked, I drew my dagger and wounded him in the face."

HAMLET certainly knew his Cardano. The Danish prince's "To be or not to be" soliloquy–with its melding of the themes of death, sleep, and travel to strange places–draws no small inspiration from the consolations of the "gambling scholar." Consider this excerpt from *Cardanus's Comfort:*

> What should we account of death to be resembled to anything better than sleep. . . . But if thou compare death to long travel . . . there is nothing that doth better or more truly prophecy the end of life than when a man dreameth that he doth travel and wander into far countries.

De Vere commissioned *Cardanus's Comfort* along with the Latin translation of *The Courtier* probably in the thick of the duke of Norfolk fiasco, when the philosophical consolations of great Renaissance minds would have been just the kind of balm that the earl needed.

And then, after Norfolk's execution, de Vere sat on the stack of papers containing *Cardanus's Comfort.* For months and months, de Vere did nothing.

As Castiglione's *The Courtier* notes, a nobleman who is also a writer must "take care to keep them [*his literary works*] under cover . . . and let him show them only to a friend who can be trusted."

Such commandments of extreme secrecy may strike the modern reader as bizarre, but a nobleman publicizing his writings in the Elizabethan Age was considered neither worthy nor prestigious. Castiglione was hardly the only one who urged all self-respecting courtiers to hide their prose and poetry from the peering gaze of the public eye. As the poet Michael Drayton would observe one generation later, contemporary English literature had gotten to such a state that "verses are wholly deduced [*diverted*] to chambers; and nothing [is] esteemed in this lunatic age but what is kept in cabinets and must only pass by transcription."

Ultimately, however, de Vere decided to publish Bedingfield's manuscript–putting both his own and Bedingfield's names on the title page. Yes, de Vere was disregarding the sacred Castiglione's advice to keep one's writings "under cover." But as de Vere writes in his preface to *Cardanus's Comfort:*

> Whereby as you [*Bedingfield*] have been profited in the translating, so many may reap knowledge by the reading of the same, that shall comfort the afflicted, confirm the doubtful, encourage the coward, and lift up the base-minded man to achieve to any true sum or grade of virtue, whereto ought only the noble thoughts of men to be inclined.
>
> And because next to the more sacred letters of divinity, nothing doth persuade the same more than philosophy, of which your book is plentifully stored, I thought myself to commit an unpardonable error to have murdered the same in the waste bottoms of my chests. And better I thought it were to displease one than to displease many.

Between the ideals de Vere set forth in the Latin translation of Castiglione (1572) and the English translation of Cardano (1573), the earl had laid out his recipe for literary mischief. It was a recipe that he would follow for the rest of his life: Treat the court as if it were a theater and the theater as if it were a court; write, but only do so covertly; publish, but only do so in such a way that some Batillus might divert the public's eye. In no mean fashion, Castiglione's *Courtier* and *Cardanus's Comfort* represent Shake-speare's true birthplace, the site of the Bard's unheralded entrance onto the public stage.

Sometime in 1573 or '74, de Vere had graciously signed over a family estate called Battails Hall in Essex to the musician William Byrd. Byrd was at the time the organist at the Chapel Royal, and the earl seems to have been enamored of

Byrd's talents. As a composer, Byrd is considered today to be perhaps the finest of the entire Elizabethan Age. De Vere's bequest would transfer the manor's ownership to Byrd once the current elderly occupants had passed away. De Vere would joke about his gift in *All's Well That Ends Well,* in which the play's CLOWN jests, "I know a man that . . . sold a goodly manor for a song."

Yet, nothing was ever so simple in the earl of Oxford's household, especially when that household's servants appear to have been retained based on their recklessness and wild abandon. One retainer, a painter named William Lewyn, ultimately defrauded Byrd from Battails Hall via some shady legal trickery. (Byrd evidently took the loss with equanimity, later writing a piece of music titled "The Earl of Oxford's March" in honor of his sometimes heedless patron.) Another of de Vere's servants in 1573 hung for a murder he'd committed, an adulterous crime of passion that titillated London society.

Three more earl of Oxford servants were highwaymen. In May of 1573, Danny Wilkins, John Hannam, and "Deny the Frenchman" accosted two of Lord Burghley's servants in the Kent countryside east of London, on the road between Gravesend and Rochester. According to Burghley's retainers' account of the assault, de Vere's three men had lain in a ditch near the road. When the Lord Treasurer's men appeared, the "three calivers [*light muskets*] charged with bullets discharged at [them]." One of Burghley's men was so startled that his saddle's girth snapped and both he and the saddle fell to the ground. The three musketeers then hopped on their horses and raced back toward London. After the immediate danger had passed, Burghley's men turned around toward Gravesend and took up lodging in the town. In a letter they wrote to their master regarding this "determined mischief," they sought his protection. Their plea preserves Burghley's version of the story.

De Vere's version of the story appeared on the public stage. Much of the first two acts of Shake-speare's *King Henry IV, Part 1* concern an assault that FALSTAFF and three associates carry out in the Kent countryside. As *1 Henry IV* tells it, the crime takes place at Gad's Hill–a landmark on the road between Gravesend and Rochester. FALSTAFF et al. await the TRAVELERS and spring upon them. The TRAVELERS quickly flee the scene. As a mocking self-portrait of the author's swollen ego, FALSTAFF whines and wheezes through the entire escapade. The appearance of this episode in the Shake-spearean history of King Henry IV suggests an apology of sorts to Elizabeth and Burghley for the author's callow rebelliousness as a youth.

As the unhorsed FALSTAFF says,

> I'll starve ere I rob a foot further. And [if] 'twere not as good a deed as drink to turn true man and to leave these rogues, I am the veriest varlet that ever chewed with a tooth. . . . A plague upon it when thieves cannot be true to one another!

At this moment when de Vere's men were playing BARDOLPH, PETO, and POINS to his FALSTAFF, the historical records also reveal Queen Elizabeth drawing the earl of Oxford closest to her bosom. Perhaps something about de Vere as outlaw poet and reckless gadabout intrigued Her Majesty.

On May 11, 1573, a young courtier named Gilbert Talbot wrote to his father a gossipy correspondence stating:

> My lord of Oxford is lately grown into great credit, for the Queen's Majesty delighteth more in his personage and his dancing and valiantness than any other. I think [the earl of] Sussex doth back him all he can. If it were not for his fickle head he would pass any of them shortly. My lady Burghley, unwisely, has declared herself, as it were, jealous, which is come to the queen's ear, whereat she has been not a little offended with her. But now she is reconciled again. At all these love matters my Lord Treasurer [Lord Burghley] winketh and will not meddle in any way.

Burghley was certainly winking at more than one "love matter" at the time. As of 1573, Burghley still had not delivered on Anne's alleged £15,000 dowry.

During the same month as de Vere's men's assault on the road between Gravesend and Rochester, Burghley had hit upon a way to raise some quick and dirty cash. The Lord Treasurer was at the time negotiating with the Spanish to facilitate a more friendly and open trade policy. To ensure that Spain got the best deal possible, Spanish agents were trying, in essence, to set up a bribe. The Spaniards had learned about Burghley's outstanding dowry debt.

On May 1, 1573, the Spanish agent Antonio de Gueras wrote to the Spanish governor of the Lowlands, the duke of Alva, about a "gratuity" for Burghley that the two had worked out. Such a backdoor payment would leave the Lord Treasurer's hands clean but would also eliminate a major headache in the form of a son-in-law with his hand extended. De Gueras explained to Burghley that payment couldn't be arranged unless Burghley committed to the deal. Burghley said he personally couldn't commit to the deal, explaining that "if his colleagues [at court] knew that he was getting a gratuity from His Majesty [the king of Spain], it would be his undoing and in no way would he accept it."

De Gueras pressed on, treading lightly:

> I said to [Burghley] I thought that if there was no stipend, that to help with the marriage of madam his daughter, who married the earl of Oxford, that perhaps milady his wife [Lady Burghley] would not refuse the demonstration of His Majesty's goodwill. And to this [Burghley] did not reply–but as admitting it, he laughed to himself. And at that same time, madam his wife entered and greeted me, asking me how I was and if

> there were anything in which she could please me–from which I could consider that she was hoping for this gift, because other times she had not granted me such favors.

De Gueras's letter ends with a request that the king of Spain send 40,000 escudos (£15,000), "which is what [Burghley] offered to give in dowry to his daughter." De Gueras suggested that the payoff come by way of a strong ship to the Spanish garrison at the Flanders coastal town of Dunkirk. All that remained was for the "gratuity" to be picked up.

Burghley certainly wasn't about to make the journey. De Gueras suggested that one of the family's retainers bring the two chests of gold back to Lady Burghley, presumably for her to dispense to the groom. But, from Lord Burghley's perspective, there was no motive for anyone in his household to do anything more. Sending a trusted messenger across the Channel to pick up the money would have been reckless in the extreme. Burghley's rivals could well have found out about the Spanish bribe, which, as the Lord Treasurer himself observed, would have guaranteed his own ruin. And sending someone less than trustworthy to retrieve the treasure chests from the Lowlands meant giving that same someone a free pass to a lifetime's income, never to be seen or heard from again.

The most logical person for the job was de Vere. It was his money, after all. Thus, sometime in May of 1573, Burghley may have told his son-in-law about the arrangements he had made with de Gueras: You can have your £15,000, but there's a small hitch–you have to travel overseas and meet with Spanish agents to pick it up. A Spanish dowry fiasco may well explain the other strange events of that month. Did de Vere order his men to strike out at Burghley's retainers on the road between Gravesend and Rochester in retaliation? And was Lady Burghley's "jealousy"–as recorded in Gilbert Talbot's letter–actually not jealousy at all? At the time de Vere was making friendly with the queen, Lady Burghley's husband was allegedly arranging for a shipment of Spanish payola behind the queen's back. One slip of the tongue on de Vere's part, and the Cecil family could have been ruined.

On the other hand, why Burghley was "wink[ing] and would not meddle in any way" in his son-in-law's alleged dalliances with Elizabeth remains a more intriguing question. In the way that he "laughed to himself" about the payola offer, the Lord Treasurer's knowing winks recall nothing so much as the leering love broker PANDARUS in *Troilus and Cressida*. In Shake-speare's satire, PANDARUS unabashedly sets up an amorous rendezvous between the title characters, who represent de Vere and the queen.

At this moment of a potentially suborned dowry, a chiding mother-in-law, and a winking father-in-law, de Vere was also jealously guarding his fickle queen. Elizabeth never entertained just one favorite; she was forever playing her men off against one another. At the same time she was drawing

de Vere close, Elizabeth was flirting with her Puritan captain of the bodyguard, Christopher Hatton. He was ten years older than de Vere, tall, handsome, and a good dancer–always a plus with the queen. Elizabeth nicknamed Hatton her "Lids," as in eyelids. She would also later dub him "Mutton" or "Sheep."

Hatton and de Vere were now rivals for the greatest prize in the Elizabethan court: Her Majesty's affections. The previous year, the court poet Sir Edward Dyer had written Hatton a letter of advice in winning the queen's heart. Dyer's letter, of which only a transcription survives today, speaks of a hated rival of Hatton's designated as "my lord of Ctm." There was no one in Elizabeth's court by that name or abbreviation. But scholars suspect this is a scrivener's misreading of "my lord Chamberlain" or "my lord of Oxon." About this mysterious "lord of Ctm," Dyer advises Hatton to

> [R]emember that you use no words of disgrace or reproach towards him to any; that he, being the less provoked, may sleep, thinking all safe, while you do awake and attend your advantages.
>
> Otherwise you shall, as it were, warden him and keep him in order; and he will make the queen think that he beareth all for her sake, which will be as a merit in her sight.

The game of one-upmanship was on.

Hatton fell sick in the summer of 1573 and traveled to the spa in Antwerp to seek a cure. During his absence from court, he wrote a series of gushing letters to the queen. Hatton had been gone from court only two days when he wrote, "I will wash away the faults of these letters with the drops for your poor Lids and so enclose them. Would God I were with you but for one hour. My wits are overwrought with thoughts. I find myself amazed." Ten days later, Hatton was still amazed: "This is the twelfth day since I saw the brightness of that Sun that giveth light unto my sense and soul. I wax an amazed creature. . . . Forget not your Lids that are so often bathed with tears for your sake." When de Vere got wind of these florid dispatches, it must have turned his stomach.

Lids's lachrymose musings would soon be spoofed in a collection of poetry that de Vere has long been suspected of writing, or at least contributing to. *A Hundred Sundry Flowers* (1573) is an anthology that offers up a century of poems written by authors using numerous Latinized noms de plume–called "posies." One such pseudonym is Fortunatus Infoelix, which, the court observer Gabriel Harvey claimed, is "lately the posy of Sir Christopher Hatton." *Flowers* also contains a short story, called "The Adventures of Master F.I." Both of these elements of *Flowers* together recite an embarrassing tale of an indelicate love affair between a suitor and his courtly maid. The whole package would have been a humiliating blow to "Lids," who most court-wise readers probably thought had written this unseemly and scandalous narrative.

Hatton was now the subject of an elaborate courtly prank. *Flowers* had a brief press run; it was promptly snatched up by the authorities.

In January of 1574, de Vere was making himself familiar with the Spanish agent who had arranged for Burghley's payoff. One of Burghley's servants, doubtless unaware of the "gratuity," wrote to his boss about de Vere's negotiations with de Gueras. Burghley's agent, Ralph Lane, said he thought de Vere spoke with de Gueras too much and too freely. In Lane's words, "A western Spanish storm may, with some unhappy mate at helm, steer [de Vere's] noble bark so much to the northward [toward Mary, Queen of Scots] that unawares he may wreck, as some of his noblest kind hath done, the more pity of their fault."

Yet, de Vere's most likely motive was simply to collect the £15,000 that was rightly owed him. De Vere wanted to hire a ship and set sail across the Channel, and neither the queen nor Burghley would let him. As an English earl at a time of heightened religious tensions in the Lowlands, he would have needed protection in wandering into a battle zone where Catholic agents could easily kidnap or kill him. Elizabeth, who did not know why de Vere was itching to cross the Channel and make his way to Flanders, would not let him go.

By March, when de Vere was lodging with the court at the archbishop of Canterbury's residence at Lambeth, the earl presented a proposal to the queen that she in turn refused out of hand. Although no record survives of the matter of de Vere's "suit," it is likely that de Vere was continuing to plea to go to Flanders.

In the words of the chronicler John Nichols:

> The young earl of Oxford, of that ancient and *Very* family of the *Veres,* had a cause or suit, that now came before the queen; which she did not answer so favorably as expected, checking him, it seems, for his unthriftiness. And hereupon his behavior before her gave her some offense. [Italics in original]

De Vere was frustrated with the queen's hardheaded ways. Soon enough, he would take matters into his own hands.

In early July of 1574, de Vere and a courtly colleague–Lord Edward Seymour–hired a ship and crossed the Channel anyway. On July 6, Spanish agents in the Low Countries reported that Elizabeth's court was "completely shaken and full of apprehension after the earl of Oxford . . . has, with my lord Edward brother of the earl of Hertford, passed incognito across the sea to Flanders." Two days later, the French ambassador to London, La Mothe Fénelon, reported to his superiors that the Elizabethan court was "rather troubled" over the perceived defection. The Catholic rebels in exile in the Lowlands took de Vere's actions as a sign for rejoicing. The defeated earl of Westmoreland, of Northern Rebellion fame, made plans to meet de Vere in Bruges. Their paths never crossed.

Sir Thomas Smith wrote to Burghley on July 13 that

> of my lord of Oxford . . . it is commonly said that he arrived in Calais and was there very honorably received and entertained–and from thence he went to Flanders. As far as I can yet perceive, Her Majesty's grief for him, or towards him, is somewhat mitigated.

According to rumors in Scotland, de Vere had made it as far as the city of Brussels via Bruges. (Dunkirk, where de Gueras had ordered the £15,000 to be shipped, was on the road between Calais and Bruges.)

While Smith did not know de Vere's true motives in running away to Flanders, Burghley understood the whole story and stood up for his son-in-law. As Burghley wrote on July 15 to one of de Vere's mentors–the Lord Chamberlain, earl of Sussex, "Howsoever [de Vere] might be, for his own private matters of thrift inconsiderate, I dare avow him to be resolute in dutifulness to the queen and his country."

The queen's rage at de Vere's actions may have been "somewhat mitigated," but she still displayed the Tudor fury that her subjects had come to fear. She dispatched Thomas Bedingfield–the courtier who had translated *Cardanus's Comfort* for de Vere–to retrieve these wayward nobles. In short order Bedingfield returned to England with his quarry. Nothing suggests de Vere had picked up any of his Spanish "gratuity"–if indeed this was the purpose of his mission.

By July 27, de Vere had returned to Dover. As the courtier Sir Walter Mildmay wrote on that day, "I trust his little journey will make him love home the better hereafter. It were a great pity he should not go straight, there be so many good things in him to serve his God and Prince." Once again, de Vere's "fickle head" was on the minds of court observers.

On August 3, the French ambassador, Fénelon, wrote back to Paris that the annual summer Progress continued on its way toward Bristol, with the queen "quite happy that the earl of Oxford has returned at her command, moreover that my lord Edward be staying." On the same day, Burghley wrote a typically prolix letter to the spymaster Sir Francis Walsingham, explaining and apologizing for de Vere's actions. In returning to court, Burghley said that de Vere was

> a mixture of contrary affections, although both reasonable and commendable. The one, fearful and doubtful in what sort he shall recover Her Majesty's favor because of his offense in departure as he did without

> license; the other, glad and resolute to look for a speedy good end because he had in his abode so notoriously rejected the attempts of Her Majesty's evil subjects and in his return set apart all his own particular desires of foreign travel and come to present himself before Her Majesty, of whose goodness towards him he saith he cannot count.

Burghley also awkwardly requested that Walsingham greet "Lids" on behalf of his son-in-law. "Remember Master Hatton to continue my lord's friend, as he hath manifestly been and as my lord confesseth to me that he hopeth assuredly so to prove him," Burghley concluded.

Elizabeth, at least outwardly, forgave her wayward earl. However, in the words of an unsigned letter from August 7, "The desire of travel is not yet quenched in [de Vere], though he dare not make any motion unto Her Majesty that he may with her favor accomplish the said desire. By no means he can be drawn to follow the court, and yet there are many cunning devices used in that behalf for his stay."

By now, de Vere had probably had his fill of the Cecil family. The twenty-four-year-old earl disappeared from the court records for the rest of the summer Progress of 1574. However, on September 19–20, de Vere did show his face at a garden party being given at his father-in-law's estate, Theobalds. His wife, Anne, was there, too, and the couple doubtless erected the facade of a normal marital relationship. Also on the guest list was an elder who could tell plenty of cautionary tales for any Catholic-leaning nobles caring to bend their ear her way. Margaret, countess of Lennox, was mother to Lord Darnley, the murdered second husband of Mary, Queen of Scots. As a rumored recent collaborator with Mary's supporters in the Lowlands, de Vere must have seemed to Lady Lennox to be a child desperately in need of a few cautionary words to the wise.

Yet, a few minutes' scolding would have been a small price to pay. For Lady Lennox was also de Vere's likely entrée to a vault of jewels beyond valuation. Her family archives held a manuscript about the kings of Scotland that is the main source for Shake-speare's *Macbeth*. It was from this manuscript–not printed until the nineteenth century–that the author would draw his portrait of the scolding and brutal LADY MACBETH. This manuscript would provide the inspiration for the portrayal of LADY MACBETH's husband as a fatalist and a brooding and hesitant murderer. In all, Lady Lennox's family manuscript sketches out dozens of details, conversations, and vignettes–from MACBETH's hallucinations to his paralysis at the sight of a forest marching forward–that can be found nowhere else but in Shake-speare's Scottish tragedy. A dozen years later, the tale of an ancient Scottish regicide would hold topical currency in de Vere's mind; de Vere himself would be party to the execution of a Scots monarch. Lady Lennox's manuscript would someday inform his literary muse.

Burghley's Theobalds garden party provided an important point of connection for de Vere's bride too. Caught once again like OPHELIA between a duplicitous father and a headstrong lover, Anne soon tried to arrange a reconciliation with her husband. Sometime in the autumn she wrote to the officer in charge of the queen's household, the Lord Chamberlain, earl of Sussex. In this undated letter, Anne asked if he could reserve another room at Hampton Court, where the queen would be lodging beginning in October. The beset countess arranged these accommodations hoping that she could persuade her husband to resume sleeping with her. "The more commodious my lodging is, the willinger I hope my lord my husband will be to come thither, thereby the oftener to attend Her Majesty," Anne wrote.

The latter half of 1574 must have been exhausting for the countess. Anne had scarcely even shared a bed with her husband, who remained locked in a power struggle with her officious father. The queen's private doctor, Richard Master, would later recall that de Vere had vociferously protested that if Anne ever became pregnant, it was not by him. If de Vere had in fact never slept with his wife since their wedding day, he may have had annulment on his mind. Mary, Queen of Scots, once wrote in a letter to Queen Elizabeth that she'd heard that de Vere had not had sex with his wife "for fear of losing the favor which he hoped to receive by becoming your lover."

By December, Anne had fallen sick, and it looked briefly as if her malady might be fatal. Unable to digest anything, Anne was also unable to ingest any medicines that her doctors concocted for her. Yet, Sir Thomas Smith was still close to de Vere and to the Cecil family. Like *Romeo and Juliet*'s FRIAR LAURENCE, Smith had a knack for brewing up the right kind of potions at the right moments. As a friendly gesture to a young woman in need, Smith sent Anne a distillation (a "chemical water," as it was then called), which, said Smith's biographer John Strype, "if she took no other sustenance in three days, . . . would nourish her sufficiently. And within twenty-four hours, [Smith] doubted not but [Burghley] would see great effects and peradventure some appetite to meat to begin to come to her within that space; adding that there was never any one yet but felt good by it."

Anne eventually recovered, and she had a polymath pharmacist to thank. Smith was one of a handful of physicians in the 1570s who practiced what was called Paracelsian medicine–a new, empirical approach to healing using chemical distillations and essences. Founded on the teachings of the early sixteenth-century German physician Paracelsus, it was the precursor to modern pharmaceutical science. The earl and countess's doctor, George Baker, dedicated two Paracelsian books to the couple–the first, in 1574, to de Vere; the second, two years later, to Anne. In 1580, the surgeon John Hester would dedicate another classic tract in the field of Paracelsian medicine to de Vere.

In the sixteenth century, Paracelsians were regarded as quacks and could scarcely find a fair audience among the learned in England, for whom

the second-century Galenic theory of medicine was the presumptive gold standard–understanding the body as a balance of "humors" and recognizing only herbal tonics as worthy of the medical profession.

De Vere, patron of the alternative medicine of his day, would insert the Paracelsian controversy into *All's Well That Ends Well.* The Anne Cecil–inspired heroine, HELENA, is in fact Shake-speare's mouthpiece for the teachings of Paracelsus. When the Galenic doctors at the court of the KING OF FRANCE cannot heal the ailing monarch, HELENA presents the KING with a strange and wondrous Paracelsian distillation. He is cured instantly, much to everyone's shock.

All's Well's courtiers are dubious of Paracelsian cures, and the COUNTESS OF ROUSILLION voices the general skepticism of the day about these empirically derived potions:

> I say we must not
> So stain our judgment or corrupt our hope
> To prostitute our past-cure malady
> To empirics....

Yet, by healing a patient whose ailment was impervious to Galenic medicine, HELENA effectively rebukes the Galenists for their backward-thinking ways.

Paracelsian chemical distillations–also called "simples"–appear in other Shake-speare plays too. For instance, both ROMEO and LAERTES use "simples" as poisons that they purchase from Paracelsian street vendors. And in a subtle joke on the hypocrisy of the sixteenth-century medical orthodoxy, CAIUS, the old Galenist of *Merry Wives of Windsor,* keeps some "simples" in his closet that he will not "for all the world" leave behind.

By New Year's Day of 1575, de Vere had returned to court and had disposable income at the ready. His New Year's gift to Her Majesty was one of the two most lavish presents given that year. ("Lids" gave the other.) De Vere's token to the queen was, according to her account books, "[a] very fair jewel of gold, containing a woman holding a ship of sparks of diamonds upon her knee, the same fully garnished with sparks of diamonds, four fair rubies, one large diamond, and sundry diamonds with three pearls pendant–and three small chains of gold set with sparks of diamonds."

Something certainly persuaded Elizabeth to give de Vere leave to cross the English Channel. Practicality undoubtedly played a role in dispatching de Vere: The new king of France, Henri III, had scheduled his coronation for February 15, 1575, and his marriage for two days later. Elizabeth, whom

Henri had once courted, would have needed an English delegate to attend the coronation–someone with enough clout in Catholic circles not to offend the French Catholic court. Furthermore, Venice had not yet sent an ambassador to England. The Italian city on the lagoon was still skittish about opening diplomatic relations with a Protestant realm, lest it offend the more fervent Catholic nations of Spain or the Papal States. At the time she sent de Vere overseas, Elizabeth required the attentions of a high-ranking courtier fluent in French and Italian for important diplomatic missions in Paris and Venice. Could it simply be coincidence that the queen gave de Vere license to travel to these two key cities at the same time she needed these tasks completed?

The French ambassador, La Mothe Fénelon, reported back to Paris on January 24 of a rumor he'd once heard that de Vere would be leading a military regiment across the Channel–perhaps to intervene in the Lowlands. However, Fénelon added, there had been a change in plans. Now de Vere was to spend a month in Paris. Fénelon noted that he thought de Vere was a devotee of both the French king and the Scots queen. He advised King Henri to treat de Vere as "the premier of the country's nobility" and that such courtesy would be recognized in England. Fénelon cryptically added that he'd learned that Don John of Austria–the powerful Spanish general–might have a job for the English earl to perform.

De Vere made out an indenture on January 30, ensuring that the bulk of the estates still in his possession would pass to his sister Mary and her heirs in the event of his untimely death overseas. De Vere and Anne were still childless, so he provided only for the "life interest of his countess." The indenture also included a schedule of the debts that de Vere had inherited from his spendthrift father and had run up himself–totaling a staggering £9,096, some $2.5 million in today's money.

By February 7, de Vere had left the country. If de Vere's retinue resembled the typical nobleman's traveling household, he would have had a groom who cared for the horses, and a couple of gentlemen to handle everything from secretarial duties to security. (Bandits were a constant danger on the open road, and keeping a few capable swordsmen at one's side was always advisable.) One servant handled the money and another performed such housekeeping duties as making beds and tending fires. The only known member of the group that departed with the earl from London was a retainer named Nathaniel Baxter. Two other servants (Ralph Hopton and William Lewyn, the painter who defrauded William Byrd out of Battails Hall) are known to have joined the travelers later in the trip.

De Vere and his entourage set sail across the brisk and choppy seas of the English Channel in late winter. Dover to Calais was the standard route to Paris in those days, and unless the tides or winds forced the ship to the more distant port of Boulogne, the newly constructed citadel of Calais would have

greeted these Englishmen as their boat pulled into the harbor. Once the party had landed, a five- or six-day journey to the French capital city awaited. De Vere's harbinger would have ridden ahead as the party approached each town and sounded the earl's trumpet call ("tucket") to ensure that all gates were opened and all privileges of passage secured.

Their first stop, the French royal court at the Louvre, would serve to remind de Vere just how staid and comfortingly normal the Elizabethan court actually was. Henri III was a flamboyant monarch, equal parts *reine* and *roi*. During his nearly fifteen years on the throne, the king of France would often be referred to as "*elle*" and would regularly wear gowns, makeup, earrings, and perfume. Frequently seen with "Sa Majesté" were his *mignons*, young male favorites whom the king dressed as ladies of the night. Henri was also very much under the sway of his domineering mother, Catherine de Medici. Mother and son, along with Henri's late brother Charles, still had blood on their hands from the Protestant slaughter they had ordered on St. Bartholomew's Day in 1572–the same genocide to which de Vere had reacted so viscerally in the letter quoted in the previous chapter.

The coronation, at Rheims Cathedral ninety miles east of Paris, was an extravagant farce. Henri's younger brother, the duke of Alençon, tried to kidnap Henri en route and obtain the crown himself. The plot fizzled. (De Vere would have heard of Alençon already; the French duke and his mother had since 1572 been pressing Queen Elizabeth to consider Alençon for her husband.) Once at the cathedral, Henri famously had a conniption over his bride's hair. The wedding was only able to proceed when she agreed to let the groom do her hair himself.

During the celebrations surrounding the coronation and wedding, de Vere must have met Henri of Navarre (later King Henri IV), who was as dashing a man as Catherine de Medici's clan was craven. Henri of Navarre was, however, caught in a lifelong struggle with the infamous Florentine dynasty: Catherine de Medici was his mother-in-law. De Vere probably also met the fifty-one-year-old poet Pierre de Ronsard–still considered one of the finest sonneteers in any language–and Jacques Amyot, Henri III's former tutor. Amyot had translated Plutarch's *Lives of the Noble Grecians and Romans* into French (one of the books de Vere had bought during his convalescence in Windsor in 1570) and had served as French ambassador to Venice. De Vere and the sixty-two-year-old scholar would have shared much intellectual common ground, and Amyot would have regaled the traveling Englishman with suggestions of things to do and places to visit once in Venice.

King Henri himself had also recently returned from Venice. The city on the lagoon had so impressed Henri that he had hired a troupe of Venetian actors to perform at the celebrations surrounding his coronation and marriage. These actors played a new and sophisticated form of Italian comedy that is today called "commedia dell'arte." The celebrations at Rheims would be the first of

numerous occasions at which de Vere could have acquainted himself with this fantastical new theatrical and literary medium.

One of the defining characteristics of the commedia dell'arte was the development of *maschere* (stock characters) that an audience could become familiar with, as today they might get to know a character on a television sitcom. To Venetian citizens, the commedia had become as popular and accessible as TV too. Italian literary dramatists, in turn, responded to the commedia's pop cultural appeal with new experiments in pastoral drama–a genre that melded comedy with tragedy.

When Henri III visited Venice in 1574, the French king became particularly enamored of the "wonderful Magnifico" *maschera* he saw on the Venetian stage. Henri demanded that Magnifico be part of the troupe that performed for him–and, one suspects, for de Vere as well–at the celebrations surrounding the royal coronation in Rheims.

Magnifico, also called Pantalone, was an old, miserly patriarch who headed, and could scarcely control, a riotous household. Often mocked, even by his servants, Pantalone was forever trying and failing to bridle his rebellious daughter. His avarice was notorious; he was always in a quandary about his ducats. Pantalone was typically portrayed as a Venetian merchant, carrying an unwieldy knife by his side that he used to threaten the many characters who taunted him. Jokes often came at the expense of Pantalone and his comedic foil, a doctor of law named Gratiano.

Pantalone's strong resemblance to SHYLOCK and the typical Pantalone plotline's resemblance to characters and situations in *The Merchant of Venice* are just the beginning of a long and underappreciated tradition of Shakespeare's indebtedness to the commedia dell'arte.

Throughout his monthlong Parisian stay, de Vere discharged his duty honorably in representing Elizabeth to Henri III. As the English ambassador, Valentine Dale, wrote to the Secretary of State, Sir Francis Walsingham, "Lord Oxford . . . has spoken with the king and queen his wife, and taken his leave with many great words of compliment; he used himself very moderately and comely and is well liked as a goodly gentleman." On the same day, Dale added that "My lord's device [*conversation; flair*] is very proper, witty, and significant."

Meanwhile, back in England, the curtain was rising on the most damaging episode yet of de Vere's career. Anne Cecil de Vere had become pregnant. When the queen learned of this news, she jumped out of her chair and proclaimed, "Indeed, it is a matter that concerneth my lord's joy chiefly. Yet I protest to God that next to them that have interest in it, there is nobody that can be more joyous of it than I am!" Elizabeth's unusual expression of enthusiasm underscores the deterioration of de Vere's marriage. Before leaving England, the earl had told the queen's doctor that if his wife became pregnant the father would have to have been somebody else. And now his

wife was with child, while the earl was in a foreign court, acting every part the diplomat.

If de Vere harbored any early doubts about the child's paternity, he did not at first make them apparent. Indeed, he responded to the news of Anne's pregnancy by having his portrait painted and sending it to Anne along with two coach horses. A copy of this painting (the "Wellbeck Portrait") survives and now hangs at the National Portrait Gallery in London; the Wellbeck can also be seen (as a whole) on the back cover of this book and (in part) on the front cover as well. It shows a young clotheshorse, in a haughty French ruff, gilded doublet, and black velvet hat with a dandified feather tucked in the back. A gold-stitched black cape hangs confidently off his left shoulder. A wisp of a mustache droops over his tightly pursed lips, while his arched eyebrows give his dark and piercing eyes a hint of bemusement, bewilderment, or cynicism.

De Vere wrote to his father-in-law about Anne's pregnancy and about his plans for the coming months of travel. He mentioned his debts to creditors, casting serious doubt on the prospect that he'd ever gotten his hands on the £15,000.

On March 17, de Vere wrote from Paris:

> My Lord, your letters have made me a glad man, for these last have put me in assurance of that good fortune which your former mentioned doubtfully. I thank God therefore, with Your Lordship, that it hath pleased him to make me a father where Your Lordship is a grandfather; and if it be a boy I shall likewise be the partaker with you in a greater contentation. But thereby to take an occasion to return I am far off from that opinion; for now it hath pleased God to give me a son of mine own (as I hope it is), methink I have the better occasion to travel, sith whatsoever becometh of me, I leave behind me one to supply my duty and service either to my prince or else my country....
>
> I have found here this courtesy: The king hath given me his letters of recommendation to his ambassador in the Turk's court; likewise the Venetian ambassador that is here, known of my desire to see those parties, hath given me his letters to the duke and divers of his kinsmen in Venice, to procure me their furtherances to my journey, which I am not yet assured hold; for if the Turks come, as they be looked for, upon the coasts of Italy or elsewhere, if I may I will see the [military] service; if he cometh not, then perhaps I will bestow two or three months to see Constantinople and some part of Greece.

A month still remained before the Alps would be passable. So de Vere's train followed the rising sun out of Paris, tracing the footsteps of the queen's tutor, Roger Ascham, who nearly thirty years before had traveled first to the

door of the Strasbourg humanist scholar Johan Sturmius before finally heading south to Venice. In the early spring of 1575, de Vere would study at the feet of this sixty-eight-year-old intellectual guru. As a rhetorician and classicist, Sturmius was one of the giants of his age. Ascham had noted that of all the modern scholars who could be imitated, only Sturmius was one "out of whom the true survey and whole workmanship [of antiquity] is specially to be learned."

After departing Strasbourg, de Vere, too, would extol Sturmius. As one of the earl's servants later reported to Sturmius, de Vere "had a most high opinion of you, and had made the most honorable mention of you." Upon returning to England, de Vere would brag that he "read the rhetoric lecture publicly in sermons preached at Strasbourg."

The scholar's great influences were Cicero and Plato–Sturmius was in fact known as the "German Cicero." And it was from Sturmius that Ascham derived his own (distinctly Platonic) philosophy of drama: "The whole doctrine of comedies and tragedies is a perfect imitation, or fair lively painted picture, of the life of every degree of man." Such wisdom from the lips of the Strasbourg master would certainly have been noted and filed away for future reference.

With the early hints of summer's thaw came de Vere's first real opportunity to cross over the Alps and into the region that had in no small part defined his studies under Sturmius, Sir Thomas Smith, and, perhaps, Arthur Golding as well. Ovid, Virgil, Cicero, Petrarch, Dante, Castiglione, Cardano: These were all names that the twenty-five-year-old earl knew as words on a page, authors who had described places and scenes, all of which still only existed for him within the vellum covers of books. The Florence of Dante and Machiavelli, the Urbino of Castiglione, the Sicily and Campania of Virgil, the Rome of the innumerable ancients, the lionized cosmopolis of Venice, the fabled university at Padua–where Smith had studied and lectured–were now all about to become more than just points on a map, poised to reveal their true identities as might masqueraders at the end of an evening's entertainment.

After passing the falls at Basel, the shores of Lake Constance, and the deep gorges of the Alps, de Vere's train at last looked up toward the stream tracing to the Rhine's glacial source, Lake Toma. For a youth whose idea of mountains was the rolling northland hills he had seen in 1570, the Alps must have been a visual feast. As de Vere's retinue pulled into Andermatt, in what is now Switzerland, and he gazed up at the 10,400-foot peak of Pizzo Rotondo, words may well have failed–at least for the moment. But his fortnight spent winding through what is now Switzerland and eastern France surely came back to him years later in Shake-spearean snapshots such as "far-off mountains turned into clouds" and "were I tied to run afoot even to the frozen ridges of the Alps" and

"night's candles are burnt out, and jocund day stands tiptoe on the misty mountaintops."

On the other side of the St. Gotthard Pass stretched the Lombardy Plain–a comparatively easy journey into Milan and what is now Italy. Although referred to collectively as Italy in de Vere's day, the boot-shaped peninsula was actually an assortment of principalities, republics, Spanish regimes, and ever-shifting alliances of foes and friends. Milan was a duchy unto itself, and–owing to its Spanish overlords and its fanatical Catholic bishop–de Vere avoided entering the confines of the city. "For fear of the inquisition, I dare not pass by Milan, the bishop whereof excerciseth such tyranny," he had written to Burghley the previous March. (An English noble would have had no problems passing through the greater duchy; he wanted only to avoid entering the city gates.)

Recuperating from their Alpine crossing, de Vere and his retinue probably rested for a night or two at St. Gregory's Well–a church and hostel just outside Milan's northeast gate. Spurred on by the allure of their Adriatic destination, the travelers would have followed local custom and continued the last leg of their trek via boat. The water route from Milan involved navigating first by canal, then by a network of rivers to Verona. The 120 miles between these two cities stretched out for one quiet week. However, as de Vere's ship approached Verona, the ride became more dangerous as waters began to surge with mock tides–due to the flooding of the river Adige that year. De Vere preserved this entire journey, in reverse, in *Two Gentlemen of Verona:* from the "tides" and shipwreck-causing spring surges of the Adige to "St. Gregory's Well" outside Milan's city gates to the forests northeast of town that meet "the rising of the mountain foot."

Once at Verona, de Vere was also within two days of Venice. The Venice of 1575 was the New York City of its day–a world financial center, fueling an ongoing explosion of learning, literature, theater, music, and art. The city nicknamed *La Serenissima* had, with the economic and artistic decline of its rival Florence, become perhaps the premier cultural capital of late sixteenth-century Italy. Reaching the shore of the Venetian lagoon sometime in mid-May of 1575, the *conte d'Oxfort* had finally arrived.

As the boatman guided the ferry toward its island destination through the lagoon's shallow waters, a metropolis unlike any other came into view. Looking beyond the *traghetti*'s port bow, just off Venice's northeastern shore, a traveler would have witnessed a strange parade of walnut logs from the Dalmatian Mountains being guided through the lagoon to a place somewhere beyond view. That somewhere was Venice's massive naval shipyard that, at its peak of production, could lay a hull in the morning and churn out a ship before sundown. Warships and merchant galleys swarmed in the waters near the Arsenal like a pack of foxhounds milling around before a hunt. The city itself, home to

150,000, was a complex patchwork of tenements and palaces, canals and bridges. One could catch glimpses of the city's nautical mazes as the ferry wound its way around the island's northwest tip and onto the central waterway, the Grand Canal. As the sun set over the mainland, lamplighters across Venice performed the nightly futility of pushing back the shadows that engulfed this many-cornered city. Black waters and narrow stone passageways swallowed up the dim beams of oil tapers that now burned at bridges, intersections, and from the bows of gondolas that shuttled up and down Venice's briny thoroughfares.

Once the party had landed and off-loaded their gear–perhaps at the French ambassador's residence, until suitable housing could be located–de Vere's retinue would have made its way to the Piazza San Marco. The earl would have had to present his papers of introduction from the Venetian ambassador in Paris to the duke *(doge)* and his court at the Palazzo Ducale, the city's central municipal building–one that was Parliament, Whitehall, and Westminster all under one vast, U-shaped roof. The Ducal Palace's state chambers exceeded even the opulence of Elizabeth's court. Allegorical statues, murals, and paintings by the likes of Tintoretto and Veronese covered every staircase, doorjamb, and square foot of ceiling of the palazzo.

If de Vere had arrived before May 11, his welcome to Venice would have been a choice seat at the characteristically Venetian ceremony known to locals as the "Marriage of the Sea" *(La Sensa)*. The eleventh of May, 1575, represented the fifth anniversary of the reign of Alvise Moncenigo, duke of Venice. The *Sensa* celebrated a symbolic union between the city and the Adriatic. The doge sailed onto the lagoon on his flagship, followed by a flotilla of state ships, galleys, and gondolas, to witness the ritual wedding. The doge's boat (the *Bucintoro*) boasted a gilded ebony deck, red velvet upholstery from bow to stern, polychrome statues, and gold-leaf oars inlaid with mother-of-pearl. For *La Sensa*, the *Bucintoro* was piloted to the mouth of the Adriatic, where the head priest of San Marco blessed the groom and bride. With a ceremonial flourish, the duke dropped his gold ring overboard, reciting the words *Desponsamus te, Mare, in signum veri perpetuique dominii.* ("We espouse thee, O Sea, as a sign of true and perpetual dominion.")

Had de Vere arrived too late to witness *La Sensa,* he still would have caught its outgrowth–the annual theatrical season, which lasted until July. By the 1570s, Venice had become perhaps the most vibrant theatrical community in all of Europe. Venetian entrepreneurs had recently constructed the first two public theaters in the city. Venice's first two professional thespian troupes had also recently formed, in 1568 and 1572. One can readily envision how, as this *aristocratico inglese* settled into his new hometown, he also began attending plays that would be meting out ideas, plots, characters, and inspiration for the rest of his life.

The theatrical mixture of high and low, refined and proletarian, comic and tragic, that graced Venetian stages at the time would present an aesthetic philosophy that would later be developed into the works of Shake-speare.

If de Vere had seen Pantalone in action at Henri III's coronation, he would have had ample opportunity to study the character in greater detail after arriving in Venice. Pantalone's valet was a clown called Arlecchino, anglicized as Harlequin. These characters might be joined onstage by the pedant Il Dottore–who overplayed his skills and learning–or the braggart captain, Il Capitano, who was a ladies' man and swaggering military type long on talk and, secretly, a coward.

These and the commedia's many other Zannis joined a cast of lovers, tricksters, heroes, and villains in improvised productions that survive today primarily in the form of brief plot summaries. It is unknowable what plays de Vere saw in Venice, when the commedia literally spilled out into the streets and piazzas.

The best guide to this will probably remain the works of Shake-speare; along with the aforementioned resemblance between Pantalone and SHYLOCK, Il Capitano is FALSTAFF's Venetian prototype; *Cymbeline*'s Italian counterpart is a commedia named *La Innocentia Revenuta; Love's Labor's Lost, Comedy of Errors,* and *Two Gentlemen of Verona* are full of commedia stock characters and story lines; and *Othello* and *The Tempest* transform the commedia into tragedy and pastoral.

The two public theaters in Venice in 1575 were some twenty minutes by foot or by gondola from Piazza San Marco and the Ducal Palace. Both theaters were on the other side of the Grand Canal from St. Mark's. One was just off the Rialto Bridge, the other was roughly where the Accademia Gallery stands today. What de Vere's commute to these performance spaces would have been like, of course, depends on where he lived.

A Venetian page the earl would hire, Orazio Cuoco, later reported that he had first met de Vere at the church of Santa Maria Formosa and that de Vere himself worshiped at "the Church of the Greeks" (San Giorgio dei Greci). Both of these churches lie within a five-minute walk from the Ducal Palace and St. Mark's Square. Since de Vere was still a courtier, albeit in a foreign court, he undoubtedly sought out lodgings close to the center of the Venetian courtly universe. One further clue about the possible site of de Vere's Venetian household comes from the Shake-speare canon: OTHELLO reports that his house lies somewhere he calls "the Sagittary." Sagittary is arguably an Anglophonic rendition of Vicus Sagittarius. Known more commonly as the Frezzeria, this street was less than fifty meters from St. Mark's and was a prominent commercial venue that had derived its name from the arrows that were originally sold in its shops.

Such was, in all likelihood, de Vere's world on the south side of the city: home, church, state, and theater all within twenty minutes' walk of one another. The Rialto Bridge and piazza, known in *The Merchant of Venice* as SHYLOCK's main haunt, was mere minutes away from the Frezzeria. De Vere probably visited the Rialto regularly, since it was one of Venice's main shopping centers, where the city's Jews lent money to anyone with good credit, and vendors of all creeds sold anything from swords and lamps to wine and meats for the banquet table. In the middle of the piazza on the Rialto's eastern side stood a platform supported by the statue of a hunchback, *Il Gobbo.* This unlikely pedestal was the podium where Venetians came to hear public pronouncements from the government and to witness the punishment of its criminals. *The Merchant of Venice* immortalizes this piece of Venetian trivia in the family name of SHYLOCK's servant–GOBBO.

De Vere's activities and wanderings were, of course, not limited to Venice's south side. One anecdote points to a portion of de Vere's life elsewhere on the island. Virginia Padoana was a courtesan of Paduan origin, as her name implies. She lived in an apartment on the Campo San Geremia, a square just off Venice's Grand Canal near its northern entrance. An English traveler a dozen years later would list Padoana as one who "honoreth all our nation for my lord of Oxford's sake."

As a *courtesana,* Padoana belonged to a distinguished tradition unknown to England. In the words of one contemporary traveler, "Thou wilt find the Venetian courtesan (if she be a selected woman indeed) a good rhetorician and a most elegant discourser." Often schooled as poets, scholars, and musicians, courtesans in Venice carried out entire careers true to the first syllable of their appellation. Some courtesans had gained fame as composers, intellectuals, or authors. In 1575 the courtesan Veronica Franco had published her *Terze Rime,* an erudite poem that satirized traditional love lyrics.

In Padoana's neighborhood–two minutes' walk across the Canale di Cannaregio–was the Jewish Ghetto of Venice, an island the size of a modern office building in the middle of the Cannaregio section of the city. In 1516, the Venetian Senate had set aside an old foundry (*gheto* is Venetian for "foundry") as a residential area for the city's Jews to live. Venice was, in fact, an attractive destination. With the advent of the Spanish Inquisition, the Renaissance for European Jews meant as much a rebirth of violent persecution as it did any cultural reawakening. Simply by allowing Jews to live and work within its borders, Venice proved itself one of the more tolerant cities in all of Christendom.

Even so, Venetian Jews were not permitted anywhere outside the Ghetto's walls after sunset and had to wear special badges that encouraged discrimination against them. These *siman,* dating back to 1215, were at various periods in history a yellow circle on the sleeve, a yellow scarf, a yellow or red beret, or a black cap. Because medieval laws forbade trade unions from allowing Jews to

join and the Torah was more forgiving of charging interest than were Christian traditions, Jews were in a position to become the city's primary bankers and loan agents. It became an uneasy marriage of convenience: The thriving Venetian mercantile economy needed Jewish capital; the Jewish community needed the relative tolerance of Venice.

A generation before de Vere moved to Venice, a prosperous subset of Levantine Jews had moved outside their walled island enclosure and expanded the Ghetto's borders to the edge of the Canale di Cannaregio. Hailing a gondola at the same spot to take him down the Grand Canal, de Vere probably met some of the city's financiers on their way to the Rialto Bridge and nearby square, their primary place of business. If de Vere's house was indeed on the Frezzeria, the Rialto Bridge was also his gondola's exit. With the city's biggest marketplace echoing into a distant din, the earl's gondolier would have guided the boat off Venice's main transportation artery and down the wave-lapped alleyways that led him home.

De Vere happened to be visiting Venice during a window that historians now reckon was the period of greatest tension between the Jews and the rest of the city. Four years before de Vere's arrival, Venice and its allies had won a crucial naval victory against the Turks, spelling the beginning of the end of Turkish military supremacy in the Mediterranean. The 1571 battle of Lepanto was, in the words of historian Fernand Braudel, "the most spectacular military event in the Mediterranean during the entire sixteenth century." The hard-fought victory was all the more pronounced in that only the year before, Venice had lost its last military garrison–the island of Cyprus–to the Turks.

Venetians met the news of Lepanto with citywide celebrations. All business was suspended, and shops across the lagoon closed their doors with explanatory notes in the window proclaiming, "For the death of the Turk." In response to the victory, the Venetian Senate in 1571 entertained a motion "to show some sign of gratitude toward Jesus Christ, our blessed defender and protector, by making a demonstration against those who are enemies of his holy faith, as are the Jews."

In their jingoistic fervor, some Venetians had imagined that somehow the Jews had secretly collaborated with the infidel Turks, rumors that led to an anti-Semitic retribution campaign. In the seasons that followed, the city buzzed with arguments back and forth about expelling the Jews once and for all. In 1573, one of Burghley's European spies wrote back that the richest Venetian Jews were trying to bribe their city's Senate into quiescence–a report that no doubt resounded with more pathos after de Vere had assessed the pitiful situation firsthand. In 1575, de Vere would have heard of (or perhaps even read) *The Vale of Tears,* a newly published Venetian Hebrew chronicle desperately arguing that Venice's Jews, if expelled, would only strengthen the Turkish forces by plying their trade for the infidels. Some Jews left Venice before any expulsion could be finalized.

Venice's Jews were ultimately never expelled, nor was the Ghetto ever closed. But the tensions had only begun to simmer down when de Vere first moved there.

De Vere centered his two Venetian plays around the contemporary events of Venetian life during the period he lived in *La Serenissima.* In *Othello,* military commanders lead their forces in far-flung campaigns at sea and on the island of Cyprus. In *The Merchant of Venice,* a normally tolerant mercantile state turns rabid with hatred of Jewish moneylenders–recalling Venice's darkest years of anti-Semitism, during the first half of the 1570s.

Now that he had established his base camp in Venice, Edward de Vere had three factors driving him onward: The plague was becoming an ugly fact of Venetian life by midsummer of 1575; those letters of introduction from King Henri III to the Turkish court were sitting on his desk unused; and the money he had brought with him to Venice was burning a hole in his purse.

The Turk had not invaded Venice, nor was there any imminent threat. In fact, the new sultan of the Ottoman Empire, Murad III, had just taken a Venetian wife–who was working to improve relations between the Turks and her native republic. Since de Vere would be traveling on a Venetian ship under the Venetian flag, the earl enjoyed ample opportunity to visit the Ottoman-occupied lands to the east, including Greece.

In his letter from Paris, de Vere had written to his father-in-law that if the seas were still peaceful, he would "bestow two or three months to see Constantinople and some part of Greece." On July 20 one of de Vere's servants, who had lagged behind the main party and had at the time only made it to Strasbourg, wrote back to Burghley that he was uncertain if de Vere had yet left for Greece–a second, independent declaration of de Vere's intent to explore the Hellenic region during the summer. Finally, in the autumn it would later be reported that de Vere had hurt his knee in a Venetian galley–confirming that a sea voyage played some part in the earl's summer itinerary. No other records have been discovered detailing de Vere's movements during the summer of 1575. But the evidence that remains is consistent with a Greek itinerary.

By worshiping in Venice at the "Church of the Greeks"–just two years old in 1575–de Vere had placed himself at the heart of a community of Greek exiles. The Ottoman Empire had been ruling much of Greece for more than a century in 1575, and the Turk's heavy taxation, Islamic culture, and corrupt government had spurred an exodus of Hellenes. The church of San Giorgio dei Greci provided sanctuary to Greek intellectuals, artists, and political and religious refugees seeking life away from the sultan's influence. Like all refugee groups, many still had family and friends back in the old country. There was, in other words, no better place in Venice than de Vere's church to find and join a group of travelers making their passage to Greece.

The 1,100-mile, fifteen-day voyage to Athens would have followed the Adriatic currents down the Illyrian (now Croatian) coastline. To someone accustomed to a life of stately homes and manors, passage down the Adriatic was a humbling ordeal. The Venetian galley recognized no class boundaries; all were equally put upon. Vermin and lice were no strangers to these voyages, and the travelers were unburdened by such modern conveniences as toilets, running water, or refrigerated food.

The galley's design had scarcely changed since the days of Marc Antony–two masts and dozens of oars rowed by both prisoners and sailors-for-hire. The rowers served not only as propulsion but also as potential soldiers should pirates make chase. Venetian "great galleys" relied upon sail power as much as possible and used their rowers only when the winds died down or when maneuvering near shore. In the words of one contemporary Spanish traveler, galley crews "are diligent in profiting by good fortune, lazy in a gale; in a storm they command freely and obey little; their god is their sea chest . . . and their pastime is watching the passengers being seasick." The long days and nights on the open water would certainly have been a time for de Vere to acquaint himself with Venetians and foreigners alike–be they Jews or Christians or otherwise.

Upon leaving Venetian waters, within its first forty-eight hours under sail, the galley would have passed along a thirty-five-mile stretch of Hungarian coastline, the seafaring end of a kingdom then ruled by Rudolf II, king of Bohemia. This Bohemian corridor was a mere finger of land squeezed between the Holy Roman and Ottoman Empires. And yet, between 1575 and 1609, the king of Bohemia and Hungary did in fact command a small parcel of seacoast. *The Winter's Tale* acknowledges this little-known fact of Central European history by setting several scenes on the "seacoast of Bohemia." (Critics dating back to the seventeenth-century dramatist Ben Jonson have harped on *The Winter's Tale*'s Bohemian seacoast scenes as proof of Shake-speare's general ignorance of continental Europe. But the critics are in error.)

The Venetian galley would then most likely have followed the currents south, down what is now the Croatian coastline, snaking its way past an Adriatic archipelago and shores belonging almost entirely to the Turks. These were dangerous waters, with pirates aplenty on the seas and unwelcoming ports on the shore. However, Venetian ships could always count on at least one safe haven on their treks down the eastern Adriatic coast: the independent city-state of Ragusa.

Southbound Venetian galleys trekking past the Illyrian coastline regularly restocked in Ragusa and gave their passengers and crew a few days of rest and relaxation. This ancient city–now called Dubrovnik–had once been a Venetian colonial possession. At the time of de Vere's travels, Ragusa was a sovereign city-state, albeit one that had retained healthy commercial and cultural ties to its former colonial master. Judging from maritime insurance records, Venice–Ragusa voyages in the sixteenth century were commonplace.

Ragusa also contained a parcel of de Vere family history: In 1193 the crusading king Richard I "the Lion-heart" shipwrecked off the coast of Ragusa and, according to legend, built a cathedral in the city to thank God for his deliverance from disaster–then continued his journey inland and was captured. The first earl of Oxford helped to pay the king's ransom, while his brother, Robert de Vere, may have accompanied Richard on the crusade that ran aground in Illyria.

Walking through this unusual city, de Vere would have been struck by the eclectic influences that defined the coastal metropolis. As an independent nation on a coastline dotted with impoverished colonial possessions, Ragusa stood apart both culturally and economically. Later known as "the Slavonic Athens," this Illyrian city-state was a rich and prospering nexus of East and West, as revealed in its Slavic, Italian, and Ottoman influences in architecture, music, art, and literature. The city's literary scene–much of it in Latin and Italian–spawned its own school of poetry that drew upon Ragusa's polyglot culture. In the early seventeenth century, Ragusa was the first region outside Italy to have developed its own opera. In the words of the Italian humanist Ludovico Beccadelli, Ragusa was "the mirror of Illyria and its greatest glory." Unlike any other city on the Illyrian shores, in Ragusa de Vere would certainly have been safe to "beguile the time and feed his knowledge with viewing of the town . . . ," seeing sights that "satisfied [the] eyes with the memorials and the things of fame that do renown this city" and enjoying music that is the very "food of love."

These quotes come from *Twelfth Night*, a play set in an unnamed Illyrian city. A shipwreck off this city's coast introduces a noble band of travelers who fall in love with the town–and a few of its more eminent residents. Two forgotten Croatian studies, published in 1957 and '64, recognized Ragusa as the setting for this Shake-spearean comedy of families lost and fables untold. Most scholars and directors today, however, still treat the setting of *Twelfth Night* as an imaginary coastal city on the Adriatic with no real-world counterpart. A pleasant surprise awaits them in Ragusa.

After several days for repairs and resupplying, Venetian galleys would have left the harbor and sailed past the barren and stony coastline, dotted with cypress and olive trees. The mountains around the harbor are networked with caves from which pirates and other criminals often staged raids on unsuspecting ships. In *Twelfth Night*, the countess OLIVIA castigates her boorish cousin SIR TOBY BELCH by noting that he is only "fit for the mountains and the barbarous caves, where manners ne'er were preached!"

The journey southward down the Illyrian coastline and into the Gulf of Corinth would have taken another two or three days, past the site of the Lepanto battle and toward the Greece of lore and legend. Two independent but converging sets of reasons make it likely that if his ship made it as far as Greece, de Vere did not tarry long there. First, the records that do exist of de

Vere's summer grand tour suggest a very tight itinerary. Second, the Shakespeare plays containing nominally Greek settings (*Comedy of Errors, A Midsummer Night's Dream, Troilus and Cressida, Two Noble Kinsmen, Pericles,* and *The Winter's Tale*) offer little local color or firsthand knowledge of Greece–especially when compared to the author's vivid depictions of Venice, northern Italy, and even Illyria. In the words of the French critic Michel Grivelet, "The Greeks of classical antiquity do not bulk large in Shakespeare's work. The Athens of TIMON is hardly more essential to the play than that of THESEUS and HIPPOLYTA in *A Midsummer Night's Dream.* There are Greek names in other works and a visit to the Oracle at [Delphi] in *The Winter's Tale.* But they all belong to the nowhere world of romance."

The last snippet of Greek geography and legend, however, may have been the only Hellenic sight to have been seen by Shake-speare's own eyes. In Paris, de Vere had learned about his wife's pregnancy; the legendary Delphic Oracle was only a few miles offshore from the Gulf of Corinth, the shortest route from Venice to Athens. In both *Timon of Athens* and *The Winter's Tale,* the Oracle is treated as a touchstone for legitimacy–antiquity's great paternity test. De Vere's tragically untamed jealousy was still welling up in his blood in 1575. But if he was in the region, he may well have wanted to figure out how his wife had become pregnant. (If one is to believe the letter from Mary, Queen of Scots, to Elizabeth, de Vere hadn't slept with Anne in some time–perhaps never.) The Oracle had worked for the ancients; perhaps it could calm those demons. The home of the Muses, Mount Parnassus, may have been one stop on the earl's itinerary.

As eagles and white-tailed Egyptian vultures soared overhead, de Vere's party would have approached the Temple of Apollo, which stood amid a collection of holy rubble that had once been a centerpiece of the ancient Greek world. The Oracle was part of a complex of memorials under the craggy cliffs of Parnassus, where spring water emerged from the mountainside. The ancient historian Plutarch, a former high priest of the temple, recorded that the Oracle was read by a local seer who entered the Apollonian temple and inhaled intoxicating gases emanating from a fissure in the mountain rock. She (it was always a woman) would reach a state of trance, receive the divine message, and then emerge to deliver the prophecy. The Oracle invariably took the form of a riddle or deliberately vague utterance that could mean different things to different hearers. *The Winter's Tale* satirizes this tradition. The play's MESSENGERS travel to Delphi and returned with a message that's as unambiguous as a jury's verdict: The child is legitimate, the protagonist's wife is chaste, and he was wrong to doubt her.

From Delphi, another four days' travel by land to the southeast would have taken the party to Athens–through the same forest that would later become

the setting for the imaginary exploits of PUCK, BOTTOM, the KING AND QUEEN OF THE FAERIES, and four young Athenian lovers. Yet, unlike the economically and culturally vibrant city-state of Ragusa, Athens in 1575 was a hollow shell. Whereas ancient Athens had long ago stood as the very seat of culture, learning, and rationality, sixteenth-century Athens under Turkish occupation had lost its intellectual and cultural luster.

In *The Winter's Tale,* the route from the land of the Oracle leads directly to Palermo, Sicily–where records do survive of a de Vere visit. This sea voyage would have taken de Vere's party approximately ten days–with scarcely a glimpse of coastline for the first nine. And unless the crew had an appetite for danger, the trip would have terminated with a smooth ride along Sicily's southern coast, where the four-knot currents carry their cargo westward like a maritime conveyor belt. (The other sea route to Palermo involves navigating the rocky straits of Messina–immortalized in myth as Scylla and Charybdis.)

Officially, the island of Sicily was a Spanish territory, and so far as is known, de Vere had no letters of introduction or passage. But Sicily was also the most corrupt government in Italy. If a noble visitor had cash enough to bribe, he had all the papers he needed.

The natural port on Sicily's west coast was a once-flourishing town named Trápani–a likely landing place for de Vere's ship. De Vere and his party would have made the fifty-mile overland journey from Trápani to Palermo on horseback. The first major stop on the trail out of Trápani was Segesta, an ancient hilltop town where the beasts of burden could rest and water, and where the travelers could enjoy the most illustrious ancient ruin in the entire island kingdom. The temple and theater at Segesta have inspired noteworthy commentary from ancients such as Thucydides and Virgil to modern art critics and archaeologists. According to ancient lore, Aeneas built the temple at Segesta, to honor the goddess Venus, as he meandered through the Mediterranean after the Trojan War. Segesta was esteemed as one of the greatest monuments anywhere to the legendary ancestor of the Roman race.

Winding his way through the stony hills to Segesta, de Vere would have caught occasional glimpses of this uncompleted wonder of the ancient world, teasing his eye with its distant elegance. Upon arriving at the Parthenon-like shrine and the nearby classical theater, de Vere may have wondered why he had ever wanted to visit Greece at all. Segesta provided him with Hellenic splendor aplenty without engendering the vast expense, the disillusionment, and the lengthy and treacherous passage to the Aegean and back.

The Winter's Tale, in fact, contains a subtle joke based on just these doubts, suggesting that KING LEONTES's slack messengers to the Oracle at Delphi sneak away to Segesta instead and never even leave Sicily.

Once in Palermo, de Vere would have sought out Spain's official viceroy of Sicily, the duke of Sessa. The viceroy was a unique persona in Palermo: a

generous patron, a lover of masques and tournaments, as well as an accomplished poet who surrounded himself with first-rate scholars and artists–an embodiment of Castiglione's ideal courtly figure.

Once in Palermo, ruled by a prince who loved the equestrian sports, de Vere organized an impromptu tournament in the city to joust for the honor of Her Highness Queen Elizabeth. According to an undated English eyewitness testimony from Palermo:

> One thing did greatly comfort me which I saw long since in Sicily, in the city of Palermo, a thing worthy of memory: Where the right honorable the earl of Oxenford–a famous man for chivalry at what time he traveled into foreign countries–being then personally present, made a challenge against all manner of persons whatsoever and at all manner of weapons as tournaments [and] barriers with horse and armor, to fight a combat with any whatsoever in the defense of his prince [*Queen Elizabeth*] and his country. For which he was very highly commended. And yet no man durst be so hardy to encounter with him, so that all Italy over, he is acknowledged the only chevalier and nobleman of England. This title they give unto him as worthily defended.

Such valor would certainly have impressed Sessa. It may have even yielded de Vere letters of passage to the other Spanish kingdoms where records reveal that he would later be traveling–Naples and Milan. Sessa had, in fact, only recently returned from the Spanish garrison at Naples. While at Naples, the viceroy had become enamored of a lame Spanish soldier who was gaining notice as a first-rate poet, Miguel de Cervantes.

Cervantes had served under the Spanish commander Don John at the 1571 naval battle of Lepanto–where an injury left the budding young novelist without the use of his left hand. Since June of 1575, Don John had been Cervantes's commanding officer in Naples. In late August or early September, Cervantes was in Palermo to visit with Sessa at his palace. The ambitious twenty-seven-year-old had been honorably discharged from his military service and was looking forward to shipping out to Spain. (Cervantes's voyage, however, would never reach its destination. His ship would instead be intercepted by Turkish pirates, leaving Cervantes a Christian slave for five hellish years.)

Had de Vere and Cervantes crossed paths during this brief window, it would have been at a formative moment in both of their careers. The closest their lifelines come to intersecting today is on the printed page: The late summer of 1575 presents the earl of Oxford at perhaps his most quixotic–thumping his chest in the Palermo square, offering to tilt against any comer who might dare to challenge the virtues of his fair Dulcinea on the English throne. And Cervantes was a notoriously good observer who would spend

the rest of his life transforming his youthful adventures into novels and plays. No one has ever considered de Vere as one of Cervantes's early character inspirations. Yet, if de Vere's Sicilian exploits do ring with the mock bravado of FALSTAFF, perhaps future scholars will find in them snapshots of Don Quixote as well.

Continuing eastward out of Palermo would take de Vere on a four-day horseback ride to Messina. The Italian squadron of the Spanish fleet was based there. In 1571, the fleet had launched from Messina to victory at Lepanto. In 1575, Messina would have attracted an English lord with feudal sympathies, since the Spanish military was then preparing to intervene in a conflict about old ruling class versus new.

The independent Republic of Genoa, a city-state on the Italian Riviera, was being torn apart in 1575 by a feud then brewing among the city's elite. Genoa's old nobility *(nobili vecchi)*, aided by Spain and the pope, were trying to keep the city's upstarts out of power. Genoa's newer patricians *(nobili nuovi)*, aided by France, resented the *vecchi*'s monopoly of control. As a defender of the old guard himself, de Vere would have sympathized with the *vecchi*, and therefore with Spain.

The commander of the Spanish military mission to Genoa was King Philip II's bastard brother Don John. The Spanish generalissimo spent the summer shuttling back and forth between his garrisons of troops in Messina and Naples. De Vere may well have met Don John at Messina. This conclusion emerges not from the historical record, but rather from the Shake-speare play set in Messina, *Much Ado About Nothing*. Messina is where a scheming bastard brother named DON JOHN enters the action. Wars in a far-off region of Italy are on everybody's mind in *Much Ado*, and DON JOHN arrives in this Sicilian port city on the heels of a mission he and his band of Italian nobles have completed in these wars.

By the summer of 1575, Don John was growing frustrated with his Italian post. He wanted to be working on his own plans to attack the Turks at Tunis. (The pope had promised Don John that he could be crowned king of whatever city or country he took next.) Yet, to his chagrin, the don had been appointed to adjudicate what he saw as a petty Italian squabble. Don John was thus looking to delegate authority in the Genoan campaign. Rumors were spreading abroad that Don John's force consisted of fifteen thousand men in Milan, ready to march into Genoa and wage war for the *nobili vecchi*. The Spanish commander needed a few good men who could lead squadrons of troops into Genoa, should the situation devolve into the civil war that everyone feared. When the French ambassador, La Mothe Fénelon, had written, the previous January, that Don John had a job for de Vere, this was probably what Fénelon had had in mind.

Records exist of a monetary advance de Vere took out in Naples at some unspecified date in 1575 or '76. Perhaps the earl, preparing to shake a spear in

Genoa on behalf of the *nobili vecchi,* sought an infusion of cash to outfit him in all the trappings of a noble commander that Don John's assignment would have entailed.

That de Vere was in Genoa in 1575 at the time of the civil strife is a known fact–attested to by letters received in England by Lord Burghley from Italian bankers handling de Vere's money. But these sources do not say whether de Vere ever fought for the *nobili vecchi.*

Yet, according to scandalous Catholic rumors circulated in England, de Vere would later brag that he had been appointed to command thirty thousand men in defense of the *vecchi* in Genoa. The gossip, to be covered in greater detail in Chapter 6, further claimed that de Vere boasted of

> excellent orations he made–as namely in the state of Venice, at Padua, at Bologna, and diverse other places in Italy. And which pleased himself above the rest [*was the speech he made*] to his army, when he marched towards Genoa, which when he had pronounced it, he left nothing to reply, but everyone to wonder at his judgment, being reputed for his eloquence another Cicero and for his conduct a Caesar.

In truth, the Genoese *nobili nuovi* and *vecchi* never did come to blows. Negotiations settled the dispute before swords were drawn, so any initial troop deployments would only have been recalled. But if any of the outrageous allegations ever dished out by de Vere's contemporaries are to be credited, surely the most believable is the claim that the earl of Oxford was a man given to lengthy orations, hilarious fictions, and imaginative elaborations. De Vere was indeed "for his eloquence another Cicero," regardless of the extent of objective, historical truth found in the gossip.

De Vere would return from Italy with many tall tales that he would spin for his drinking buddies and fellow pub crawlers. The Catholic chatterboxes who recalled de Vere's supposed actions in Genoa said that the earl also boasted that he would have been made duke of Milan for his valiance on the battlefield were it not for one of Queen Elizabeth's agents in Italy who had interceded. There would be no Milanese dukedom for this Englishman. De Vere, it was said, loved to tell this story: "Diversely hath he told it, and when he enters into it, he can hardly out, which hath made such sport as often have I been driven to rise from his table laughing."

One of de Vere's colleagues in the Genoese Civil War That Almost Was was a nobleman who, in 1575, became the new duke of Genoa. The new duke's name was Prospero Fattinanti. The seeds of *The Tempest*–the protagonist of which, PROSPERO, is a deposed duke of Milan–may well lie scattered

on the Genoese and Milanese ground in the late summer of 1575. De Vere's Italian adventures, both real and imagined, would serve as the raw materials out of which grand and monumental works of fiction were ultimately made.

Edward de Vere's grand tour in the summer and early fall of 1575 was an exhausting endeavor, both physically and financially. He had injured his knee on one of his Venetian galley trips and returned to the city on the lagoon running a fever. He must have walked in the door of his Venetian flat yearning for the creature comforts that he had otherwise enjoyed throughout his twenty-five years. From the letters de Vere's bankers were sending Lord Burghley–and the record of his cash advance in Naples–de Vere's prodigal lifestyle had not abated since he had crossed the Alps. Over fourteen months of travel, the earl spent £4,561, some $1.2 million in today's currency.

The nineteenth-century English historian Isaac Disraeli once recorded a legend he'd read that in passing through Italy or Germany, de Vere's train had encountered a beggar. The destitute man asked one of de Vere's servants if he could spare a sixpence or shilling. "What dost [thou] say if I give thee ten pounds?" the servant replied. "Ten pounds!" the beggar said. "That would make a man of me!" So de Vere's servant gave the beggar ten pounds and entered into de Vere's account books, "Item, £10, for making a man." According to this story, de Vere "not only allowed [it], but was pleased" when he learned of this encounter. Such singular talent for cash dispersal led economic historian Lawrence Stone to term de Vere "the greatest spendthrift tourist of all."

De Vere had also returned to Venice in late September to discover that the three packets of letters he had sent back to his wife and father-in-law during his grand tour had never made it past the Alps. The plague had hit Italy too hard. Letter carriers were denied passage to points north. De Vere had, however, received two postings from his father-in-law, one of which announced that his wife Anne had delivered a daughter, Elizabeth.

De Vere would wait until he could get closer to home to discover the true story about a pregnant wife whom he'd supposedly never impregnated.

In September, de Vere sent a letter to Lord Burghley explaining why communication had been cut off during the grand tour. He noted that rest and quiet were what he now desired most. De Vere also requested that a loan he had taken out for five hundred crowns should be settled with the sale of his lands. Like *As You Like It*'s melancholy courtier JAQUES, de Vere was one who had "sold [his] own lands to see other men's."

In his September 24 letter posted from Venice, de Vere wrote to his father-in-law:

> My good lord . . . I have been grieved with a fever; yet with the help of God now I have recovered the same and am past the danger thereof, though brought very weak thereby and hindered from a great deal of

travel, which grieves me most, fearing my time not sufficient for my desire. For although I have seen so much as sufficeth me, yet would I have time to profit thereby.

Your Lordship seems desirous to know how I like Italy, what is mine intention in travel, and when I mean to return. For my liking of Italy, my lord, I am glad I have seen it, and I care not ever to see it anymore, unless it be to serve my prince or country....

Thus thanking Your Lordship for your good news of my wife's delivery, I recommend myself unto your favor; and although I write for a few months more, yet though I have them, so it may fall out I will shorten them myself.

In his Italian adventures, de Vere had seen much, although his sickness had hindered him from seeing more. To appease Burghley, who might have worried that his son-in-law was turning Catholic, de Vere downplayed his love of Italy. De Vere told his father-in-law not to expect many more letters. No doubt he wanted to minimize his feigned acknowledgment of a child whose conception remained a mystery.

CHAPTER 5

THE FABLE OF THE WORLD

[1575–1578]

THE FALL OF 1575 WAS A BAD TIME TO GET SICK IN VENICE. THE city was suffering an epidemic of the bubonic plague. Anyone who had come into contact with known or suspected plague victims was quarantined for up to forty days. Unemployment was rising, especially among those whose livelihoods depended upon crowds, such as schoolmasters, mountebanks, and tavern keepers. The Venetian textile industry had been temporarily shut down because the plague could be transmitted through infected bedding, clothing, and fibers. The city would soon be losing one quarter of its population. Church spires across the Veneto were all too often aglow with "lanterns of the dead"—an Italian funerary tradition that appears in *Romeo and Juliet.*

The plague of 1575–77 would ultimately claim the life of one of the most celebrated Venetians of his day, the artist Tiziano Vecellio (later anglicized as Titian). In 1575, however, this octogenarian great master was anything but ailing. Titian's studio at the island's northern edge, Ca' Grande, was churning out complex works at the time such as *The Allegory of the Battle of Lepanto* and *The Allegory of Religion.* Both of these paintings were commissioned by King Philip II of Spain and would inspire literary tributes by the Spanish playwright Lope de Vega.

In sixteenth-century Italy, Titian was an artistic celebrity comparable to Picasso in the twentieth century. Venetian society flocked to his bayside home, and noteworthy foreign visitors frequently paid their respects. When King Henri III of France had resided in Venice, he had called upon Titian at Ca' Grande. It is likely de Vere did as well.

One of Ca' Grande's guests describes a soiree at Titian's:

Here, before the tables were set out, because the sun, in spite of the shade, still made his heat much felt, we spent the time in looking at the

> lively figures in the excellent pictures, of which the house was full, and in discussing the real beauty and charm of the garden with singular pleasure and note of admiration of all of us. It is situated in the extreme part of Venice, upon the sea, and from it one sees the pretty little island of Murano, and other beautiful places. This part of the sea, as soon as the sun went down, swarmed with gondolas adorned with beautiful women, and resounded with varied harmony and music of voices and instruments, which till midnight accompanied our delightful supper.

Titian had lived and worked amid the highest caste of Venetian society when the city-state was still a Mediterranean powerhouse to be reckoned with. The artist had met, and in many cases painted, some of most of the prominent European figures of the sixteenth century, from popes and cardinals to artists and philosophers to dukes and kings. As one contemporary noted, "There was almost no famous lord, nor prince, nor great woman, who was not painted by Titian." Titian had outlived most of his colleagues and contemporaries. To a young earl with a romantic attachment to the past, there would have been plenty to be learned at the master's table.

One painting alone–depicting a myth from Ovid's *Metamorphoses*–would fire the Shake-spearean imagination years later. Shake-speare's epic poem *Venus and Adonis* boldly revises the Ovidian myth in the same way that Titian does.

Whereas all classical sources of the Venus and Adonis fable depict the couple's affair as mutually passionate, Titian's *Venus and Adonis* portrays the former as a desperate vixen and the latter as a disinterested boy. On Titian's canvas, a grasping goddess of love clings to a willful youth who appears bothered by the temptress embracing him. Titian's Venus nearly falls over herself to restrain Adonis from leaving. Similarly, Shake-speare's VENUS tries to hold the heedless boy numerous times, when finally, "On his neck her yoking arms she throws; she sinketh down, still hanging on his neck. He on her belly falls, she on her back." In the words of art historian Erwin Panofsky, "Shake-speare's words . . . sound like a poetic paraphrase of Titian's composition."

There were at least four replicas of Titian's *Venus and Adonis* elsewhere on the Continent by 1575–most notably, in the collection of the king of Spain. But the copy remaining in Titian's studio was distinctive. In Titian's copy and in Titian's copy only, Adonis wears a stylized form of a man's hat known as a bonnet. The other copies of the painting feature a bareheaded Adonis. Shake-speare's ADONIS wears a "bonnet [that] hides his angry brow."

Not only would Titian's *Venus and Adonis* inform de Vere's vision of the Ovidian myth, works by two of Titian's closest artistic colleagues (long dead in 1575) also loom large in Shake-speare. Plays by Titian's literary mentor Pietro Aretino provided character studies, language, situations, and ideas for more than a dozen Shake-speare plays and poems, while two plays and both

of Shake-speare's epic poems *(Venus and Adonis* and *The Rape of Lucrece)* allude to works by Titian's friend Julio Romano.

Romano is, in fact, mentioned by name in Shake-speare. In *The Winter's Tale,* a painted statue of the wronged wife HERMIONE is compared to statuary by "that rare Italian master Julio Romano." This sentence has often been cited by orthodox academics to disprove Shake-speare's knowledge of Italian art; Romano is known today as a painter, not a sculptor.

Yet a northern Italian trip that de Vere took in the late fall of 1575 points him in a direction that would resolve this controversy. On November 27, de Vere wrote Lord Burghley from Padua. Just a day's journey from Padua was the city of Mantua, where de Vere's idol Baldassare Castiglione had lived and worked. Castiglione was buried in the church of Santa Maria delle Grazie, five miles outside Mantua's city walls.

Le Grazie was a popular sanctuary containing numerous life-size statues in colored wax of local dignitaries and religious leaders. Amid these lifelike effigies stands Castiglione's tomb, which also holds the remains of the philosopher's wife, Ippolita. Atop the tomb one finds a masterful sculpture of a risen Christ. The monument was designed and sculpted by Castiglione's friend Julio Romano.

Ippolita Castiglione had died nine years before her husband, and the tomb records the widower's heartrending sorrow:

> I live no longer, sweetest spouse, since Fate which tore you from me has taken my life with yours; but I shall live, when I am buried in the same grave with you, and my bones are joined with yours. To Ippolita Torelli, who was no less fair than she was chaste, and had hardly entered on the first years of her youth, this tomb is raised by her inconsolable husband, Baldassare Castiglione, A.D. 1520.

The Winter's Tale's comparison between HERMIONES's memorial statue and sculpture by Julio Romano is not a hallmark of Shake-speare's ignorance. It is de Vere's memory of a Mantuan tomb dedicated to a much-loved wife.

Visiting dignitaries to Mantua, such as an English earl, would have been put up as a guest of the local duke, Guglielmo Gonzaga. The Gonzagas had in 1575 reigned as dukes of Mantua for nearly 250 years. De Vere probably read tales from the family's own bookshelves about the strange and curious history of the Gonzaga dynasty. One Gonzaga–a cousin to Castiglione–had been accused of murdering the duke of Urbino by pouring poison in his ear. This is the same story HAMLET tells in his play-within-the-play, *The Mousetrap.* "His name's Gonzago [*sic*]," HAMLET tells his colleagues at court. "The story is extant and writ in very choice Italian."

The Gonzagas' monstrous five-hundred-room, fifteen-courtyard *palazzo ducale* contained a number of suites for distinguished guests. In 1575, one of

the main guest rooms was the Appartamento di Troia. The *appartamento* contained frescoes of famous scenes from the Trojan War, painted and decorated by none other than Julio Romano. The mural is one busy work of art: on the ceiling, Mount Olympus and battles between the Greeks and Trojans; on the walls, Paris's judgment, the rape of Helen, Hecuba's dream, the forging of Achilles's arms, the building of the Trojan horse, and the deceitful Sinon's ploy to induce his countrymen to receive the horse.

Shake-speare's *Rape of Lucrece* describes just such a painting–202 lines of poetic elaboration upon a mural of epic proportions.

> At last she [LUCRECE] calls to mind where hangs a piece
> Of skillful painting, made for Priam's Troy;
> Before the which is drawn the power of Greece,
> For Helen's rape the city to destroy,
> Threat'ning cloud-kissing Ilion with annoy,
> Which the conceited painter drew so proud,
> As heaven (it seem'd) to kiss the turrets bow'd.

And so on. *The Rape of Lucrece* describes in vivid pictorial detail much of what Romano had set upon the *appartamento*'s walls.

As the year 1575 drew to a close, de Vere's purse was under siege too. On November 27, the earl wrote to his father-in-law from Padua not to inhibit any sales of his family lands in order to stem a rising tide of debts. "I shall desire Your Lordship to make no stay of the sales of my land," the earl commanded his father-in-law.

De Vere wrote his brief letter in haste, as the messenger was preparing to depart soon. The Alps would not have been passable this late in the year, so the envoy likely prepared an alternate route to Genoa or another western port city and then onward through France. The messenger would hardly have been the only emissary in the neighborhood who was departing for a thousand-mile journey. Padua was a city in touch with the world.

One of Italy's most celebrated college towns, Padua was home to a university that, thanks to its independence from the Catholic Church, drew scholars from all across the Occident and Orient. Christians, Arabs, Jews, Persians, and Turks all studied within this institution's hallowed walls; registration was optional; tuition was, except for the rich students, free. The university also housed a world-famous law school, an institution where Sir Thomas Smith had once trained. Its most celebrated professor in 1575 was a jurist named Ottonello Discalzio–a man who made regular trips to Venice to render his considered opinion in court cases that required outside consultation. Discalzio's many contributions to Venetian jurisprudence inspired the duke of Venice to appoint the professor to Venice's prestigious Order of San Marco. Discalzio

was the real-life inspiration for *The Merchant of Venice*'s celebrated Padua University law professor BELLARIO, consulted to settle the case of *SHYLOCK V. ANTONIO*.

The Merchant of Venice describes the trip from Padua to Venice–by what PORTIA calls "the *tranect*, the common ferry." The river Brenta connected the inland university town to the Venetian Lagoon, and the seven-hour journey by horse-drawn ferry *(traquet* or *traghetto)* was one of the most scenic river rides in all of northern Italy. Riverside estates on the Brenta were home to numerous luxurious mansions; the Brenta was in fact known to locals as "the continuation of the Grand Canal" *(la continuazione del Canal Grande)*. PORTIA lives on the Brenta in an estate called Belmont. Belmont, she notes, is at a location ten miles from Venice and two miles away from a monastery. There is only one villa that meets these two geographic details: the luxurious Villa Foscari on the Brenta, two miles from the Ca' delle Monache (The Nuns' House). King Henri III had stayed at Foscari during his 1574 trip to Venice, as had de Vere's probable host in Mantua, Guglielmo Gonzaga. *The Merchant of Venice* mentions this latter fact, when PORTIA's assistant, NERISSA, recalls a recent visit to Belmont by "the marquis of Montferrat." One of Gonazaga's titles, in addition to duke of Mantua, was marquis of Montferrat.

De Vere's ferry ride down the Brenta would have passed the classically inspired Villa Foscari as the *traghetto* slowed down to round a wide curve on the riverbank. One nineteenth-century English traveler, on a similar ferry ride down the Brenta with Lord Byron, recorded the inspirational beauty the local vistas provided.

> [I] remarked [on] the moon reigning on the right of us and the Alps still blushing with the blaze of the sunset. The Brenta came down upon us, all purple–a delightful scene. . . .

One final trip into the heart of Italy remained before de Vere would cross the Alps once again. This time neither the river and canal networks of northern Italy nor the Adriatic afforded him the convenience of journey by water. Overland travel would be his only option as he ventured out to see "the rest of Italy"–as de Vere told one of his creditors. De Vere and his train pointed their horses and carts south toward Florence on December 12. The duchy of Tuscany was their destination. But first de Vere had to pass through the neighboring duchy of Ferrara.

This dukedom does not appear in Shake-speare. De Vere did not tarry long there. However, one of Ferrara's famous sons, Giraldi Cinthio, had published a collection of short stories, *Gli Hecatommithi* (1566), that would have been spiritual balm to a husband pondering his wife's sexual duplicity. The

Hecatommithi recites the tale of a jealous Moor and a wife he accuses of infidelity, a fair young wench named "Disdemona."

Reaching Florence from the Ferrara-Tuscany border takes less than a day on horseback. Once de Vere's train arrived in this thriving mercantile city, probably around December 16, he would have been welcomed by the new duke of the city-state, Francesco de Medici. Even more than his father before him, Francesco I was a despot whose reign marked an age of disorder and misrule in nearly every function of the government: The duke regularly hired assassins to kill supposed enemies; his court was a quagmire of fear and loathing; crime flourished throughout the city.

However, the Medici were also a philosophically and artistically enlightened clan, patrons, in no small part, of the Italian Renaissance. The city's walls could hardly contain its wealth of art and learning. On her cobblestone streets had walked Dante and Machiavelli. Florence was also known as a center of both banking and science. Because of this, inhabitants of rival city-states sometimes derided Florentines, as the Venetian IAGO castigates the Florentine CASSIO, as "bookish" and as "mathematician[s]." Florence was also home to the monastery of Santa Maria Novella, widely renowned for its perfumes and sweet oils. De Vere would return to England bearing perfumed gloves as gifts to the queen and others–perhaps purchased during his stopover in Florence. (Shake-speare's other Florentine, *Much Ado About Nothing*'s CLAUDIO, gives these same "sweet gloves" to his betrothed, HERO.)

Near Christmastime, de Vere headed south out of Florence. On his journey, he would have run across many travelers heading toward Rome. Fifteen seventy-five was a Jubilee Year. Pilgrims from across Europe, summoned by the pope, were converging upon the Vatican and the yet-unfinished St. Peter's Basilica. Many English Catholics made the 850-mile journey from London. Upon meeting in Rome, some of these English exiles would together vow to "convert" their homeland back to the Catholic faith–a pact that would be keeping Burghley and Walsingham's secret agents busy for years to come.

It was an auspicious time to be riding in the direction of Rome. As if to time-stamp the historical moment of Shake-speare's travels through Tuscany, HELENA in *All's Well That Ends Well* seeks out her wayward husband BERTRAM, in Florence, by disguising herself as a pilgrim on Jubilee.

HELENA says her Italian destination is "St. Jaques le Grand." These words have puzzled critics. The most famous holy site of this name is a cathedral in Galicia, Spain. HELENA's destination is often cited as one more example of Shake-speare's supposed ignorance of continental Europe, like the seacoast of Bohemia.

During de Vere's Tuscan visit, Rome had reached its capacity. Pilgrims had arrived at the Holy City only to find the gates shut in their face. Many travelers never made it any farther south than overflow sites near Florence. Two such locations were the shrines to St. James the Great ("St. Jaques le Grand" in HELENA's native French) in the Tuscan towns of Pistoia and Prato. In disguising herself as a Jubilee pilgrim heading toward "St. Jaques le Grand," HELENA effectively states that she intends to wind up near Florence in order to track down her husband.

On January 3, 1576, de Vere wrote a letter to his father-in-law from the southern Tuscan town of Siena. This time de Vere had ample time to compose his thoughts. The earl's letter begins in the same way as his missive from Padua regarding the impatience of his creditors and the need to sell his lands. But then it evolves into a trilingual expression of frustration at Burghley's meddling and conniving. The Lord Treasurer had, no doubt wisely, advised de Vere not to sell so many of his estates to pay his debts. Family properties were de Vere's primary source of income. In hastily selling off his holdings, he was like a trust-fund kid cashing in on his principal–a short-term gain leading to long-term ruin. Yet the twenty-five-year-old earl was having what would truly be the time of his life in Italy, and money could not get in the way of his continued immersion in Italian life and culture.

De Vere explained to Burghley that he had no other choice but to sell his family properties:

> [A]lthough to depart with land Your Lordship hath advised the contrary and that Your Lordship for the good affection you bear unto me could wish it otherwise, yet you see I have none other remedy. I have no help but of mine own, and mine is made to serve me and myself not mine. Whereupon till all such incumbrances be passed over and till I can better settle myself at home I have determined to continue my travel, the which thing in no wise I desire Your Lordship to hinder, unless you would have it thus: *Ut nulla sit inter nos amicitia.* [Latin: "There would be no friendship between us."] For having made an end of all hope to help myself by Her Majesty's service, considering that my youth is objected unto me, and for every step of mine a block is found to be laid in my way, I see it is but vain *calcitrare contra li busi* [Italian, citing Acts 9:5: "To kick against the pricks"], and the worst of things being known, they are the more easier to be provided for to bear and support them with patience.

The statement "mine is made to serve me and myself not mine"–my monies and lands serve me and not the other way around–lays bare both the writer's petulant mood and his egocentric attitude. And yet to write off de Vere's protestations as mere narcissism is to miss a further point as well: Since he'd inherited them, the earl's estates had indeed been mostly serving others–primarily, in the final analysis, the queen. And now he was a foreigner in a faraway, Catholic land, a foreigner whose reputation rested on having the money to maintain his position, a poet and playwright in the making who was gathering his subjects and learning his craft. No matter how bad a money manager

the earl of Oxford was, he was in the right to point out that this was a very bad time for his checks to start bouncing.

De Vere continued:

> Wherefore for things passed amiss to repent them it is too late to help them, which I cannot but ease them that I am determined to hope for anything I do not, but if anything do happen *preter spem* [Latin: "Beyond hope or expectation"], I think before that time I must be so old as my son, who shall enjoy them, must give the thanks, and I am to content myself, according to this English proverb that it is my hap to starve like the horse, while the grass doth grow.
>
> ... The 3rd of January. From Siena.
>
> EDWARD OXENFORD

De Vere did not, so far as is known, have a son in 1575. One presumes that he writes in the hypothetical, looking forward to a time when he will have an heir. In the same paragraph as the "son" remark, de Vere also spells out a proverb that his counterpart quotes to Burghley's counterpart in *Hamlet.* As the Danish prince says to POLONIUS, "Ay, sir, but, 'As the grass grows ...'– The proverb is something musty."

For a spendthrift such as de Vere, opportunities for extravagance could be found anywhere in Italy. But in early January in Siena, temptations leading to wantonness were even greater than normal. Whether by choice or by accident, de Vere had arrived in Siena at a time of revelry. This gorgeous Tuscan town was one of the most active theatrical cities in all of Italy outside of Venice, and the period from Christmas to Twelfth Night (January 5) was filled with celebrations, parties, and plays.

Upon arriving in Siena, de Vere would likely have met the man who stood at the center of the Sienese theatrical world in 1576. The sixty-seven-year-old Alessandro Piccolomini was a Sienese philosopher-playwright widely hailed as "the prince of comic writers." Piccolomini had previously written a book that was something of a companion to Castiglione–detailing the proper education of the ideal courtier. Piccolomini also headed a local drama club called the Academy of the Deaf and Daft (Accademia degli Intronati) that spearheaded their own style of commedia dell'arte. By the 1570s, Piccolomini's academy had taken the radical step of hiring actresses. (Typically, on both Italian and English stages, boys played all the female roles.) As fellow artistic innovators, courtly gentlemen, and renegade scholars, Piccolomini and de Vere had much in common.

Piccolomini's Academy observed a decades-long Sienese tradition of performing his comedy *The Deceived (Gl'Ingannati)* on Twelfth Night. De Vere's letter from Siena is dated two days before the Academy's annual theatrical

revelry, so Piccolomini would probably have importuned the city's courtly English visitor to stick around long enough to watch the Academy's comic masterpiece.

The plot of *The Deceived* concerns a brother–sister set of twins; the sister falls madly in love with a nobleman who's wasting his affections on someone else. The sister then disguises herself as a male servant, who ferries love letters between the noble and his elusive paramour. The twin brother, supposedly dead, arrives on the scene and straightens out the mess by falling in love with the noble's paramour, while the twin sister snatches the noble for herself. This is also the plot of Shake-speare's *Twelfth Night*–a fact that was recognized as far back as the early seventeenth century. (Traces of Piccolomini's comedy have also been found in *Romeo and Juliet* and *Two Gentlemen of Verona.*) De Vere would transform the setting of Piccolomini's farce to Ragusa, but Shake-speare's *Twelfth Night* would proclaim its Sienese origins in everything from its story line to its very title.

De Vere's Siena stopover came at a time not just of revelry but also of reverence. With his visit falling in the midst of the Christmas-Epiphany season, it's reasonable to assume that de Vere at least made an appearance at church. The cathedral in Siena was, like the Palazzo Ducale in Mantua, a unique piece of architecture and design, situated on the highest prominence in this hilly town, with a zebra-striped exterior and an exquisite interior to match nearly any cathedral in Italy. One peculiar piece of art inside Siena's *Duomo* is a circular mosaic representing the proverbial Seven Ages of Man. In the words of art historian Samuel C. Chew,

> Familiar to Shakespearean scholars because it has been cited as a parallel to JAQUES's lines in *As You Like It*.... the Ages [in Siena's Duomo] are represented thus: Infantia rides upon a hobbyhorse, Pueritia is a schoolboy, Adolescentia is an older scholar garbed in a long cloak, Juventus has a falcon on his wrist, Virilitas is robed in dignified fashion and carries a book, Senectus, leaning upon his staff, holds a rosary, Decrepitas, leaning upon two staves, looks into his tomb.

As You Like It's world traveler JAQUES–a melancholic who "sold his lands to see other men's"–describes these same seven ages in a speech that famously begins, "All the world's a stage, and all the men and women merely players." JAQUES continues:

> ... At first the infant,
> Mewling and puking in the nurse's arms.
> And then the whining schoolboy, with his satchel
> And shining morning face, creeping like snail

> Unwillingly to school. . . . Last scene of all,
> That ends this strange eventful history,
> Is second childishness and mere oblivion,
> Sans teeth, sans eyes, sans taste, sans everything.

After the drizzly January voyage from Siena back to de Vere's Venetian home, a new kind of commedia dell'arte awaited him. Venice's Carnival season–from December 26 to the beginning of Lent–represented the city's other great annual period of theatrical and comic activity. Venetians from the highest-born grandees to the lowest vagabonds donned masks and performed with one another in Carnival skits and masquerades.

The Venetian Carnival masque was a social equalizer unlike anything de Vere would ever see again, an opportunity for an English blueblood to interact with all walks of life without either the burdens or the baubles of his high caste. The experience evidently affected him. From *Much Ado*'s masked revels to HENRY V's camouflaged interviews with his own troops to ANTONY and CLEOPATRA's walking through the common streets incognito, disguise in Shakespeare frequently affords highborn characters the opportunity to descend in rank and stature and learn something about the worlds they normally cannot access.

One thread of seventeenth-century oral history, distorted by the telephone game of multiple retellings, provides a glimpse into de Vere's activity during the Carnival celebrations. A commedia dell'arte performed in Naples in 1699 would recount the exploits of one "Elmond, milord of Oxford." Since there was no lord of Oxford named Elmond and only one Edward before 1699, scholars presume that the seventeenth earl of Oxford is being spoofed in this interlude. It begins:

> The horse of milord of Oxford is faun colored and goes by the name of Oltramarin [*Beyond-the-Sea*]. Elmond carries a large sword. His color of costume is violet. He carries for device a falcon with a motto taken from Terence: *Tendit in ardua virtus* [Valor proceeds to arduous undertakings].

The Elmond character jousts with "Alvida, countess of Edenburg" and for his efforts is awarded the "horn of Astolf"–named after a marauder from the time of Charlemagne who once besieged Rome. Tempting as it may be to try to wring meaning out of this farcical scenario, one must also remember that it is a tale told by an idiot. The character who recites this story is a clownish pseudointellect (the "Dottore") who mangles every speech he gives. Ultimately, this anecdote reveals more about the Neapolitan commedia at the end of the seventeenth century than it does about de Vere's travels in Italy. All the same, one revealing fact can be discerned from the commedia: De Vere had made such an impression during his continental travels that his memory was still treading the boards more than a century after his departure.

Perhaps due to the howl of too many impatient creditors, de Vere had by the end of February 1576 decided to close down his Venetian home and return to England.

On the day before Fat Tuesday, March 5, 1576, de Vere and his train packed their bags and bade farewell to the city that had yielded up so many of its riches–and unburdened the earl of Oxford of so many of his. *La Serenissima* was gearing up for the explosive Mardi Gras celebrations that would take place the following night. But, perhaps to beat the post-Carnival rush, de Vere and his servants boarded the "tranect, the common ferry," and watched as Venice floated away like an unmoored ship. Now on the mainland, many days of travel awaited them as they prepared to cross the Lombardy Plain and make their way into the Alps a second time.

The one recorded Italian contact they made on the return journey was in the vicinity of Milan. This was the third known time de Vere had passed by Milan–the first was on his way into Italy and the second at the conclusion of his summer grand tour. An Englishman then in Milan, Francis Peyto, had earlier tried to insinuate himself into the earl of Oxford's company. Peyto had devised an intricate genealogy illustrating the family ties between English and Scottish royalty. Peyto sought a rich patron to pay him for it. The work was probably a piece of Catholic propaganda–because it would publicize family ties to the English throne that the Scots queen could parlay to her advantage. De Vere wanted no part in it. Peyto wrote to Burghley on March 31, 1576, that he'd tried to show

> the designment to my lord of Oxford if he had passed this way visible to any English eye, as he did not. I always desired to know His Lordship both for his own sake and for my country's sake and to that end made offer of myself in his first coming hither. But . . . at this new demand I was refused to be spoken with.

Peyto's unusual wording–not that de Vere never made it to Milan but that he'd "passed this way [in]visible to any English eye"–suggests de Vere had entered Milan incognito.

A few Shake-spearean allusions to sites and scenes inside the walls of Milan would suggest that the author had enjoyed some fleeting glances of the city and its residents. MARGARET in *Much Ado About Nothing* mentions a sumptuous gown owned by the duchess of Milan. (Even in the sixteenth century, Milan was recognized as a center of haute couture. Once he'd returned to London, de Vere was said to have joked that "the cobblers' wives of Milan

are more richly dressed every working day than the queen [is] on Christmas Day.") SILVIA in *Two Gentlemen of Verona* speaks of "Friar Patrick's Cell" in Milan, which was indeed a real place where the Irish friar Patrick O'Hely stayed during a Milanese stopover in the summer of 1576.

Unlike the more independent Spanish-controlled kingdom of Sicily, which English tourists had an easier time traversing, Milan was a stronghold of Spain's imperial might. For more than a generation, Milan's leader had actually been a colonial governor, a foreigner appointed by the king of Spain. In honor of his predecessors, the governor still retained the honorary title of duke. At the time of de Vere's probable visit, a Spanish "duke"–Don Antonio de Guzmán, marquis of Ayamonte–did indeed rule the city. (This peculiar feature of Milanese life makes its way into *The Two Gentlemen of Verona:* Shake-speare's DUKE OF MILAN reveals his nationality when he addresses his colleagues using the Spanish honorific "Don.")

Had de Vere actually infiltrated the Spanish-controlled city, he would likely have skipped over the houses of the "duke" and the archbishop of Milan for lodgings in another Milanese household that would readily have opened its doors to a visiting patron of the arts. The sculptor and engraver Leone Leoni kept a palazzo in the city's center that was an architectural testament to its owner's creativity and individuality. Eight stone giants lean ominously out of the building's facade, divided into three neat stories in an almost Elizabethan-style frame. Inside, the sixty-seven-year-old artist, a close friend of Michelangelo, displayed his extensive collection of drawings, paintings, and plaster casts. One painting in Leoni's inventory, Correggio's mythological masterpiece *Io,* makes its way into Shake-speare. An unnamed LORD in *The Taming of the Shrew* describes a picture he's seen:

> We'll show thee Io as she was a maid,
> And how she was beguiled and surpris'd,
> As lively painted as the deed was done.

As the twentieth-century cultural historian A. Lytton Sells observes, "It is possible that Shakespeare is here simply inventing; but it is more natural to suppose that he is describing real pictures such, for example, as Correggio's *Io.*"

De Vere's departure from Milan at the end of March 1576 represents the last known instance that his feet touched Italian soil. Historical records establish that during his ten-month Italian sojourn, de Vere visited Venice, Padua, Milan, Genoa, Palermo, Florence, Siena, and Naples. In traveling between his known destinations, de Vere had probably also seen parts of Messina, Mantua, and Verona. Yet this list still leaves out more than a dozen significant Italian cities and city-states. These locations–including Turin, Parma, Bergamo, Livorno, Rimini, Bologna, Ravenna, Reggio, Modena, and the island states of Sardinia and Corsica–are the same parts of Italy that go unmentioned in the Shake-speare

canon. (Rome is a special case, since de Vere's personal secretary, Anthony Munday, would spend three months touring and studying there in 1579.) As the literary scholar H. F. Brown points out:

> Shakespeare displays a knowledge of Venice and the Venetian dominions deeper than that which he appears to have possessed about any other Italian state. Omitting the references to Rome, which are just under four hundred in number, we find that the chief cities of Italy come in this order: Venice, with fifty-one references; Naples, thirty-four; Milan, twenty-five; Florence, twenty-three; Padua, twenty-three; and Verona, twenty.

Undoubtedly, plenty of Italian allusions in Shake-speare remain to be ferreted out–such as de Vere's Sienese stay on or near Twelfth Night and its relevance to the play *Twelfth Night.* However, as a rule, these references have so far clustered around the Italian ports of call on de Vere's itinerary. There is little cause to doubt that this trend will continue.

As with his journey into Italy, de Vere faced the Alps on his outbound voyage when the spring thaws made the mountains passable. Correspondence from one of de Vere's moneylenders reveals that he had sent baggage as well as some traveling money ahead to await him in Lyon. Connecting the dots between Milan and Lyon, the Mont Cenis pass northwest of Turin provides the most probable route over the Alps.

The terrain at Mont Cenis gradually ascends over six miles but becomes too steep and jagged on the French side to accommodate any mode of transportation more technologically advanced than a beast of burden. At the base of the mountain, carriages were typically broken down and lugged over the mountain on pack mules. The passengers either rode on the mule train or on straw chairs hoisted by porters. The porters, no strangers to snow squalls and bracing winds, charged as much as £5 per head ($1,300 in modern currency) for the six-day trek. Nearly two centuries later, when passage across Mont Cenis involved the same sleety ordeal, one English traveler marveled, "It was a great miracle that [the carriage] was not dash'd into ten thousand pieces."

Landing in France, de Vere's caravan would have faced the choice of traveling by land or by water. The easier route involved following Mont Cenis's mountain stream, the Arc, which leads into the river Isère. The Isère flows through Grenoble and St. Marcellin, where it joins the Rhône. Numerous castles fortified the Rhône's banks, where a French-speaking cosmopolitan earl had lodging aplenty to choose from. Staying with one's "cousins"–as aristocrats often referred to one another–was generally the preferred overnight option for a nobleman on tour.

Less than a day's journey up the Rhône from its junction with the Isère lies the hillside town of Tournon. A small medieval city with a renowned university and an active market of printers and publishers, Tournon-sur-Rhône was at its peak of activity in the sixteenth century. In 1576, Tournon was also a provincial seat where the local magistrate–Just-Louis, Lord Tournon, count of Roussillion–kept a number of prominent nearby châteaux for his family and his distinguished visitors. King Charles IX of France had stayed with the family in 1564, and his successor, Henri III, had lodged with them ten years later. The door of Count Roussillion's estates would have been open to the *comte d'Oxford* as he made a similar progress upstream.

As baggage, books, and provisions remained tied down in the barges parked at the riverbank, probably with one or more servants camped out nearby to guard against pillaging, de Vere would have enjoyed his first taste of the refined and noble life since he'd left Renaissance Italy behind. The spacious Château Tournon, practically carved out of the granite peak in the center of town, served as both fortress and villa to the Roussillion clan. The count of Roussillion's family used the Château Tournon for their primary residence and may have entertained their worthy visitor either there or in the commodious lodgings of the nearby Château Roussillion.

Also in the Roussillion household in 1576 was Just-Louis's unmarried youngest sister. Hélène de Tournon was a fetching young woman who drew the admiration of townsfolk and visitors alike. (A room devoted to her in the Château Tournon, the Salle Hélène de Tournon, remains to this day.) Hélène's mother, the dowager countess of Roussillion, also lived with the family and remained watchful over her youngest daughter and young son who now ruled over the region.

The tribulations of this family must have been notably dramatic. *All's Well That Ends Well* is partly based upon them. The plot of *All's Well* originates in a primary source text (Boccaccio's *Decameron*) and draws its motivating force from de Vere's life–particularly from his mistreatment of Anne Cecil de Vere. But the touching story of Hélène de Tournon also feeds into the tragicomic tale that *All's Well* tells.

To begin with, the name of *All's Well*'s mistreated wife, HELENA, has no other known source. *All's Well* also faithfully preserves Hélène de Tournon's family at the time of de Vere's passage up the Rhône: Shake-speare's play features both a DOWAGER COUNTESS OF ROUSSILLION and her son, the COUNT OF ROUSSILLION. De Vere would fuse *All's Well*'s three primary sources to create a self-consistent dramatic framework–changing the location referenced in Boccaccio's story from the French *province* of Roussillion to the Château Roussillion and changing the relationship between HELENA and the COUNT OF ROUSSILLION from sibling to betrothed.

Like Anne Cecil de Vere, Hélène de Tournon would be the victim of a haughty lover and ugly family politics. When de Vere made his way up the

Rhône River Valley in 1576, Hélène had just one more year to live; her death would soon become the scandal of the French court. She was in love with a French marquis who returned her affections. But the marquis's family was opposed to the match; they wanted him to become a priest. The marquis gave in, and at a courtly function where both would-be lovers were in attendance, he refused to acknowledge Hélène's presence. She swooned and, as the story goes, died of "mortal sorrow."

The story of Hélène de Tournon contributed to another play as well: Happening by chance upon her funeral, the marquis inquired who was being buried. Discovering that it was the young woman his cold heart had inadvertently killed, he fainted and fell from his horse. The marquis repented for his cruelty, and according to one eyewitness, "his soul, I believe, enter[ed] the tomb to beg pardon of her whom his indifferent neglect has put there." Some French historians have recognized in the obscure melodrama of this maiden from southern France a seed of inspiration for the graveyard scene in *Hamlet.*

The Upper Rhône Valley and parts south and west, the Languedoc, was a Protestant stronghold in an increasingly strife-riven Catholic France. Since the St. Bartholomew's Day atrocities in 1572, Catholic–Protestant wars had become a source of potentially revolutionary instability. In early 1576, the king of France's younger brother, the duke of Alençon, had forged a secret alliance with Protestant forces in France, Germany, and England and had secretly begun to advocate for a coup d'état. A cavalry division led by the German duke Jan Casimir had invaded the eastern provinces to assist Alençon in the uprising. As de Vere was returning home on his way north toward Paris, the entire country was bracing itself for bloody hostilities. De Vere's train came across Casimir's forces, who were then based in the eastern region of Langres. The earl's encounter with the invading German prince survives in a peculiar form–in an extended encomium to de Vere that appears in a play by the Jacobean dramatist George Chapman.

Chapman's tragedy *The Revenge of Bussy d'Ambois* (c. 1607) has been hailed as one of the first great tragedies of passion, containing "perhaps the finest celebration in our language of the philosophy of Stoicism." Chapman's stoic hero is a French noble named Clermont d'Ambois, who claims to have been present at the meeting between de Vere and Duke Casimir. Chapman imbues his semifictional protagonist with the most commendatory attributes–Clermont's "virtues [rank] with the best of th' ancient Romans"–so Clermont's panegyric to de Vere is rightly seen as high praise indeed:

> I overtook, coming from Italy,
> In Germany, a great and famous earl
> Of England, the most goodly fashion'd man
> I ever saw; from head to foot in form

Rare and most absolute; he had a face
Like one of the most ancient honor'd Romans
From whence his noblest family was deriv'd;
He was beside of spirit passing great,
Valiant and learn'd, and liberal as the sun,
Spoke and write sweetly of learned subjects,
Or of the discipline of public weals;
And 'twas the earl of Oxford; and being offer'd
At that time by Duke Casimir, the view
Of his right royal army then in the field,
Refus'd it, and no foot was mov'd to stir
Out of his fore-determin'd course.
I [Clermont] wondering at it, ask'd for his reason,
It being an offer so much for his honor.
He, all acknowledging, said 'twas not fit
To take those honors that one cannot quit [*repay*].

In other words, Duke Casimir wanted to show off his armies for the earl of Oxford; de Vere refused because he could not return the favor.

Clermont then goes on to describe de Vere's haughty treatment of an upstart English gentleman who was then traveling with Casimir–Sir John Smith. Smith had taken Casimir up on his offer to review the troops in the field. De Vere bristled with elitist rancor at what he considered Smith's presumptuousness:

And yet [de Vere] cast it only in the way,
To stay and serve the world. Nor did it fit
His own true estimate how much it weigh'd,
For he despis'd it; and esteemed it freer
To keep his own way straight, and swore that he
Had rather make away his whole estate
In things that cross'd the vulgar, than he would
Be frozen up still like a Sir John Smith,
His countryman, in common nobles' fashions,
Affecting as the end of noblesse were
Those servile observations.

Duke Casimir, a widely heralded Teutonic prince only seven years older than de Vere, had since the early 1560s been a major player on the world stage. One senses a hint of envy in de Vere's refusal to let Casimir show off his military force. On this unlikely stage outside of Langres, France, de Vere was shown his own failure at the nobleman's art. The earl of Oxford had been raised to become the power-brokering prince that now, in the person of Casimir, was preparing to command the will of the king of France.

HAMLET's final soliloquy ("How all occasions do inform against me...") is inspired by the puzzlement mixed with envy that wells up in him upon seeing his rival FORTINBRAS's troops march in front of him. Young FORTINBRAS's army–in a scene that is not in any known source of *Hamlet*–heads out to face a futile but deadly conquest in Poland. The effect of this show of military might is to force HAMLET to a new resoluteness to right his wronged honor. As HAMLET says while reviewing FORTINBRAS's army

Rightly to be great
Is not to stir without great argument,
But greatly to find quarrel in a straw
When honor's at the stake.

Neither Danish prince nor English earl can change places with the Teutonic prince who has inspired this surge of envy. In the words of twentieth-century literary critic Moody E. Prior, "[HAMLET's] admiration for FORTINBRAS's action may move him, but it is not an example he can readily follow." At the moment when they see the massed troops, both HAMLET and de Vere recognize their own fates awaiting them.

By March 21, de Vere and his men had arrived in Paris, where the English ambassador notified Lord Burghley of the new guest in town. The forces the earl had seen in the fields of Langres were now part of a larger army that had begun prying a host of concessions out of the king. The king's brother, Alençon, had surrounded Paris with a semicircular formation of thirty thousand troops. To placate his bloodthirsty brother, Henri gave Alençon the additional title of duke of Anjou. Henri gave Casimir three million francs, the duchy of Étampes, and nine lordships in Burgundy. But the besieging forces were not so easily bought off. Alençon had already caused a stir at court by notifying his mother (Catherine de Medici) that someone had attempted to poison him.

The rumor was false, but the situation was becoming frantic. Alençon's forces had cut off all goods and foodstuffs going into and out of Paris. On March 31, Ambassador Valentine Dale wrote to the spymaster Walsingham, "The camp of Monsieur [Alençon] approaches. The king is unready. The strangers [*Casimir's army*] cannot abide to linger this matter. Lord Oxford is here attending his coming."

This would probably have been de Vere's second meeting with the duke of Alençon, whom he is likely to have met at King Henri III's coronation. De Vere's part in the actual negotiations, if he had any place at the table, was

soon ended, however. Another month and a half of talks would ensue before Henri and his younger brother sat down to ratify "the Peace of Monsieur," the treaty that ended the French wars of religion. By that time, de Vere would be engaged in his own battles.

In mid-April, after fourteen months of travels across the Continent–and perhaps into Asia Minor–de Vere prepared his luggage for the final crossing of the English Channel. His Italian odyssey had at last come to an end. The earl's many chests and boxes contained, according to one account, a "great collection of beautiful Italian items."

Burghley later recalled that as early as April 4, an unnamed receiver (probably de Vere's servant Rowland Yorke) was beginning to infect the earl's mind against his wife, Anne. The questions of cuckoldry raised earlier in the Italian sojourn were beginning to surface again, although this time inspired by the divisive whispers of a third party. As Burghley noted in a memo to himself and posterity:

> [De Vere] wrote somewhat that by reasons of a man of his, his receiver, he had conceived some unkindness, but he prayed to me to let pass the same, for it did grow by the doubleness of servants.

De Vere, understanding the need to downplay to Burghley the divisive nature of the rumor, asked his father-in-law not to worry about it. This is not to say, however, that de Vere was not concerned. Thus it was with some anxiety that, on or around Good Friday, April 20, de Vere boarded his ship. There were other reasons to be anxious than he knew.

In the spring of 1576, Spanish forces on the high seas were on heightened alert. Catholic France was preparing to concede everything but the throne to Alençon's armies; Spanish commanders in the Lowlands were undoubtedly apprehensive about the shift in power that an Alençon victory in Paris represented. The diplomatic correspondence arising from what was about to happen is quoted at length elsewhere. But the most expressive account is, naturally, Shake-speare's:

> Ere we were two days old at sea, a pirate of very warlike appointment gave us chase. Finding ourselves too slow of sail, we put on a compell'd valor, and in the grapple I boarded them. On the instant they got clear of our ship, so I alone became their prisoner. They have dealt with me like thieves of mercy, but they knew what they did: I am to do a good turn for them.

Just as HAMLET's review of FORTINBRAS's troops leads directly to an ocean voyage overtaken by pirates, de Vere's meeting with Duke Casimir's army was soon followed by a Channel crossing intercepted by pirates. (Neither the encounter with FORTINBRAS's army nor HAMLET's brush with buccaneers appears in any of the play's sources–to the puzzlement of numerous literary critics.)

The "pirate[s] of very warlike appointment" boarded de Vere's ship, and they stripped it bare. De Vere's luggage was ransacked, and the pirates even took the clothes from the earl's back. De Vere was, as the French ambassador later reported to his superiors, "left naked, stripped to his shirt, treated miserably, his life [would have been put] in danger if he hadn't been recognized by a Scotsman." (HAMLET notes that the pirates had him "set naked on your kingdom.") The ordeal anguished both the Privy Council and Prince William of Orange of the Lowlands. The latter soon learned the identities of some of the perpetrators and clapped them in prison for their insolence. As the poet Nathaniel Baxter, who was part of de Vere's entourage, wrote of the episode in a book of poetry from 1606:

> Naked we landed out of Italy
> Enthrall'd by pirates, men of no regard
> Horror and death assail'd nobility,
> If princes might with cruelty be scarr'd.
> Lo, thus are excellent beginnings hard.

Landing at Dover on a vessel stripped by seafaring bandits, de Vere had stepped ashore into a swarm of questions about Anne's daughter's paternity. Rumors about the unknown father of Elizabeth de Vere had spread beyond the queen's presence chamber and the Lord Treasurer's privy chamber.

Burghley was managing the crisis with a shotgun approach. He had fetched his son Thomas from a hundred miles away to greet de Vere at Dover and learn the earl's mind. He had also sent Lord Henry Howard, Norfolk's brother and de Vere's cousin, to bear Burghley's and Anne's greetings to de Vere. Other messengers followed soon thereafter. Anne and de Vere's sister Mary took a coach to Gravesend to intercept de Vere on his way to London–or at least intercept any messengers bearing further news about the earl's arrival. Meanwhile, none of these busybodies seemed to appreciate the fact that the stripped and humiliated man had nearly met his maker–and now probably wanted nothing more than to meet a good tailor.

The scandal surrounding de Vere's wife required utmost discretion, not Lord Burghley's ham-fisted promotion and publicity campaign. Perhaps there was a misunderstanding at the root of it. Ales and sweet wines flowed liberally in an age when clean water was a luxury; a night of drunken marital sex in the autumn of 1574 was not out of the question. De Vere had played along with the

game when circumstances left him no other choice–witness the husband's courtly expressions of joy about the progress of Anne's pregnancy in his letters home. Now that he'd returned, however, de Vere undoubtedly wanted to resolve the controversy with minimal fanfare. Burghley's insistence on an immediate and public display of affection might have been designed to make that impossible. It was at best surprisingly undiplomatic, a sort of banner by the quayside proclaiming, WELCOME HOME, DEAR CUCKOLD, with a welcoming committee asking de Vere to stand by it and smile for the camera.

In future years, de Vere would come down–albeit still tentatively–on his father-in-law's side. In perhaps the last Shake-speare play ever written, *The Tempest,* PROSPERO tells his daughter that her mother "was a piece of virtue and she said thou wast my daughter." Even *The Tempest*'s great magus must rely on hearsay when divining MIRANDA's paternity. But for de Vere to reach this state of resolution would require years.

Easter weekend was upon them, and an ailing Burghley suggested via messenger that de Vere take his lodgings at Cecil House. However, de Vere undoubtedly knew that once he entered Burghley's managed care, access to information about the previous seventeen months would be closely screened.

De Vere declined his father-in-law's invitation. This would mark the beginning of a period when de Vere openly questioned his daughter's paternity. His trusted servant Rowland Yorke offered an alternative that provided what must have seemed the most neutral space available on such short notice. Rowland's older brother Edward kept a house in London on Walbrook, near London Stone. As Burghley notes in one of his copious memos:

> I sent letters to him to entreat him to take my house for his lodging, whereof I had no answer. And yet I wrote twice by 2 several messengers. But my son [Thomas] sent me word that he found him [*de Vere*] disposed to keep himself secretly 2 or 3 days in his own lodging.... Then my son told me how [de Vere] did suddenly leave the barge and took a wherry [boat]–and only with Rowland Yorke landed about Yorke's House.

The Monday after Easter, April 23, Burghley wrote a pleading letter to the queen, full of less matter and more art. In this nearly incoherent piece of correspondence, he protested that he and his daughter were being grievously abused and that "in anything that may hereof follow, whereof I may have wrong with dishonesty offered me, I may have Your Majesty's princely favor to seek my just defense for me and mine." Sir Thomas Smith, solicitous of the latest news about his former student, wrote to Burghley two days later. Smith was then in the final stages of throat cancer, and his physical pain was only heightened by the emotional anguish he felt for the family. "I am sure it must very much grieve Your Honor seeing it grieveth me for the love I bear him [de

Vere], because he was brought up in my house.... What counselors and persuaders he hath so to behave himself I cannot tell."

Smith was not the only observer who felt that de Vere was being "persuaded." Burghley later logged in his diary that de Vere "was enticed by certain lewd persons to be a stranger to his wife," while Nathaniel Baxter–the same poet who would later write about being abducted by pirates–later lamented of his former patron:

> Only some think he spent too much in vain,
> That was his fault. But give his honor due;
> Learned he was, just, affable, and plain,
> No traitor but ever gracious and true.
> 'Gainst [the] prince's peace, a plot he never drew.
> But as they be deceived that too much trust
> So trusted he some men that prov'd unjust.

Rowland Yorke, the same unruly servant who had angered Anne in 1573 for barring her from de Vere's private chamber, was the most likely deceiver. If OTHELLO's blindness to the dishonesty of his "honest IAGO" is in any way autobiographical, de Vere and Yorke must have made a pitiful team of verbally poisoned and verbal poisoner. Rowland Yorke takes top honors as the most venal man who ever served the seventeenth earl–a real distinction, considering the Elizabethan rogues and hooligans who at one time or another wore the livery of the blue boar.

Yorke first gained notice on the side of the Catholic rebels in the Northern Uprising of 1569. Forgiven for his treason, three years later he fought with English Protestant forces in the Dutch wars of independence. Lieutenant Yorke (the very rank IAGO aspires to) inspired suggestive rhymes by his colleagues in arms about both his fearlessness on the battlefield and his lascivious conduct with young nuns. The seventeenth-century antiquarian William Camden recalled that Yorke was a "man of a loose and dissolute behavior and desperately audacious, famous in his time amongst the common hacksters and swaggerers as being the first that... brought into England that bold and dangerous way of foining [*thrusting*] with the rapier in dueling." (IAGO brags that he had often "yerk'd... [opponents] under the ribs.")

In the Lowlands in 1584, Lieutenant Yorke would try unsuccessfully to betray allied positions to Spain. Two years later he would try again, with astonishing results; he and another commander would sell out the English army for Spanish silver. (IAGO, a name not in any of *Othello*'s sources, may be taken from *Santiago*–St. James, the patron saint of Spain.) The strategic consequences of Yorke's sedition were, in the words of one historian, "dramatic in the extreme."

The Spaniards trusted this rabid bulldog no more than did the English.

Yorke died in 1588, reportedly by Spanish poison. Dutch patriots, still angry at his heartless treachery, would later exhume his body and hang it like a scarecrow.

The above crimes are known, chronicled, and uncontested. However, one likely malfeasance also merits attention: The man who double-crossed his very homeland for a bloodstained purse in 1586 also appears to have played the role of turncoat ten years before. At a time when de Vere's ear was being infected with allegations of his wife's misdeeds, Rowland Yorke's brother Edward was servant to the earl of Leicester. The libeler Charles Arundell–who never lacked for sensational material–in 1584 published a screed accusing the earl of Leicester of manifold crimes against his countrymen, God, and England. One such allegation reads that

> [Leicester] hath ever used to sow and nourish debate and contention between the great lords of England and their wives, in which he always showed himself a good practitioner and very diligent, knowing that according to the Italian proverb, *Nel mare turbato guadagna il pescatore,* in a troubled water the fisher gains most.... The same he attempted between the earl of Oxford and his lady, daughter of the lord treasurer of England, and all for an old grudge he bare to her father the said Lord Treasurer.

Recall that Edward Yorke's house is where de Vere and his dear and trusted servant first stayed upon returning from the Continent. Could the Yorke brothers merely have been agents of Leicester's plans to destroy the house of Cecil?

The evidence in the Shake-speare canon is mixed. Two plays feature duplicitous servants/associates (IAGO in *Othello* and IACHIMO in *Cymbeline*) acting as free and independent agents who drive their respective compatriots (OTHELLO and POSTHUMUS) into rage and jealousy against the compatriots's chaste and wrongly accused wives. These Rowland Yorke-like characters act alone. On the other hand, the jealousy subplot in *Much Ado About Nothing* originates in a conspiracy; *Much Ado*'s mischief is masterminded by DON JOHN, a military commander of the highest station. The historical sources for DON JOHN may include the actual Don John of Austria, but the character also contains more than a hint of the earl of Leicester too. *Much Ado* reveals that de Vere suspected Leicester of being the mastermind behind Yorke's treachery.

One week after returning, a discontented de Vere wrote to his father-in-law. De Vere's letter reads like HAMLET addressing POLONIUS about OPHELIA–if HAMLET had been counseled by IAGO. De Vere writes:

> Urged ... by your letters to satisfy you the sooner, I must let Your Lordship understand thus much. That is until I can better satisfy or advertise myself of some mislikes, I am not determined as touching my wife to accompany her. What they are because some are not to be spoken of or written upon as imperfections, I will not deal withal. Some that otherwise discontent me I will not blaze or publish until it please me. And last of all I mean not to weary my life anymore with such troubles and molestations as I have endured nor will I, to please Your Lordship only, discontent myself....
>
> This might have been done through private conference before and had not needed to have been the fable of the world if you would have had the patience to have understood me. But I do not know by what or whose advice it was to run that course so contrary to my will or meaning–which made her disgraced, the world raised suspicions openly that with private conference might have been more silently handled, and hath given me more greater cause to mislike.

The voice is firm and eloquent; the man, shaken and offended. It was one thing to feel a private and personal sense of embarrassment at the countess of Oxford giving birth to, for all de Vere could know, a bastard. De Vere, who had himself been accused of bastardy, would have felt this shame acutely. Such blots on the family, if properly stage-managed, could be handled with minimal difficulties. Problems of doubtful legitimacy are hardly unheard of in any aristocratic culture. However, as de Vere puts it, Burghley had made this crisis "the fable of the world." And that was the action that had gone beyond the pale.

The truth is that both parties had handled the imbroglio badly. Burghley had insisted on an immediate, public acknowledgment of Anne's virtue and Elizabeth de Vere's paternity. De Vere had refused to give it. Both men were in crisis. Burghley was ill and anxious about his daughter's position. De Vere was worn out by traveling and unnerved by his close escape from death. Neither Burghley nor de Vere had ever got on with the other, appreciated the other's strengths, or been able to abide the other's failings. This moment was the beginning of a decisive change in de Vere's life and fortunes.

Two days after sending the above letter, de Vere met Burghley face-to-face. In a memo preserved for posterity, Burghley recorded the charges leveled at him. De Vere accused his father-in-law of corresponding directly with de Vere's servants when they were in Italy, presumably to obtain clandestine intelligence of their master's activities and whereabouts. He claimed Burghley had at times stranded him without sufficient money and that Burghley had shown his son-in-law's letter, presumably the one quoted above, to the queen "of set purpose to bring him into Her Majesty's indignation." Finally, de Vere charged Lady Burghley with trying to foment an internal civil war at Wivenhoe and furthermore of wishing de Vere dead.

Contrary to the accusation of tightfistedness, Burghley replies in defense

that he'd advanced de Vere £2,700 "by the credit of the Lord Treasurer when the earl's money could not be had." Other points he does not refute, such as his alleged reading of de Vere's letter to the queen. Burghley also jots down notes to himself that suggest talking points for a confrontational conversation. "Mislikings–yea, hatreds–hath amongst many been purified in time," the old counselor writes. "[*Blank*] ought to content all his friends, except there be any that regard some present or future profit more than his own honor," reads one incomplete thought. The platitude-dispensing POLONIUS shines through. One of Burghley's chestnuts even appears to have registered with his son-in-law, although not exactly in the way the old Lord Treasurer had intended. "The greatest possession that any man can have," Burghley notes, "is honor, good name, good will of many and of the best sort." This was one bromide that did not find its way to POLONIUS's mouth. Instead, it is uttered by one of the utmost villains in all of Shake-speare.

> IAGO Good name in man and woman, dear my lord,
> Is the immediate jewel of their souls.
> Who steals my purse steals trash, 'tis something, nothing;
> 'Twas mine, 'tis his, and has been slave to thousands;
> But he that filches from me my good name
> Robs me of that which not enriches him,
> And makes me poor indeed.

For such an autobiographical artist as the earl of Oxford, extreme agony and disturbance in life ultimately provided profound inspiration. The litany detailed over the past chapter and a half represents just a sampling of the many Shake-spearean resonances to be found in the most exhaustively chronicled twelve-month period in de Vere's life, from de Vere's arrival in Venice in the late spring of 1575 to his tumultuous return to London in the late spring of 1576.

De Vere would spend the rest of his life writing about the dramatic and traumatic events of his twenty-sixth year. It's even possible to define a "spirit of '76" subcategory within the larger Shake-speare canon, embodying portions of *The Comedy of Errors, Two Gentlemen of Verona, The Merchant of Venice, The Merry Wives of Windsor, Much Ado About Nothing, Twelfth Night, All's Well That Ends Well, Measure for Measure, Hamlet, Othello, Pericles, Cymbeline, The Winter's Tale,* and *The Rape of Lucrece.* Setting aside the Shake-speare English history plays, de Vere's twenty-sixth year of life enters into slightly less than half of the canonical works of Shake-speare.

De Vere's doubts were, in fact, founded in more than mere whims and suspicions. A recently discovered March 1575 letter from the queen's physician, Richard Master, to Burghley records that a distraught Anne had tried

unsuccessfully to get the doctor to perform an abortion on her a week after her husband's departure for Italy.

> My lady [of Oxford] being here at Shrovetide [February 12–15, 1575] had dealt with me to prepare some medicines *ad menses promotiones* [to cause the menses to resume]. But I counseled her to stay awhile. Her Majesty asked me how the young lady did bear the matter. I answered that she kept it secret 4 or 5 days from all persons and that her face was much fallen and thin, with little color–and that when she was comforted and counseled to be gladsome and rejoice, she would cry, "Alas, alas! How should I rejoice, seeing he that should rejoice with me is not here, and to say truth, [I] stand in doubt whether he pass [judgment] upon me and it [*the pregnancy*] or not."

Four months into her pregnancy at the time she sought out Dr. Master, Anne was not ignorant of her condition. (If she thought her periods had ceased for a reason other than pregnancy, why would she have made the uproar she did when Dr. Master counseled her to "stay awhile"?) When the doctor notes that she requested an emmenagogue–an agent to introduce menstruation–he is euphemistically dancing around the fact that Anne wanted him to concoct one or more abortifacients. Three possibilities thus emerge: Either de Vere was the father and Anne was convinced he wouldn't believe it, or she wanted an annulment of their marriage just as much as he evidently did, or de Vere's suspicions were correct.

Anne's private conference with Dr. Master was probably at least part of the incendiary information whispered into de Vere's ear in Paris that caused him to return home in such a huff. The author would mull over his wife's conclave with Dr. Master for years. De Vere's anxiety over its causes and consequences surfaces in *Hamlet.*

OPHELIA, in her distracted state, is often found singing bawdy songs and reciting tales of copulation. ("Young men will do't if they come to't;/By Cock they are to blame.") HAMLET's feigned madness includes a confrontation with OPHELIA's father containing the immortal lines

> HAMLET For if the sun breed maggots in a dead dog, being a good kissing carrion–Have you a daughter? . . . Let her not walk i' th' sun. Conception is a blessing, but as your daughter may conceive, friend, look to 't.

OPHELIA ultimately drowns beneath a white willow tree–whose flowers were a known abortifacient. Before meeting her watery fate, she distributes flowers and herbs to the Danish courtiers. At least four of OPHELIA's flowers were

used as antifertility drugs in the sixteenth century: rosemary, violets, fennel, and rue. Rue was the most powerful abortifacient listed in contemporary herbal medicinal literature. OPHELIA gives rue to QUEEN GERTRUDE but also keeps some for herself.

> OPHELIA [*to GERTRUDE*] There's rue for you, and here's some for me. We may call it herb of grace a' Sundays. You may wear your rue with a difference.

Difference was a heraldic term, according to the *Oxford English Dictionary,* "used to distinguish a junior member or branch of a family from the chief line." For instance, the child of an earl would wear a mark of difference on his or her coat of arms. Wearing one's rue with a difference, on a symbolic level, could be read as a heraldic hint at an attempted abortion.

De Vere no longer knew whom he could trust. In *Cymbeline,* once the young husband POSTHUMUS becomes convinced of his wife's supposed infidelity, his next soliloquy begins by calling to mind "that most venerable man which I did call my father." De Vere's distant father, Earl John, probably did serve as a security blanket in the author's imagination–as that deified mental construction KING HAMLET is to PRINCE HAMLET.

But in the land of the living, de Vere appears to have rested his faith in a most dishonest man.

Rowland Yorke remains not only the likely immediate instigator of de Vere's crisis but also–if rumors of de Vere's bisexuality are to be believed–a possible channel for de Vere's sexual frustrations. As de Vere's marriage withered and shriveled, Yorke remained at his master's side. It is possible that some closer relationship, be it sexually charged or sexually sublimated, existed between the two men. Numerous modern scholars find OTHELLO and IAGO's deadly dance of lies and misplaced trust resonating with homosexual overtones.

Throughout the summer of 1576, de Vere continued to feud with his in-laws and live apart from his wife. Burghley continued scratching out memos and notes, which he retained in his family archives. Burghley reported that de Vere's unkindnesses seemed "grounded upon untrue reports of others," while these "same untruths are still continued in secret reports to others." The queen had been pleading with de Vere to reach a swift and peaceful resolution to a dispute that was beginning to consume the attentions of her chief advisor. On July 13, de Vere wrote another letter to Burghley from his "lodging at Charing Cross," in Westminster. Yorke House, near Charing Cross, appears to have been where de Vere now called home.

De Vere noted a verbal agreement he'd struck with Burghley to keep

Anne away from him for now and for her father not to press their case. But, de Vere notes, he'd learned that the day after making this deal, Burghley was about to break it. As in the letter from three months before, de Vere continues to sound the refrain of the abandoned child: I'm looking out for number one now. In de Vere's words:

> Now I understand that Your Lordship means this day to bring [Anne] to the court, and that you mean afterward to prosecute the cause with further hope. Now if Your Lordship shall do so, then shall you take more in hand than I have or can promise you. For always I have and will still prefer mine own content before others, and observing that wherein I may temper or moderate for your sake, I will do most willingly. Wherefore I shall desire Your Lordship not to take advantage of my promise till you have given me some honorable assurance by letter or word of your performance of the condition–which being observed, I could yield, as it is my duty, to Her Majesty's request and bear with your fatherly desire towards her. Otherwise, all that is done can stand to none effect.

The terms are now starker. De Vere had set forth his bottom line: "Always I have and will still prefer mine own content before others." Also, he would only compromise if the queen ordered him to. Burghley commanded untold political power over his son-in-law, but he could not command de Vere's actions.

De Vere may well have recognized that, in a court where stories commanded the queen's attention and the queen commanded ultimate power, de Vere's blossoming talent was his own road to power. As HAMLET warns POLONIUS:

> Good my lord, will you see the players well bestow'd? Do you hear, let them be well us'd, for they are the abstract and brief chronicles of the time. After your death you were better have a bad epitaph than their ill report while you live.

As de Vere lamented the life he had returned to, his laments of years past had only just appeared in print. The work of the late Richard Edwards, the director and choirmaster whom de Vere had met during his youth, had finally been issued. Edwards's 1576 verse anthology *The Paradise of Dainty Devices* was a best seller. It would go through at least eight editions into the seventeenth century. "E.O." was now a published lyricist, with eight song lyrics in *Paradise;* one was given two different musical settings.

All but two of de Vere's verses in *The Paradise* belonged to the genre known as the Complaint–a form he would ultimately master in the Shakespeare poem *A Lover's Complaint.*

Here is one early experiment in the form:

Not Attaining to His Desire, He Complaineth

I am not as I seem to be,
Nor when I smile, I am not glad.
A thrall, although you count me free,
I, most in mirth, most pensive sad.
I smile to shade my bitter spite
As Hannibal that saw in sight
His country soil with Carthage town
By Roman force, defaced down.

And Caesar that presented was
With noble Pompey's princely head,
As 'twere some judge to rule the case
A flood of tears he seemed to shed.
Although in deed, it sprung of joy,
Yet others thought it was annoy.
Thus contraries be used I find
Of wise to cloak the covert mind.

Aye, Hannibal, that smiles for grief,
And let you Caesar's tears suffice.
The one that laughs at his mischief,
The other all for joy that cries.
I smile to see me scorned so;
You weep for joy to see me woe.
And I a heart by love slain dead
Present in place of Pompey's head.

O cruel hap and hard estate
That forceth me to love my foe.
Accursed be so foul a fate,
My choice for to profix it so.
So long to fight with secret sore
And find no secret salve therefore.
Some purge their pain by plaint I find
But I in vain do breathe my wind.
Finis. E.O.

De Vere wrote this poem when he was still a teenager; Richard Edwards had died in 1566, ten years before his *Paradise of Dainty Devices* was finally published. De Vere's teenaged soliloquy quarrels with fate, dissembles behind a courtly countenance, loves out of its proper sphere, and conspires with heartrending frustration. In his sometimes halting verse–lines are still padded with filler like "saw in sight"–the teenager had nevertheless set down the first hints of character sketches that would later mature into OTHELLO (comparing himself to a North African hero who "smile[s] to shade my bitter spite"), HAMLET and PRINCE HAL ("I am not as I seem to be"), BERTRAM ("Cruel hap . . . that forceth me to love my foe"), and ROMEO ("So long to fight with secret sore/And find no secret salve therefore").

When he first saw *The Paradise of Dainty Devices* in the bookstalls outside St. Paul's Cathedral sometime in 1576, de Vere probably shook his head at the sixteenth-year-old kid who had thought he knew adversity. The "howling hounds of hell"–to use another "E.O." clunker from *Paradise*–were now baying like never before. But this time he needed a medium more complex than song lyrics to, as the teenaged earl had put it, "cloak the covert mind."

Taking his cue from what he had witnessed in Venice and Siena, de Vere would begin to stage his complaints in the form of commedia dell'arte, transformed and translated for English audiences.

On a field north of the Bishopsgate entrance to the City of London, a team of entrepreneurs were just opening the first custom-built playhouse in England. Two brothers-in-law named James Burbage and John Brayne had erected an open-air building they called simply The Theatre. A men's troupe sponsored by the earl of Leicester took over The Theatre and began staging works for public audiences–which meant that propaganda favoring Leicester would be well represented at Elizabeth's play-loving court come Christmastime.

As in Venice, the season from the day after Christmas to Shrove Tuesday (Mardi Gras) was the high point of the Elizabethan theatrical calendar, when the troupes that had been conducting staged rehearsals all year would entertain Her Majesty at court. On the night of December 30, 1576, The Earl of Leicester's Men presented an interlude for the queen and the highest-ranking peers in England called *The History of the Collier*. In Elizabethan slang, *collier* meant "cheat" or "dirty trickster," so through this play Leicester was probably grilling his lifelong rival, Lord Burghley.

The play does not survive–indeed, most plays that were performed at Queen Elizabeth's court are now supposedly lost. All that remains is a record in the queen's royal payment books of the title of the play performed, the date and place where it was enacted, and the name of the troupe that played it. Yet, there may be more to a few of these records than first meets the eye. It is the contention of this book that de Vere wrote some of these "lost" courtly interludes. Then, during the 1590s and early 1600s, he–probably with the assistance and input of others in his immediate circle of family, secretaries, and friends–rewrote these plays for the public stage. These revised

texts constitute the central part of what is today called the Shake-speare canon.

Much of Shake-speare is thus a palimpsest, popular dramas refashioned from works that were originally written for an elite audience in the 1570s and '80s.

The dramatic troupe that de Vere enjoyed closest access to is the children's company of choirboys from London's St. Paul's Cathedral. Under the supervision and direction of Sebastian Westcote, Paul's Boys had staged plays for the court since 1552, when Elizabeth was still a princess. And during the court revels season of 1575–76, for the first time in more than a decade, Westcote had the privilege of presenting multiple entertainments for the queen.

On the evening of New Year's Day, Westcote led his troupe in a play titled *A Historie of Error.* Here, one suspects, is an early prototype of Shakespeare's *The Comedy of Errors.* As the literary historian Allison Gaw observed, *The Comedy of Errors* "is certainly a rewriting of pre-Shakespearean material, which may, with fair assurance, be identified with *A Historie of Error* played before the queen at Hampton Court by the Children of Paul's on January 1, 1577."

Today, it is hard to imagine preteen actors bringing to life stage productions of professional quality. Yet, paradoxically, where modern society might see child actors as a burden that would severely inhibit a playwright's expressiveness, Elizabethan children's troupes enjoyed liberties that were simply unavailable to adult players.

Elizabethan authors had to carefully disguise their criticism of contemporary events or authority figures for fear of censure, imprisonment, or worse. One of the simplest ways to present controversial material was to use child actors. From the mouths of babes, some otherwise scandalous words enjoyed the protective cloak of presumed youthful innocence. An adult calling the queen of England a harlot or the Lord Treasurer a backstabbing Janus could be thrown in jail. But depending on the craftiness of the playwright, a child could say the same thing in front of the entire court and be applauded. "Children and fools speak truth" was a popular bromide of the time. Three plays enacted by Elizabethan children's companies cited this very proverb–reminding the audience the special license granted to a dramatist writing for boys.

In the case of *A History of Error,* de Vere was probably inviting controversy by dramatizing his own imbroglio with the house of Cecil. The crux of *The Comedy* (and, one suspects, *History*) *of Errors* is marriage into a powerful family–the chief "error" of the title–that never should have been. De Vere the misunderstood husband becomes ANTIPHOLUS OF EPHESUS, married to a "fond fool" of an impatient wife, ADRIANA.

The twist that turns this melodrama into comedy is that ANTIPHOLUS has a twin brother, whom he doesn't know exists. The freewheeling ANTIPHOLUS

OF SYRACUSE falls in love with ADRIANA's placid and idealized sister, LUCIANA. Mix-ups soon follow, leading down the path to pure farce. Almost every element of *The Comedy of Errors* plot is stolen from commedia dell'arte scenarios of mistaken identity. But, psychologically, the conceit is entirely de Vere's own. The author has performed an experiment he would repeat many times throughout his career: He has splintered himself into more than one character. *The Comedy of Errors'* two couples are, in fact, the author's and his wife's egos cut in half. (*LUCIANA* roughly translates to "the light one" and *ADRIANA* "the dark one": Anne Cecil as de Vere first saw her and as she had become.)

A journey at sea, like the one de Vere had taken starting in his twenty-fifth year, frames *The Comedy of Errors.* Not coincidentally, the brothers ANTIPHOLI are also twenty-five.

Errors was the author's first attempt at broaching the topic of his at times pathological behavior toward his wife and her family. It's comedy in denial, oblivious to its own predispositions; an appropriate subtitle would be *What, Me Jealous?* The play also represents de Vere's first staged attempt to cauterize and suture his own emotional wounds.

The evening of New Year's Day 1577 may have marked the first time Elizabeth truly recognized the talents of her temperamental courtier. If *History* is *Comedy,* it was also the first time Shake-speare got away onstage with what other playwrights could only dream of. De Vere held his satirical license aloft when he portrayed Queen Elizabeth as the fat kitchen wench NELL. Courtly flatterers often personified the queen as a goddess, sometimes going so far as to portray Her Majesty as England itself; NELL is jokingly anatomized as a map of England and its dominions.

ANTIPHOLUS OF SYRACUSE What's her name?

DROMIO OF SYRACUSE Nell, sir; but her name and three quarters, that's an "El" and three quarters [*syllables*], will not measure her from hip to hip.

ANT. In what part of her body stands Ireland?

DRO. Marry, sir, in her buttocks, I found it out by the bogs.

ANT. Where Scotland?

DRO. I found it by the barrenness, hard in the palm of the hand.

ANT. Where France?

DRO. In her forehead, arm'd and reverted, making war against her heir. . . .

ANT. Where stood Belgia, the Netherlands?

DRO. O, sir, I did not look so low.

A year in Italy had transformed de Vere, twenty-six-year-old chronic pain in the ass, into a chronic pain in the ass with an astonishing capacity for court comedy.

At Whitehall Palace on Shrove Tuesday (February 19), Westcote's boys capped the season with an encore performance for the court. The palace's 4,500-square-foot Great Hall was to be illuminated one last time during the 1576–77 theatrical season. The chandeliers bearing dozens of candles hung overhead, casting their beams both downward onto the stage and upward into the banqueting hall's great "marble heaven." The queen's account books list the title of Westcote's masque as *The History of Titus and Gisippus,* an ancient story of friendship. It is also known to be one of two principal source texts for Shake-speare's *Two Gentlemen of Verona.*

Two Gentlemen features two grooms readily recognized as alter egos of the author. It also features the daughter of the most powerful man in the land, a representation of de Vere's wife Anne. *Two Gentlemen* splits the author's ego down the middle and stages his marital strife as a love triangle plot borrowed from the commedia dell'arte.

Two Gentlemen is ostensibly a tale of courtly love and courtly friendship set at odds. The titular gentlemen, PROTEUS and VALENTINE, are close friends whose amorous interests begin to overlap. Scholarly commentary on this early Shake-speare play focuses primarily on the codes of Renaissance friendship and courtly love. However, the affair most curiously chronicled in *Two Gentlemen* involves neither woman nor man. Instead, the most unlikely love affair in the play is with the pen. PROTEUS and VALENTINE are each at their most virile and impressive as writers. The otherwise emasculated VALENTINE, for instance, briefly comes into his own when his beloved (SILVIA) asks him to compose verses. In so doing, VALENTINE makes a discovery: An author writes not for his lover's nor his friend's nor even his sovereign's contentment. He writes for himself.

VALENTINE Please you, I'll write Your Ladyship another.
SILVIA And when it's writ, for my sake read it over,
And if it please you, so; if not, why, so.
VALENTINE If it please me, madam? What then?
SILVIA Why, if it please you, take it for your labor;
And so good-morrow, servant.

VALENTINE's page, SPEED, watches this exchange and marks how fond a folly he has just witnessed. "O excellent device, was there ever heard a better," he asks, "That my master, being scribe, to himself should write the letter?"

Since the summer of 1577, de Vere's younger sister Mary had been on her own quest for self-definition. With her father now dead, the immediate decision of whom she would wed lay in the hands of her big brother. (The queen's consent

was ultimately needed for any aristocratic marriage.) But Mary, as strong willed as her brother, had wedding plans of her own.

Mary had been advocating for a husband that neither her family nor her proposed husband's family nor the queen favored. Peregrine Bertie, later Lord Willoughby, was twenty-three years old, a well-known soldier and swashbuckler who did mostly as he pleased and had little time or patience for courtly etiquette. Courtiers to him were mere "reptilia," as he liked to call them. Bertie once observed that he was about as comfortable in their presence as a lion on a feather bed.

On the other hand, when it came to defending his honor, Bertie obeyed the courtier's rulebook to the letter. This tightly wound ball of temperament did not tolerate affronts from anyone short of royalty. In 1570, Bertie got into a heated tiff with the earl of Kent, stating, "I must prepare a rough wedge for a rough knot, for I cannot perceive . . . that many others have regard to small fire-sparks until they grow out into dangerous flames." In later years, during a military expedition to the Lowlands, a gout-stricken Bertie received a challenge from a Catholic lord. "Though he was lame of his hands and his feet," writes one chronicler, "yet [Bertie] would meet him with a rapier in his teeth"!

Bertie had taken a shine to Mary de Vere sometime during the first half of 1577. And the twenty-three-year-old woman returned her pugnacious paramour's affections. Known for her sharp tongue, Mary was a headstrong woman whose heart pumped choler, the same fiery stuff that ran through the veins of her proud brother.

But the earl of Oxford didn't like Bertie. And Bertie's mother, the duchess of Suffolk, disliked both Mary and her brother. The previous year there had been a rumored attempt to betrothe Mary to one of her brother's acquaintances (Gerald Fitzgerald, Lord Garrat), and on the other side of the aisle, the antipapist duchess of Suffolk had tried to arrange for her son to marry a nice girl from a stable Protestant family. But neither Mary nor her beau, Peregrine, would brook a match other than their own.

The mother of the (would-be) groom was distraught. She wrote two letters to Lord Burghley during the summer of 1577 expressing her anguish. In the first, dated July 2, she noted that she'd heard how de Vere had "used you [*Burghley*] and your daughter so evil that I could not require you to deal in it."

The duchess also noted:

> It is very true that my wise son has gone very far with my lady Mary Vere, I fear too far to turn. I must say to you in counsel what I have said to her plainly, that I had rather he had matched in any other place. . . . If she should prove like her brother, if an empire follows her [*even with a tremendous dowry*], I should be sorry to match so. She said that she could not rule her brother's tongue nor help the rest of his faults. . . . And seeing

> that it was so far forth between my son and her, she deserved my goodwill and asked no more.

One can imagine Mary de Vere's frustration with her older brother. Bertie's bullheadedness was matched only by the earl of Oxford's own temperamental streak. Try as she might, Mary had no way to "rule her brother's tongue."

All available indicators would seem to doom this unlikely match. Bertie wrote a letter to Mary observing "how uncourteously I am dealt with by my lord your brother, who, as I hear, bandeth against me and sweareth my death, which I fear not, nor force not, but lest his displeasure withdraw your affections from me." Thankfully, de Vere and Bertie never took their quarrels beyond exchanging threats and puffing their chests. Throughout the autumn, no matter what anyone else said or did, the Bertie–Vere marriage match inched forward.

On October 28, amid Mary's nuptial negotiations, de Vere attended the wedding of the duke of Norfolk's youngest son, William Howard, at the Howard family property of Audley End in Essex. The adolescent Howard, not even fourteen, had been promised to his child bride since just before Norfolk's beheading–an awkward arrangement all too familiar to de Vere. Since the trauma of Norfolk's execution, de Vere probably cared more about the betterment of Norfolk's fatherless heirs than he did about the baby Elizabeth de Vere, an infant of dubious legitimacy.

Betterment, however, is not what William Howard was in for. The autumn air cooled a wedding party already chilled by the prospect of a child bride, Elizabeth Dacre, approaching the altar without an inheritance. (Both the Dacre and the Howard clans would squander many years fighting over who would get what properties and titles.) The groom's eldest brother was married to the bride's elder sister, so the coming years of litigious feuds would be burdened by the squabbling of two pairs of siblings. As de Vere wished the juvenile couple all the happiness that Norfolk would have wanted for his youngest boy, he must also have said a little prayer for these innocent children who knew not what kind of whirlwinds they were summoning.

The trials of three orphaned sons, the eldest and youngest of whom marry into the same family, would become the main plot of *As You Like It*–a play that was probably finalized in 1600 when a battered William Howard finally emerged from behind an accumulated mountain of affidavits. Twenty-three years after exchanging rings with his spouse, Will Howard in 1600 finally won the inheritance that should have transferred to him and his wife on their wedding night. De Vere witnessed the whole soap opera, beginning with the fateful "I do" on that October afternoon in 1577.

Another problematic wedding was probably the last thing de Vere wanted to concern himself with. Both he and the queen refused to make a decision about Mary and Peregrine's fate, as reflected in a November 1577 letter to the

earl of Rutland, which notes that "the marriage of the Lady Mary Vere is deferred until after Christmas, for as yet neither has Her Majesty given license nor has the earl of Oxford wholly assented thereto." The 1577–78 revels season at court, for which most of the records are now lost, began with no resolution to either the earl of Oxford's troubled marriage or his sister's troubling marriage proposal.

Moreover, those laying impediments to Mary and Peregrine's wedding were now laying other plots. Peregrine's mother, a willful matriarch who was as persevering as her son was stubborn, had by December hatched a plan to intervene in the domestic dispute between Anne Cecil de Vere and her estranged husband. The duchess's method was both devious and simple. She sought simply to bring the infant Elizabeth de Vere in plain view of the child's erstwhile father. "I will bring in the child as though it were some other child of my friend's, and we shall see how nature will work in him to like [her]–and [we'll] tell him it is his own after," the duchess wrote to Lord Burghley. The busybody duchess added, recognizing the mercurial nature of her prey, "I would wish speed that [de Vere] might be taken in his good mood. I thank God I am at this present in his good favor."

However, the duchess did not find her subject in his good mood. Her appeal to pathos did nothing to weaken de Vere's conviction that the infant was a bastard. It was only years later, after the duchess was dead and gone (and de Vere and Peregrine were fast friends), that the author paid homage to the iron-willed wench who dared stand up to him and call him the megalomaniac he was. PAULINA in *The Winter's Tale*–a character found in none of *The Winter's Tale*'s sources–performs precisely the same futile errand that Peregrine Bertie's mother played in de Vere's life in December of 1577. PAULINA presents LEONTES with his own daughter, in the face of his vicious and deadly threats. And yet, with a doggedness characteristic of the Bertie family, PAULINA refuses to acknowledge LEONTES's legitimacy as a ruler, as a husband, or even as a sane individual.

> PAULINA I'll not call you tyrant;
> But this most cruel usage of your queen
> (Not able to produce more accusation
> Than your own weak-hing'd fancy) something savors
> Of tyranny, and will ignoble make you,
> Yea, scandalous to the world.

De Vere was, when he ultimately wrote *The Winter's Tale,* clearly impressed by this woman who had had no right to do what she did–but did it anyway simply because it was the right thing to do. Katherine (Bertie) Willoughby, dowager duchess of Suffolk, survives through the ages in *The Winter's Tale*'s PAULINA, a character who, in the words of one critic, "is one of the rare women in

Elizabethan drama who actively defies the male authority and, in the world of romance at least, is allowed to survive."

The fall and winter of 1577 was an ominous time for a man to wed or to contend with a (seemingly) unfaithful wife. Astrologically hypersensitive as a society, most Elizabethans saw dire consequences in the comet that blazed across the sky from November through January 1578. Even the most careful and scientific observations of the comet, by a colleague of Johannes Kepler in Germany, still treated it as a "new and horrible prodigy" whose presence in the sky forecast great and bloody conflicts for the peoples of Earth.

So when Peregrine Bertie and Mary de Vere finally did win the battle of wills–they wed sometime between Christmas of 1577 and March of 1578–de Vere must have marveled at how prophetically the celestial fires above reflected the terrestrial conflagrations below. In coming to friendly terms with this bullish family that were now his in-laws, de Vere apparently began plotting a comedy that recounted the wooing and wedding of these two obstinate and most unlikely lovers. Peregrine Bertie became the soldier PETRUCHIO, while, probably in homage to Peregrine's equally shrewish mother, Mary de Vere became KATHARINA (KATE). And that same comet that shone on the couple's fiery courtship makes its own cameo appearance:

> PETRUCHIO Gentles, methinks you frown,
> And wherefore gaze this goodly company,
> As if they saw some wondrous monument,
> Some comet or unusual prodigy?

The play is, of course, *The Taming of the Shrew*. Its first recorded performance in its Shake-spearean form was in London in June 1594. But this five-act comedy probably originated as a comedic masque at court at a time when the memory of this disputatious duo's rocky courtship was still fresh in everyone's minds.

The numerous parallels between de Vere's sister and brother-in-law and *The Taming of the Shrew*'s infamous couple leave little room for doubt as to the play's original biographical source. PETRUCHIO is a swashbuckler who proudly recounts how he has "in a pitched battle heard loud alarums, neighing steeds, and trumpets' clang" His florid style of speech, like Peregrine's, is "extempore, from my mother-wit." PETRUCHIO is a superlative swordsman–a man who seizes his bride and tells her he can shield her "against a million." Like Peregrine, PETRUCHIO "tells you flatly what his mind is" and disdains all ceremoniousness: *Shrew*'s wild-eyed groom abruptly departs before his own wedding reception begins, and when he and KATE attend her sister's wedding, it is only in "honest mean habiliments." Both Peregrine's and PETRUCHIO's weddings take place in a drunken haze: Five hundred gallons of wine flowed at Peregrine's nuptial bacchanals. PETRUCHIO debases the communion wine by proposing a toast before he partakes–a sacrilege one might expect of the bull-in-a-china-shop Peregrine and a zealously Protestant family like the Berties. And both Peregrine and PETRUCHIO rule their retainers with an iron fist.

Like her brother, Mary was known for her quick temper and harsh tongue. As PETRUCHIO says of KATE, so might Peregrine have said of his bride: "I am as peremptory as she proud minded. And where two raging fires meet together, they do consume the thing that feeds their fury." In a letter to the earl of Leicester, Peregrine's mother complains of her great grief at her son's "unlucky choice of a fair lady [foreign] to full manners." Mary, she claims, fumed that the duchess was out to kill her! These were, in the duchess's words, "wicked and most malicious slanders"–and since nothing ever became of these supposed plots, history sides with the duchess.

The newlyweds' household proved as much a tinderbox as KATE and PETRUCHIO's bridal suite. Soon after Peregrine and Mary's nuptials, Anne Cecil's brother Thomas wrote of the connubial pyrotechnics he had witnessed during a recent visit. Peregrine's mother, he said, had visited the couple "to appease certain unkindness, grown between her son and his wife." The writer gives no specifics to the nature of the couple's quarrel, but he does venture to predict the outcome: "I think my lady Mary will be beaten with the rod which heretofore she prepared for others." A more succinct plot summary of *The Taming of the Shrew* one could not hope to find. However, as with the resolution of *The Shrew*, "the early differences between the young couple were soon adjusted," one historian writes, "and [Mary] proved a most loyal, capable wife."

Mary and Peregrine's exploits are further staged to great comic effect in *Twelfth Night*. In fact, one can think of *Twelfth Night*'s SIR TOBY BELCH and his mate MARIA as PETRUCHIO and his "tamed" KATE a few years into their marriage. In MARIA's first scene onstage, she is greeted, "Bless you, fair shrew." The similarities are not merely nominal: like MARIA, lady-in-waiting to the unmarried but romantically entangled OLIVIA, Mary was a lady-in-waiting to Queen Elizabeth. Like both Mary and the "tamed" KATE, *Twelfth Night*'s MARIA is ultimately loyal to her man, inspiring BELCH to boast, "She's a beagle true bred and one that adores me."

SIR TOBY BELCH is a mischief-making, dueling, drinking, quarrelsome swordsman–an exaggeration of Peregrine Bertie's persona at court, but not by much. And Bertie's close friendship with Sir Philip Sidney is hilariously spoofed in BELCH and SIR ANDREW AGUECHEEK's bumbling and roistering camaraderie. The author portrays Sidney/AGUECHEEK considerably less sympathetically than he does Bertie/BELCH. AGUECHEEK feigns sophistication but can scarcely speak without malapropisms. BELCH gets into two swordfights–both of which are extensions of a duel that the cowardly AGUECHEEK has shirked. TOBY BELCH is a superior scholar, AGUECHEEK a shallow and dense carpet knight; BELCH is a cunning trickster, AGUECHEEK a "clodpole."

De Vere's new brother-in-law had become a prime source of comic

inspiration. But Peregrine Bertie's most important role in de Vere's life was yet to come. Bertie would, in only a couple of years, serve as his brother-in-law's eyes and ears in a famous foreign court, on an honored assignment of the sort that would cause PETRUCHIO to stand at attention and BELCH to sober up–at least long enough to greet a new king before running off and getting drunk with him.

By the time of his twenty-eighth birthday, in April 1578, Edward de Vere was falling out of love with court life and intrigues. Perhaps the tempests that beset his marriage had pelted him too long. Perhaps the Italian Renaissance had awakened him to a new world of art and culture that the boorish, porridge-sopping homebodies at Elizabeth's court did not appreciate. Perhaps he just wanted to try his hand at something beyond royal flattery, the common currency of the Elizabethan courtier. The previous December, Peregrine Bertie's mother (now part of de Vere's extended family), had written in a letter to Lord Burghley that she'd learned "[de Vere] is about to buy a house here in London about Watling Street, and not to continue a courtier as he hath done."

Watling Street was a commercial thoroughfare in the center of London, home to numerous woolen clothes retailers ("drapers"). Many printers and publishers also hailed from this neighborhood, because St. Paul's Churchyard, the biggest bookselling area in London, was nearby. A couple of blocks to the northeast stood the "Long Shop" near the church of St. Mildred in the Poultry, where a young printer's assistant named Anthony Munday was learning his trade. Munday had signed on in 1576 for an eight-year-long apprenticeship; soon, however, Munday would be working for a literary earl with a flair for the dramatic.

Although de Vere's attendance on the queen and her "reptilia" may indeed have been waning at the time, de Vere the classical courtier–the liberal-minded man of munificence as defined by Castiglione–was well and thriving. Like TIMON OF ATHENS before his liquid assets ran dry, de Vere still understood no form of fiscal restraint. Increasing numbers of rogues and worthies swarmed around him, and de Vere funded them all with abandon. Perhaps the earl's single biggest financial venture came during this period.

At the time, there was an ongoing search for the Northwest Passage to the Pacific, an ice-free trade route to India and China. If such a thing had actually existed, investing in its exploration would have yielded great financial returns. It would also have been a geopolitical coup for England, as Spanish- and Portuguese-controlled territories in South America and Africa made southern passages to the Orient treacherous for English ships. De Vere performed his courtly role as venture investor in expeditions that, ideally, could enrich both his purse and England's economic and colonial future.

The expeditions did neither.

In March of 1577, Elizabeth appointed the merchant Michael Lok governor for life of a new corporation, the Cathay Company. Two months later Lok sent his admiral, Martin Frobisher, with three ships into the Meta Incognita (the unknown boundary), which Frobisher's team had initially explored the year before. The Meta Incognita is today in northeastern Canada, near the inlet to Hudson's Bay.

Frobisher's second expedition, in which de Vere did not invest, returned to English shores in September 1577 with two hundred tons of ore, which Lok thought contained gold. (It was only pyrite, fool's gold.) Frobisher's men had also captured two adult Eskimos and one infant and had brought them back to England to show to the queen. These North American aborigines did not survive long in London. But even after their death, their cadavers evidently continued to fascinate the English aborigines. In *The Tempest,* the Shake-speare play most concerned with the New World and the people in it, the clown TRINCULO marvels at Englishmen who "will not give a doit [*one eighth of a penny*] to relieve a lame beggar, [but] they will lay out ten to see a dead Indian."

In 1578, lured by the promise of both gold and golden waterways to the Pacific, investors lined up to finance another expedition to the northwest. With a mission plan that included establishing a base camp to continue mining and searching for an Oriental passage, Frobisher pitched an ambitious itinerary that appealed to the adventurer in de Vere. De Vere wrote a memo in fluent legalese to the team four days before they were to set sail.

> After my very hearty commendations understanding of the wise proceeding and orderly dealing for the containing of the voyage for the discovery of Cathay by the Northwest, which this bearer, my friend Mr. Frobisher, hath already very honorably attempted, and is now eftsoons to be employed for the better achieving thereof, and the rather induced as well for the great liking Her Majesty hath to have the same passage discovered, as also for the special good favor I bear Mr. Frobisher, to offer unto you to be an adventurer therein for the sum of £1,000 or more, if you like to admit thereof, which sum or sums upon your certificate of admittance, I will enter into bond, shall be paid for that use unto you, upon Michaelmas day next coming.

De Vere also bought out £2,000 of Lok's shares in the adventure, making his £3,000 bond the single largest investment in the enterprise.

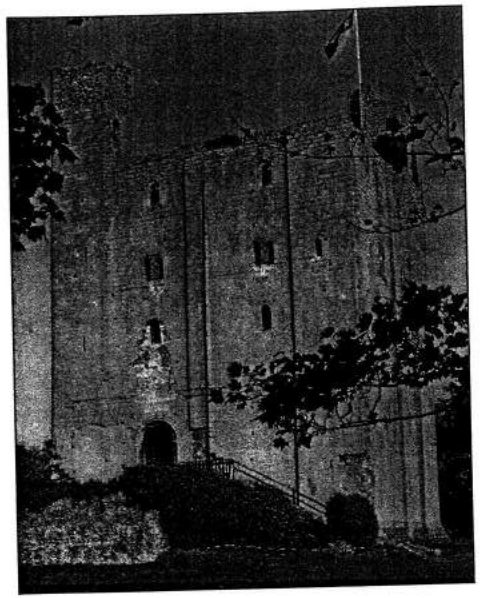
Frobisher named his landing site Queen Elizabeth's Foreland and a prominent hill on the island Mount Oxford. Nearby inlets he dubbed Leicester Point and Hatton's Headland. The names didn't stick. Queen Elizabeth's Foreland is now known as Resolution Island in the Canadian province of Nunavut; Mount Oxford is now, appropriately, an unnamed eminence.

In more ways than one, the expedition was a failure. This time the ships faced powerful storms and massive ice floes, ruining the food stocks and prefabricated shelters they had brought to set up the explorers' outpost. They could do nothing but mine the ore, twelve hundred tons of which they returned to England. Some of this worthless rock can still be seen in Dartford on the Lower Thames, where Frobisher had set up smelting works to extract his quarry's ostensible riches. Frobisher and his investors soon discovered, however, that they were ruined.

Yet, all was not lost. De Vere would later use his humbling experience as failed financial speculator for his literary endeavors. In *The Merchant of Venice,* the munificent ANTONIO takes out a 3,000-ducat bond with the financier SHYLOCK–a name that is a tip of the hat to Michael Lok. But when ANTONIO discovers that his shipping ventures have proven disastrous, he has no choice but to default on his bond, setting in motion the Shake-spearean plot sequence that derives from other sources.

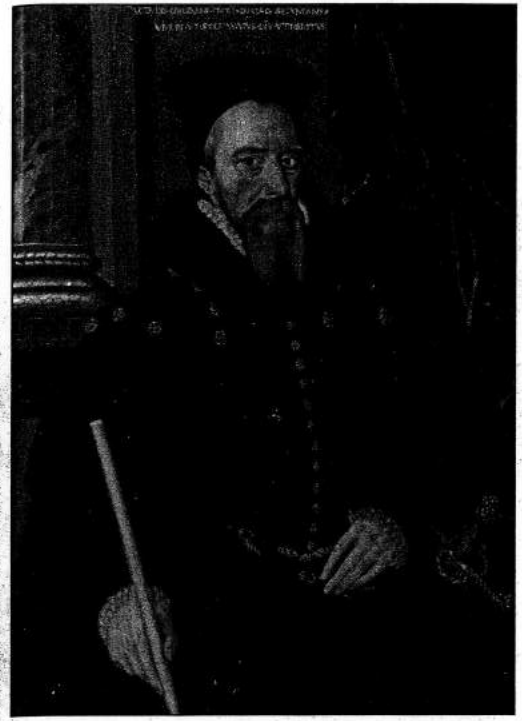
Though de Vere had been badly burned with his £3,000 bond–he was never, so far as is known, able to pay it all back–he would sink yet more money into Northwest Passage expeditions in 1584 and '85. These latter expenditures came at a time when de Vere was arguably developing the story line for *Hamlet.* With an addiction for investing in Frobisher-like enterprises, de Vere could certainly claim, as does the Danish prince, that he was "but mad north-northwest."

Closeups of the "Ashbourne Portrait of Shakespeare" and the "Wellbeck Portrait" of a twenty-five-year-old Edward de Vere (1575). The Ashbourne, four centuries old, first gained notice as a "Shakespeare" portrait in 1847. It has since been discovered to be an overpainted image of someone else. Although many orthodox scholars today believe the Ashbourne's original sitter to be a mayor of London named Hugh Hamersley, the strong resemblance to the Wellbeck argues another thesis: Beneath the "Shakespeare" veneer lies Edward de Vere. For more on the Ashbourne controversy, see this book's Appendix D.

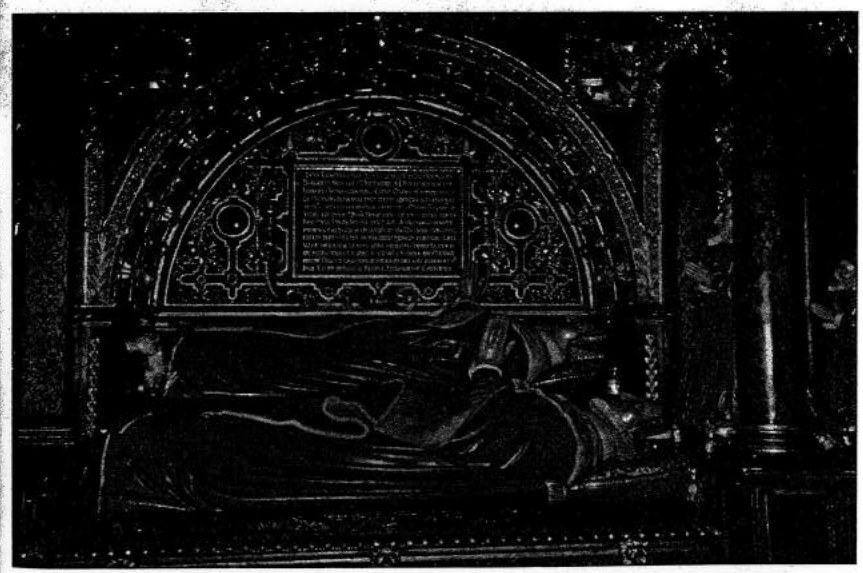


Castle Hedingham in Essex, the ancient family seat where earls of Oxford had resided since c. 1140 and where Edward de Vere spent part of his youth.

An aerial view of sixteenth century London as seen from the west: Fleet River (aka "Fleet Ditch") is in the immediate foreground, with Ludgate and St. Paul's just beyond. In the distance, spanning the Thames, is London Bridge.



Sir William Cecil painted in the 1560s by or after a portrait painted by Arnold van Brounckhorst. In 1561, Cecil was appointed master of the queen's Court of Wards and Liveries; ten years later, Elizabeth would elevate him to the peerage, styling him the first Baron Burghley.



The tomb of Anne Cecil (d. 1588) and her mother Mildred Cecil, baroness of Burghley (d. 1589) at Westminster Abbey.

The copy of Titian's painting *Venus and Adonis* that was in Titian's Venice studio in 1575; Shake-speare's 1593 poem *Venus and Adonis* depicts the mythological couple in the same idiosyncratic terms as does Titian–from the desperate and clawing goddess to the heedless hunter wearing a "bonnet [that] hides his angry brow."

Henry Wriothesley, third earl of Southampton, as painted during his imprisonment in the Tower of London between 1601 and 1603. The Latin motto pictured near Southampton's left shoulder reads *In vinculis invictus*– "Unconquered though in chains."

Anne Vavasour, a gentlewoman of Her Majesty's Bedchamber, with whom Edward de Vere had a tempestuous extramarital affair from 1579-81.

The "Armada Portrait" of Queen Elizabeth I by George Gower presents a triumphal image in celebration of the victory of the English naval forces over the Spanish Armada in the summer of 1588. Over the ornately clad queen's left shoulder are the storm-tossed seas that the Spanish fleet (and, briefly, the English fleet as well) faced. To Her Majesty's right is an image of the victorious English navy, probably off the shores of Calais. Not coincidentally, Elizabeth's imperial crown rests below the latter image, while she confidently places her right hand on the globe, prefiguring her nation's increasingly global ambitions.

CHAPTER 6

IN BRAWL RIDICULOUS

[1577–1582]

IN THE 1570S, SPAIN, FRANCE, AND ENGLAND WERE LIKE THREE dancers trying to tango. Two countries would attempt a couple of steps together; then the third would cut in, leaving one or both of the original partners slighted. These brief political alliances, sometimes lasting only a few months, make for a dizzying courtly backdrop against which Edward de Vere led his life.

For Elizabeth and her chief ministers, the single most important factor that determined who allied with whom at any given moment was religion. Protestant hard-liners like Walsingham, Leicester, and Sidney were less likely to negotiate and promote deals with Catholic foreigners than were old-school feudalists like the earls of Sussex and Worcester and the duke of Norfolk's heirs and cousins. However, any of them could switch alliances, depending on the rewards they stood to reap–or the punishments they'd face if too strongly allied with the losing side.

De Vere's role in this game was shifting as well. Sometime in 1576 or '77, according to the French ambassador to England (Michel de Castelnau, seigneur de Mauvissière), the earl of Oxford had become a secret Catholic. As ambassador Mauvissière later recalled:

> On his return from Italy, [de Vere] made profession of the Catholic faith together with some of his relatives among the nobility and his best friends and had sworn, as he says, and signed with them a declaration that they would do all they could for the advancement of the Catholic religion.

One of de Vere's Catholic cohorts was Henry Howard, the late duke of Norfolk's younger brother. Howard, ten years older than de Vere, was a

brilliant and learned man, having taught civil law at Cambridge. As a supporter of Mary, Queen of Scots, and her claims to Queen Elizabeth's job, Howard risked losing his head, like his brother. Yet the fact that Howard outlived nearly all of his contemporaries–he would die at the ripe age of seventy-four–speaks highly of his survival skills in a time of adversity. De Vere was won over by his canny and guileful cousin, a man nearly as smart and accomplished as Sir Thomas Smith–and an outspoken adherent of *The Courtier* to boot.

Another of de Vere's Catholic comrades was Howard's cousin Charles Arundell. Arundell's father had been executed for a conspiracy against the earl of Leicester's father. Arundell, raised with four siblings by a gallows widow, would carry his father's grudge and would ultimately find ample opportunity for sweet revenge.

Arundell would later tell two versions of why de Vere reconciled himself to the pope: to please a former schoolmaster–although the identity of this papist teacher has yet to be found–and to ease his conscience over an unspecified murder. The only murder (or, more accurately, manslaughter) that de Vere is known to have committed was the accidental killing of Thomas Brincknell in 1567. But a second homicide has also been proposed as the cause of de Vere's newfound religiosity, although his connection to it is considerably more tenuous.

In July of 1577, a London yeoman named William Weekes had killed William Sankey, one of de Vere's men. Weekes was arrested in Durham in November. The queen's Privy Council got involved, ordering the extrication of Weekes from Durham to London, where he was tried for murder, found guilty, and hanged. These are the known facts in the case. Arundell would later charge, however, that de Vere had hired Sankey to kill Rowland Yorke, and Henry Howard would add that de Vere had hired Weekes to kill Sankey–and that £100 of de Vere's money had been found on Weekes at the time of his arrest.

None of these convoluted charges can be verified beyond the cobwebs of conspiracy that Arundell and Howard's later testimony weave. Arundell and Howard cite witnesses who, so far as is known, were never summoned or deposed. The Privy Council's record concerning the Sankey murder case mentions nothing about de Vere's alleged involvement. And the allegation itself makes little sense, considering de Vere's continued closeness at the time to his "honest IAGO."

Whatever his reasons, the earl of Oxford was now engaged in the kind of backroom plotting that might liberate England from its heretic church but might also just as readily liberate de Vere's head from his body. Letters between Ambassador Mauvissière and King Henri III reveal that de Vere and his band of brethren planned to capture the French Protestant (Huguenot) prince Henry of Condé if he ever made it to England. The prince never did. De Vere

may also have been the *"jeune seigneur"* to whom Mauvissière referred–a young lord who had offered to send a squadron of five ships to assist de Vere's cousins, Francis and Robert Vere, in fighting Huguenot forces in the Netherlands. This, too, never came to pass. The French ambassador quietly indulged de Vere's insurrectionist brainstorming without ever openly embracing it. In July of 1577, Mauvissière awarded de Vere a jewel as a token of his king's appreciation.

Not everyone was so tolerant. On June 13, 1577, Leicester wrote to Burghley:

> I am sorry my lord of Oxford should for any respect think any more of going over sea. I can but wish and advise him to take such advice in all things as were best and most honorable for him–and specially in his consideration toward Her Majesty and his country.

De Vere's misplaced evangelism stemmed in no small part from his frustration with Protestant hypocrisy and ineptitude, especially as practiced by Burghley and Leicester. As Howard would later testify:

> His Lordship suddenly replied again that touching the Protestants, he saw them practice other courses daily, where they... [wed] Catholics, like good *Ave Maria* coxcombs, [and] were content to lay down their heads till they were taken off. And therefore for his own part he wished that for every one they [*Protestants*] lost, they might lose a thousand, till they learned to be wiser and took out another lesson.

Ever the temperamental sectarian, de Vere also squabbled with his priest, who refused to give him communion until the earl resumed living with his estranged wife.

Sometime in 1577 or '78, the earl of Oxford was looking to hire a secretary. De Vere, with increasing literary aspirations, needed one or more talented university graduates to help him find suitable source material and adapt these texts into plays for court performance. De Vere needed someone who knew his Boccaccio and his Ovid, someone adept with the Romance languages and a quill pen.

The luxury of a private secretary became more affordable with the royal favor recently bestowed upon him. On January 15, 1578, the queen, citing de Vere's "true and faithful service done and given to Us," awarded the stately Castle Rising to her fickle lord. If the queen was at all aware of de Vere's intrigues and conspiracies with the likes of Arundell and Howard, she played a very smart card. Castle Rising, alienated from the late duke of Norfolk's

portfolio, was worth a handsome £250 a year. De Vere was hardly in a position financially to turn it down. But now he'd accepted blood money from the very estate that had been sacrificed, to his great anger, on the altar of Elizabethan politics. How could this "*Ave Maria* coxcomb" then turn around and cook up schemes against the government?

Rising was no mere trinket to be tossed away–especially as de Vere was hardly Her Majesty's favorite gentleman caller these days. Elizabeth and de Vere hadn't exchanged New Year's gifts since he had fallen out with his wife. (Countess Anne, on the other hand, continued to elicit the sympathies of queen and court–and continued to receive annual New Year's gifts from Her Majesty.) De Vere had not, in any official capacity at least, rendered "true and faithful service" to the crown. Yet, the queen had a sixth sense for recognizing and nurturing the talents of those around her. Elizabeth's grant may have been the first material encouragement the literary earl had ever received to continue writing and producing.

Another prime opportunity to produce more material–and to cast about for top-rate assistants–came that summer. Elizabeth's Progress of 1578 was to be, like her progresses to Cambridge and Oxford in 1564 and '66, filled with scholarship, learned debates, and theatrical diversions. She and her household first rested at the Cecil family estate of Theobalds in early July–where de Vere was almost certainly not. (He still had an agreement with Burghley about keeping his distance.) But de Vere did attend Her Majesty's court at the next stop: Audley End in Essex. This Howard family estate, where the earl had recently visited for the wedding of his once-removed cousin William Howard, was now in full regal splendor, while some of the nation's up-and-coming young writers and scholars from nearby Cambridge University would be showcasing their wares.

One of these was Gabriel Harvey, a contemporary of de Vere's and a fellow student of the recently deceased Sir Thomas Smith. (Smith had died of throat cancer the summer before, and Harvey had soon thereafter published a moving Latin eulogy to his teacher.) De Vere had known Harvey since at least their late teenaged years, when the earl had bestowed money and favors on him while studying at Christ's College, Cambridge. By 1578, Harvey had been appointed professor of rhetoric at Cambridge, and had gained a reputation as both a bright light and an argumentative blowhard. No doubt he had been encouraged in his egomania by Smith. "Gallant audacity is never out of countenance," Harvey once wrote, "but hath ever a tongue and a hand at will."

For the Audley End presentations, Harvey had prepared a series of lectures to be delivered to the prominent members of the court, the earl of Oxford included. Harvey was well aware of de Vere's literary interests and his need for a secretary.

Harvey also believed that men of rank and stature should perform

actions "singularly worthy of most glorious and immortal fame." War was the traditional job of noblemen. Writing was a lesser task, for learned men and secretaries. Harvey's exhortation was brash and unsolicited. But Harvey said it anyway: You, milord, are wasting your time in pursuing a career based around poetry and the courtly stage. Between the lines, Harvey seems to have been putting himself forward for the job of de Vere's secretary.

The satirist Thomas Nashe would later nickname Harvey "Timothy Tiptoes" for his audacious rhetoric in his Audley End verses. Here is what Harvey wrote to de Vere, translated from the original Latin:

> Thy splendid fame, great earl, demands even more than in the case of others the services of a poet possessing lofty eloquence. Thy merit doth not creep along the ground, nor can it be confined within the limits of a song. It is a wonder that reaches as far as the heavenly orbs.
>
> ... For a long time past Phoebus Apollo has cultivated thy mind in the arts. English poetical measures have been sung by thee long enough. Let that courtly epistle–more polished than even the writings of Castiglione himself–[*de Vere's 1573 Latin preface to Castiglione's* Courtier] witness how greatly thou dost excel in letters. I have seen many Latin verses of thine; yea, even more English verses are extant. Thou hast drunk deep drafts not only of the muses of France and Italy but hast learned the manners of many men, and the arts of foreign countries. It was not for nothing that Sturmius himself was visited by thee. Neither in France, Italy, nor Germany are any such cultivated and polished men. O thou hero worthy of renown, throw away the insignificant pen, throw away bloodless books and writings that serve no useful purpose. Now must the sword be brought into play. Now is the time for thee to sharpen the spear and to handle the great engines of war. ... What if suddenly a most powerful enemy [*Spain*] should invade our borders? If the Turk should be arming his savage hosts against us? What though the terrible war trumpet is even now sounding its blast? Thou wilt see it all. Even at this very moment thou art fiercely longing for the fray. I feel it. Our whole country knows it. In thy breast is noble blood. Courage animates thy brow, Mars lives in thy tongue, Minerva strengthens thy right hand, Bellona reigns in thy body, within thee burns the fire of Mars. Thine eyes flash fire, thy will shakes spears. Who would not swear that Achilles had come to life again?

Will shakes spears. At the time Harvey uttered these words, a fourteen-year-old boy in Stratford-upon-Avon was still living in obscurity. The first opportunity Will Shakspere of Stratford would have to join London society–and, presumably, to come to the attention of literati such as Harvey–was still years away. It must be one of the great coincidences of Western literature that Harvey's

1578 encomium to de Vere would reference the very name the earl of Oxford would one day use to conceal his own writings.

More significant, though, is Harvey's statement that at age twenty-eight, de Vere had written "many Latin verses . . . [and] even more English verses"–in excess of the handful of published song lyrics then under his name. De Vere was already gaining a reputation among the intelligentsia as a courtier poet. Harvey must have felt that appealing to de Vere's military potential might curry favor. As was often the case in Harvey's life, he completely misread the situation. The earl of Oxford was unimpressed.

One former student of "Timothy Tiptoes" appears to have tossed his hat in the ring in 1578 as well. The poet Edmund Spenser–who would later earn his place among the greatest English poets with his *Faerie Queene*–was in 1578 preparing an extended literary work that, in the words of one Spenser expert, "serves as an advertisement of Spenser's qualifications for secretaryship."

Scholars have long recognized Spenser's *The Shepherd's Calendar* as an allegory depicting prominent Elizabethan figures such as Harvey, de Vere, Sir Philip Sidney, Leicester, and Queen Elizabeth. Contemporary critics recognized it as well. The 1579 publication of *The Shepherd's Calendar* is generally regarded as one of the more important milestones in the history of English letters. Missing from the conventional picture, however, is a compelling explanation of why Spenser wrote what he did when he did.

Spenser in 1578 was newly under the earl of Leicester's patronage. However, Leicester had no talent for literature, and *The Shepherd's Calendar* appears to be a book-length job application written for one or more prospective next employers, perhaps including de Vere. The *Calendar* revels in the secrets it conceals. It showcases Spenser's humanist education, his skills as a rhetorician, and his ability to be trusted with sensitive and intimate details, an essential quality in a secretary.

Neither Harvey nor Spenser got the job. De Vere would hire at least three men at this time or soon thereafter: the playwright John Lyly (affiliated with de Vere by 1582), the translator and playwright Anthony Munday (by 1579), and the amanuensis Abraham Fleming (by 1580).

As a friend and sometime employee of Leicester and the Sidney family, Spenser would have little cause to second-guess de Vere's choice of secretaries. De Vere would appear occasionally in Spenser's writings over the years, such as in a dedicatory sonnet written to the earl in *The Faerie Queene,* where de Vere may also appear as the character "Scudamore." However, Spenser remained an observer of the unfolding Shake-speare game from afar, as seen through the eyes of colleagues and patrons who happened to be Shake-speare's greatest and most long-standing courtly rivals.

Spenser moved on, but Harvey continued to stew over his lost opportunity. In 1580, Harvey published a plodding poem that lampooned a foppish Italianate Englishman who was clearly a caricature of de Vere. Harvey's

unnamed nobleman was one of "valorous words," "frivolous deeds," "Tuscanish look," and "womanish works." Harvey labors over de Vere's effeminate appearance–a "forefinger kiss," "little apish hat," and a "large-bellied codpieced doublet." The Italianate fop, Harvey says with all the sarcasm he can muster, is "a diamond for nonce, a fellow peerless in England." For publishing such a nasty libel about a peer of the realm, Harvey would later be hauled before the queen's Privy Council to answer for his impudence. Ultimately, the matter burned out on its own. But de Vere would never trust or take Harvey seriously again, and that fact would stick in Harvey's craw for many years to come.

Around the time Gabriel Harvey delivered his speech at Audley End, in late July of 1578, two French ambassadors had joined the queen's progress to advocate for a most delicate matter. Their employer, François de Valois, duke of Alençon, had been lobbying on and off for six years to marry Elizabeth, and now his case was moving to the front and center of English politics. This was the same French lord who had amassed troops against his older brother (King Henri III of France) when de Vere was making his way home from Italy. Although he came from a strongly Catholic family and was only twenty-four (to Elizabeth's forty-four), Alençon had also shown enough animosity toward Spain and Catholicism to make him an attractive potential husband for Elizabeth. A new Anglo-French alliance was just one wedding ring away.

However, Alençon's mother, Catherine de Medici, was a major stumbling block to the young duke's chances. She was still widely reviled in England for her role in the 1572 St. Bartholomew's Day Massacre. Protestant patriots like the earl of Leicester and Sir Philip Sidney were opposed to the Alençon match. Gabriel Harvey spent part of his Audley End verses railing against "Machiavellians"–a code word for the Medici clan–and the "dark blood" they threatened to visit on the "white cliffs of the English."

Burghley, on the other hand, backed Alençon. The Lord Treasurer saw in this unlikely match the possibility of a crucial alliance that would keep both Spain and Mary, Queen of Scots, in check. The bleak choice he felt England now faced was either an Alençon marriage or eventual war with Spain. Time would ultimately prove him correct too. One additional deciding factor, unmentioned in Burghley's letters and memoranda at the time, must nevertheless have also made Alençon an attractive suitor: No husband of Elizabeth's would put up with the queen's longtime favorite, Leicester. Burghley's–and de Vere's–eternal rival would be tossed out as soon as the French marriage was finalized.

De Vere continued to anger and frustrate his father-in-law over his mistreatment of Anne, and yet these two men with so many differences did agree

about one thing. They both stood against Leicester and Sidney and supported the wedding plans with Alençon. Since meeting Alençon in Paris two years before, de Vere had seen eye-to-eye with the short, pockmarked French lord. Drinking one night with a cadre of English Catholic ne'er-do-wells, including a young Walter Raleigh, Oxford reportedly bragged that Alençon had once offered him a salary of 10,000 crowns a year to move to France. (He also said the French have a knack for "crowning none but coxcombs.")

However, de Vere would only go so far in advocating for Alençon, whom Elizabeth would soon nickname her "frog." On August 14, on the way toward Norwich, the Spanish ambassador wrote home about an uncomfortable incident between de Vere and Alençon's envoys. "The queen sent twice to tell the earl of Oxford, who is a very gallant lad, to dance before [Alençon's] ambassadors, whereupon he replied that he hoped Her Majesty would not order him to do so as he did not want to entertain Frenchman," the Spanish ambassador reported. De Vere may have enjoyed dancing with the queen, but entertaining overgrown errand boys was a humiliation to which he was not prepared to subject himself.

De Vere's indifferent attitude toward the very suitors he ostensibly supported suggests another, more subtle move in the never-ending chess game of court politics. Modern psychological profiles of Elizabeth have pointed out that the queen's personal relationships were forever dogged by her overpowering fear of rejection. From an early age, this most unwanted princess had learned that survival meant playing coy with love and ultimately repudiating it altogether–before any potential lover had a chance to reject her. The Scots ambassador once told the queen, "I know your spirit cannot endure a commander," while the Spanish ambassador laid a-hundred-to-one odds that Elizabeth would dump Alençon before they ever reached the altar. De Vere may have felt secure enough in Elizabeth's permanently unmarried state to play politics with the Alençon match. In promoting Alençon, de Vere was preventing Leicester and Sidney from receiving the queen's attentions and largesse, a reward in itself, and currying favor with his powerful father-in-law.

The approaching court revels season of 1578–79 presented an opportunity for the earl of Oxford to present his perspective. Plays performed for the queen and her court would become de Vere's propaganda device–a semipublic space in which he could spell out his views and opinions about the powers and players at court.

The Lord Chamberlain's Men–headed by de Vere's mentor, the earl of Sussex–were slated to perform at court on December 28 and January 6. Again, the historical record for the 1578–79 season furnishes only the names of the troupes and the plays they performed. No playscripts exist. Nonetheless, these two performances by a company whose patron was closely affiliated with de Vere bore titles evocative of Shake-speare plays.

Before this veritable festival, Elizabeth had sent back to Paris the low-level envoys for whom de Vere would not dance. The queen had them tell Alençon that she would never marry someone she hadn't first seen in the flesh. Alençon's response was to prepare his negotiator Jean de Simier, who was more Don Juan than diplomat, for a journey to England in mid-January. The following summer, Alençon himself would make an incognito visit to Elizabeth. But the Lord Chamberlain's Men plays, staged between visits of French envoys, would appear before a primarily English audience. Therefore, any messages these plays conveyed could be more controversial and less diplomatic than when Simier and his entourage would be on hand. And diplomatic, it would appear, they were not.

Both performances would be staged at Richmond Palace. Built by the queen's grandfather, Henry VII, Richmond was one of Elizabeth's favorite retreats from nearby London. Behind Richmond's gabled and turreted walls, she would one day plan the naval campaign against the Spanish Armada and agree to the terms for peace in England's war against Ireland. In 1603, Her Majesty would breathe her last breath within this enormous monument to late medieval architecture.

England was in the midst of, according to the antiquarian William Camden, "a sharp winter, full of snows." But no mere forces of nature would shut down Elizabeth's cherished seasonal revels. On the Sunday after Christmas, December 28, 1578, Richmond's Great Hall shone with the radiance of hundreds of candles, projecting their beams out through the hall's large windows and onto the snowy orchard next door. De Vere would have joined the queen and her assembled court in the center of the chilly and cavernous hall, warmed by the charcoal fire glowing behind them. Portraits and statues commemorating Elizabeth's royal ancestors adorned the walls. And on the far end of the hall stood the dais where the Lord Chamberlain's Men enacted their play, titled *An History of the Cruelties of a Stepmother.*

A stepmother's cruelties are the centerpiece of Shake-speare's *Cymbeline. Cymbeline*'s matriarch is, in the words of one late twentieth-century critic, the "wicked stepmother, par excellence." *Cymbeline*'s convoluted story was cribbed in no small part from a book, *The Ethiopian History of Heliodorus,* that was dedicated to de Vere just one year before *The Cruelties of a Stepmother* was enacted. And the story *Cymbeline* tells makes a close fit with the characters and situations in de Vere's life circa 1578.

Cymbeline's plot concerns a contemptible old QUEEN's attempts to marry her stepdaughter IMOGEN off to a vainglorious dolt of a son CLOTEN. IMOGEN wants nothing to do with the foolish would-be groom and instead weds a heroic young nobleman named POSTHUMUS. However, POSTHUMUS's overweening problem is his irrational jealousy of his wife, stoked in no small part by an IAGO-like colleague named IACHIMO. De Vere dramatizes himself as

POSTHUMUS and his wife, Anne, as IMOGEN. *Cymbeline* is in part another look at the author's still-troubled marriage.

POSTHUMUS is an orphan. Like de Vere, POSTHUMUS was raised under the same roof as his wife. "It is your fault that I have lov'd POSTHUMUS. You bred him as my playfellow," IMOGEN petulantly tells her father. Also like the earl of Oxford, POSTHUMUS received a first-rate education in his adopted home. As one incidental character in the play reveals, "POSTHUMUS [gleaned] all the learnings that his time could make him the receiver of, which he took as we do air, fast as 'twas minister'd."

De Vere's/POSTHUMUS's mistrust toward his wife gets fobbed off once again on Rowland Yorke/IACHIMO. And thus, in this most basic reading of the play, the wicked stepmother stands none too subtly for a certain mother-in-law with whom de Vere was forever squabbling. (Lady Burghley had wanted Anne to marry Philip Sidney and probably never tired of saying as much.) *Cymbeline* shares the author's opinion of his mother-in-law when the play's court physician says of the QUEEN:

> I do not like her. She doth think she has
> Strange ling'ring poisons. I do know her spirit
> And will not trust one of her malice. . . .
> She is fool'd
> With a most false effect. And I the truer
> So to be false with her.

De Vere evidently had no qualms about airing his griefs with the Cecil family on the courtly stage. In late 1578, however, a courtly audience presented with a play entitled *The Cruelties of a Stepmother* would have understood that the title character represented Catherine de Medici, a conniving woman who would have become stepmother to England had Elizabeth married Alençon. De Medici, more than any other royal matriarch in Europe, fitted the profile laid out in *Cymbeline* of "a mother hourly coining plots." Here de Vere the truth teller is also de Vere the coy and crafty dramatist. He conceals his personal level of meaning within a contemporary political context. One can imagine de Vere taking perverse pleasure skewering de Medici and her doltish son, that rival for Elizabeth's affections, as *Cymbeline*'s corrupt QUEEN and her spotty child CLOTEN:

> That such a crafty devil as his mother
> Should yield the world this ass! A woman that
> Bears all down with her brain; and this her son
> Cannot take two from twenty, for his heart,
> And leave eighteen.

During the midst of the revels season, de Vere and Elizabeth resumed giving and receiving New Year's gifts. The earl graced Her Majesty with a "very fair jewel of gold, wherein is a helmet of gold and small diamonds." Elizabeth returned the favor with a gold basin, ewer, and a pair of pots. De Vere's sister Mary was also on hand that evening, receiving a royal gilt bowl for the "vale of open work with gold and spangles" that she presented to Her Majesty. Mary's husband, Peregrine Bertie, that hater of courtly "reptilia," was nowhere to be found–or if he was on hand, he had opted out of the New Year's traditions of polite society.

The following Tuesday, January 6, 1579, the Lord Chamberlain's Men presented the play *The History of the Rape of the Second Helen.* The title plays off the legendary rape of Helen–the implied "first Helen"–in the Trojan War, who Shake-speare depicts in *Troilus and Cressida.* In the Shake-speare canon, there's a second afflicted Helen. She appears in *All's Well That Ends Well.*

All's Well That Ends Well is yet another refiguring of de Vere's troubled relationship with his wife, including this unique twist: Sometime during de Vere's separation from Anne, the husband found himself faced with one of the most bizarre marital alibis ever concocted to explain how his wife's child was allegedly his.

According to Essex country lore, de Vere had in fact slept with his wife when he believed he was having sex with another woman. Or so de Vere was later told. De Vere "forsook his lady's bed," the Essex antiquarian Thomas Wright notes, "[but] the father of Lady Anne by stratagem contrived that her husband should unknowingly sleep with her, believing her to be another woman." Lord Burghley's meddling hand once again appears.

Anne or one of her servants had handed the perplexed husband this jaw dropper, and de Vere must have wondered to himself how it possibly could have transpired–and if any other rube in human history had been played like this before. Here is where having a secretary on hand must have come in handy. There was in fact ample historical and literary precedent for what is called "the bed trick." In the book of Genesis, a meddling father-in-law sneaks the bride's sister Leah into Jacob's bed. Chaucer turned the tables and made the wife the deceived party in "The Reeve's Tale." One also finds bed tricks in the ancient legends of King Arthur, and Giovanni Boccaccio's *Decameron* details eight different bed tricks. One of the bed-trick plots from Boccaccio, in fact, concerns a French province named Roussillion. And this became the central bed-trick story line through which the tale of Hélène of the Château Roussillion would be framed.

The tale of Hélène and Boccaccio's short story would provide the cover de Vere needed to speak his own set of troubling truths. De Vere's young life is as much an inspiration for *All's Well*'s BERTRAM as it is for HAMLET. BERTRAM loses his father and then is packed off to become a ward of court.

BERTRAM is married to the comely maid HELENA against his will. The groom protests that her family is beneath his social standing–and to rectify this heraldic wrong, the sovereign entitles HELENA's family. (Elizabeth, the reader will recall, ennobled the Cecil clan soon before Anne's marriage to de Vere.) BERTRAM forsakes his wife's bed and runs off to Italy. Then HELENA wins BERTRAM back by playing the same bed trick that Anne allegedly played on her recalcitrant husband.

By staging *The Rape of the Second Helen* for Elizabeth and her court on Twelfth Night of 1579, de Vere had arguably laid out for his friends and allies the conundrum that he'd recently been saddled with. One suspects the bed-trick alibi was as hard to believe then as it is today. And yet . . . what if? Could de Vere say for sure that he hadn't been bed-tricked? Perhaps he had been sexually promiscuous during the autumn before his continental adventure. (Double standards in marital relations were certainly the standard of the day–especially for the upper classes.) If so, how hard would it have been for the all-seeing Lord Treasurer to fool his son-in-law? In fact, de Vere highlighted a passage in his Bible about these very questions in the book of Ecclesiasticus:

> 18 A man that breaketh wedlock and thinketh thus in his heart: "Who seeth me? I am compassed about with darkness. The walls cover me. Nobody seeth me. Whom need I fear? The Most High will not remember my sins."
> 19 Such a man feareth the eyes of men and knoweth not that the eyes of the Lord are ten thousand times brighter than the Sun, beholding all the ways of men.

De Vere would later ruminate over these ideas in the epic Shake-speare poem *The Rape of Lucrece*–yet another mythical working out of his distressed marriage with Anne and the mystery daughter he could not account for. The poem's heroine, LUCRECE, thinks "not but that every eye can see/ The same disgrace which they themselves behold" and concludes:

> Make me not object to the telltale day.
> The light will show, charactered in my brow,
> The story of sweet chastity's decay,
> The impious breach of holy wedlock vow.

The question of Elizabeth de Vere's paternity would continue to simmer for years, even into his daughter's adulthood. The uncertainty over the bed trick, the true nature of Anne's character (innocent HERO or manipulated OPHELIA?) and the extent of his father-in-law's meddling in the couple's

bedchamber remained an unanswered mystery. Lacking definite answers, de Vere was left to spend much of the rest of his life poetically and dramatically exploring every possible scenario behind Elizabeth de Vere's birth. Was de Vere deceived by a bed trick? *All's Well* and *Measure for Measure* consider such a stratagem. Could Anne have been raped and then have covered it up? *The Rape of Lucrece* and *Titus Andronicus* present this scenario. Was Anne actually unfaithful? *The Winter's Tale* sneaks in such a possibility. Was de Vere misled by a sinister servant? Well . . . yes. And that one certainty is laid out in full view in *Othello* and *Cymbeline*. Did de Vere act cruelly and heartlessly, no matter what Anne had or hadn't done? *The Winter's Tale* and *Othello* suggest he'd reached that conclusion by the end of his life.

De Vere also satirizes his own jealous obsessions. *The Comedy of Errors* and *The Merry Wives of Windsor* both poke fun at the jealous insanity the author recognized in himself. In the latter, de Vere casts himself as the wildly accusatory FORD–who, naturally, is at one point punningly labeled an "Ox." *Merry Wives* relentlessly mocks FORD for mistreating his innocent and cunning wife. (Perhaps this is why there is an oral tradition that the queen loved *Merry Wives* so much.) In one scene, FORD's English friend PAGE, his Welsh colleague EVANS, and his French doctor CAIUS all stand astonished at FORD's stubborn inability to recognize that his jealous accusations against his wife are utterly unfounded.

> PAGE Good Master FORD, be contented. You wrong yourself too much.
> FORD True, Master PAGE. Up, gentlemen, you shall see sport anon. Follow me, gentlemen.
> EVANS This is fery fantastical humors and jealousies.
> CAIUS By gar, 'tis no the fashion of France. It is not jealous in France. . . .
> EVANS If there be any pody in the house, and in the chambers, and in the coffers, and the presses, heaven forgive my sins at the day of judgment!
> CAIUS Be-gar, nor I too. There is no bodies.
> PAGE Fie, fie, Master FORD. Are you not asham'd? What spirit, what devil suggests this imagination? I would not ha[ve] your distemper in this kind for the wealth of Windsor Castle.
> FORD 'Tis my fault, Master PAGE. I suffer for it.

On January 22, 1579, the German prince Jan Casimir–the would-be FORTINBRAS whom de Vere had encountered on his way to Paris in the spring of 1576–arrived in England for a three-week court visit. He had come to win support for military and economic aid in The Netherlands. Elizabeth responded with ceremony. She personally invested the prince in the Order of

the Garter and lavished upon him generous gifts and accommodations. But none of these trinkets of state mattered to the blunt and warlike prince. Casimir ultimately left England frustrated at the queen's noncommittal approach to international politics.

The newly arrived French ambassador, Jean de Simier, would have done well to recognize in Casimir's frustrations a forecast of his own. Elizabeth soon turned Alençon's ambassador against Alençon. By February 1579, Her Majesty was flirting with Simier himself, her *singe* (monkey), as she nicknamed him. And Simier gladly played *coq* to the queen's *coquette.* The whole spectacle, with a forty-five-year-old grand dame who imagined herself perennially seventeen, must have been slightly disturbing even to Alençon's supporters at court. For a man whose marital jealousies ventured far beyond the pale, de Vere may well have begun to feel twangs of jealousy over Elizabeth. He was, after all, still the young Casanova who had been rumored to be the queen's lover only five years before. It's hard to tell precisely where or when de Vere began drifting back toward the Protestant tradition in which he was raised. But one suspects seeds were already being sown by the time the "monkey" came a-courting for the "frog."

The following Shrovetide (March 1–3, 1579), de Vere and his cousins and in-laws performed in a masque for the court at Whitehall. The palace's Great Hall, or perhaps its more intimate Great Chamber, was the site of this interlude that did not impress the one audience member who recorded his reaction. "The device was prettier than it hap to be performed," the courtier Gilbert Talbot succinctly noted in a letter to his father. "But the best of it–and I think the best liked–was two rich jewels which was [*sic*] presented to Her Majesty by the two earls [of Oxford and Surrey]."

Shrove Tuesday (March 3) was undoubtedly the evening in question, since it was the only night of the three that featured a masque. The professional troupe performing that night was the Lord Chamberlain's Men, who presented the play *The History of Murderous Michael.* De Vere, Surrey, and associates handled the other item on the evening's bill, *A Moor's Masque.*

The History of Murderous Michael was probably later revised and reprinted (in 1592) as the anonymous Elizabethan drama *Arden of Feversham. Arden* is based on a true story about a wife who conspires to kill her husband with the treacherous assistance of a servant named Michael. *A Moor's Masque,* conversely, may have been an extremely rough version–a "masque" was then what one might today call a skit–of what later became Shake-speare's domestic tragedy about a husband who conspires to kill his wife with the goading of a servant named Iago.

With this possible *Ur-Othello,* de Vere was again presenting courtly theatrics about his dysfunctional family life. Shake-speare was, it now appears, an obsessive man. One may rightly marvel how the earl of Oxford managed to keep poison out of his porridge and stray daggers out of his gut when he made pointed jab after pointed jab at the most powerful and dangerous family in the Elizabethan court: his in-laws.

In preparation for Alençon's visit, the queen needed to choose blue-blooded hostages to send to France as collateral to ensure Alençon's safe return. Elizabeth volunteered de Vere as well as two other *Moor's Masque*rs. Although de Vere was ultimately never sent overseas in exchange for Alençon, the earl's gargantuan pride was probably sore from the slight. De Vere would later reflect on his experiences as conflicted royal nuptial advocate in *Twelfth Night.*

In this play, the author casts himself as the jester Feste. The play's female ruler, Olivia, hears the marriage pleas of a suitor only through a series of messengers. She refutes the first messenger, and the suitor (Duke Orsino) responds with another, whom Olivia falls for. This is a direct parallel to the rebuked Alençon ambassadors in the summer of 1578, followed by the queen's "monkey" Simier.

Ultimately, *Twelfth Night*'s Duke shows up on Olivia's doorstep, just as Alençon finally met Elizabeth face-to-face in August of 1579. Feste watches this from the wings, cracking wise all the while. (The fool is clearly wary of wedding bells. "Many a good hanging prevents a bad marriage," Feste says.) However, Feste also entertains the Duke with a love song–perhaps de Vere's acknowledgment that he did his part in hosting and entertaining Alençon during a brief English visit in September of 1579.

Olivia presides over an unruly household that consists of key antagonists and protagonists in the author's life at court circa 1579. As noted previously, there's de Vere's sister Mary (Maria), her roistering, cut-knuckle husband, Peregrine Bertie (Sir Toby Belch), and Bertie's dearest friend, Sir Philip Sidney (Sir Andrew Aguecheek).

The "clodpole" Aguecheek's time onstage consists of one verbal pratfall after the next. The knight doesn't understand the meaning of the word *accost* or the French word *pourquoi*–and, in admitting as much, Aguecheek becomes the butt of a bawdy French double entendre about his sexual inexperience.

And yet, in *Twelfth Night* a conflicted portrait of Aguecheek emerges. The sympathetic Belch holds Aguecheek near to his heart. Belch speaks of Aguecheek as if he were the very ideal of Castiglione's courtier who "speaks three or four languages word for word without book." All of this certainly holds true of Sir Philip Sidney.

In 1579, the twenty-five-year-old Sidney was widely adored on the Continent as England's brightest light. Prince William of Orange proclaimed Sidney the most learned and promising statesman in all of Europe. And as a poet, Sidney stood out as a distinctive voice among a dull and generally speechless tribe. Had Sidney lived into his forties or fifties, the Elizabethan

Age might well have become known as the period that produced four timeless literary legends: Shake-speare, Spenser, Donne, and Sidney.

One of AGUECHEEK's lines speaks to a more substantive dispute de Vere had with Sidney. AGUECHEEK confides in BELCH that "I am a fellow o' the strangest mind i' th' world: I delight in masques and revels sometimes altogether!" With these words, Shake-speare unsheathes his sword against a literary rival.

In 1579 the Puritan pamphleteer Stephen Gosson, sensing a potential kindred spirit, dedicated to Sidney a railing pamphlet *(The School of Abuse)* denigrating literature as the handmaiden of evil. But Sidney agreed only in one small part with Gosson. Sidney responded with a manuscript circulated at court and then, more than a decade later, printed for public consumption. Sidney's *Defense of Poesy* has been rightly hailed as one of the finest pieces of English Renaissance literary criticism. In it, Sidney gives the lie to the Puritanical scolds who would condemn literary creation as unholy and devoid of moral value. Poetry, Sidney says, is not "an art of lies, but of true doctrine; not of effeminateness, but of notable stirring of courage; not of abusing man's wit, but of strengthening man's wit; not banished, but honored by Plato."

However, Sidney goes on to concur with naysayers like Gosson who belittle the new breed of English plays. Sidney never names names, but his criticisms make it clear that the man who would become Shake-speare was clearly in his sights. One theatrical innovation that Sidney strenuously objects to is the compression of time and space itself–condensing the scope of entire lives into a two-hour play, or continually shifting moods and settings without explaining each step to the audience. Sidney, whose theatrical tastes are clearly not fit for the modern age, writes:

> Now you shall have three ladies walk to gather flowers, and then we must believe the stage to be a garden. By and by, we hear news of shipwreck in the same place, then we are to blame if we accept it not for a rock. . . . While in the meantime two armies fly in represented with four swords and bucklers, and then what hard heart will not receive it for a pitched field?

De Vere shot back at Sidney in a Shake-spearean fashion. Shake-speare's *Henry V,* the final draft of which was undoubtedly written years after the author's personal quarrel with Sidney, contains a CHORUS that apologizes more than thirty times for its regular shifting of time, mood, and setting. Whenever the play hops over the English Channel or otherwise requires the audience to exercise their imagination, the CHORUS interjects a satirical note of explication for fussbudgets like Sidney who require everything to be laid out neatly. In glossing over the Battle of Agincourt, for instance, the CHORUS sarcastically responds to Sidney's above quote as follows:

> CHORUS And so our scene must to the battle fly;
> Where–O, for pity!–we shall much disgrace
> With four or five most vile and ragged foils
> (Right ill dispos'd in brawl ridiculous)
> The name of Agincourt.

Just as de Vere opposed Sidney on the printed page, so, too, he treated Sidney brusquely in real life. In September of 1579, less than a month after the completion of Alençon's seemingly successful mission to win Elizabeth's hand, de Vere and Sidney publicly quarreled. Alençon's adversaries were no doubt feeling particularly embattled at that moment, as it looked more likely than ever that the queen would accept the "frog's" hand in marriage. What retribution would lie in store if King François of England wanted payback? Sidney and his cohorts were on edge. The fight that resulted would become perhaps the single most notorious event in de Vere's life.

According to the sole witness who recorded his recollections, Sidney's friend Fulke Greville, Sidney was playing tennis–probably at Greenwich Palace–in the presence of sundry French nobles when de Vere entered the arena. The earl probably sensed hint of awkwardness colors the account of this event, as one of the leading Francophobes at court was entertaining some of Alençon's strongest allies and advocates. De Vere asked to join the game. Sidney first ignored de Vere and then, upon a second, more insistent request, Sidney responded in words that offended de Vere. (The eyewitness does not say what these words were.) De Vere, by now red in the face with both embarrassment and anger, insisted that Sidney stop playing immediately till they could settle the matter. Sidney did no such thing, in response to which de Vere branded Sidney a "puppy." More angry words were batted across the net, and Sidney ultimately left in a rage, preparing to fight a duel with de Vere. But the queen forbade it. Some of de Vere's adversaries would even suggest that he secretly planned to murder Sidney.

However, beyond the time frame and the identities of the key players, the actual course of events surrounding the tennis-court blowup remains obscure. The historical sources–de Vere's adversaries' account, Fulke Greville's eyewitness, and the works of Shake-speare–are strongly partisan on either side. De Vere's enemies make the earl of Oxford look like a petty criminal without a shred of honor, picking a quarrel with Sidney, shamelessly shirking a duel, and then lurking in the shadows to murder him. De Vere, on the other hand, avers that it was Sidney who was too cowardly to face his opponent man-to-man. (In *Twelfth Night,* SIR ANDREW AGUECHEEK is goaded into provoking a duel but

then occupies several comic scenes trying ignominiously to wriggle his way out of it.)

De Vere also suggests that Lord Burghley was actually the primary figure responsible for stoking these fires. In *Hamlet,* POLONIUS recites to one of his servants a list of dirty tricks that can be used to discredit a courtier. One such deception, the old counselor notes, involves starting a smear campaign over a "falling out at tennis." The literary critic E. K. Chambers recognized that POLONIUS may be alluding here to the infamous Sidney–de Vere tennis court quarrel.

Moreover, the poet Edmund Spenser also suggests that Burghley pulled strings to turn the quarrel into a scandal. Spenser's poem *Muiopotmos* (1590), about a butterfly fluttering into a spider's web, has been recognized as an allegory about Burghley's machinations against Sidney in the tennis court dispute. As the Alençon negotiations came ever closer to being finalized, Burghley no doubt wanted to prevent both parties–Sidney the Alençon opponent and de Vere the loose cannon–from spoiling the negotiations. Wasting their time squabbling with each other would be one easy way of keeping both Sidney and de Vere away from the queen's bargaining table. Spenser mused:

> I sing of deadly dolorous debate
> Stirr'd up through wrathful nemesis despite
> Between two mighty ones of great estate
> Drawn into arms and proof of mortal might.

As the wet and dreary fall of 1579 dragged on, neither the Alençon marriage nor the de Vere–Sidney dispute reached any resolution. The queen kept de Vere under close supervision, mandating that he not leave his rented lodgings near the court at Greenwich. One of Sidney's continental friends, Hubert Languet, wrote him in November to say that the German prince Jan Casimir felt "great pain" for Sidney in his contentions with de Vere. "[Casimir] begs you to consider whether he can do anything to assist you, for he assures you that you shall not want his good offices," the correspondent notes. On January 27, 1580, the queen, who had already interceded to cool these hotheads down, took de Vere out for a walk in the orchard near Whitehall. According to the questionable testimony of Charles Arundell, on the same day de Vere sent Sidney two written challenges. (The challenges, if they ever existed, have not survived.) No further developments are known, other than the continuation of de Vere's house arrest.

De Vere and Sidney were well suited for each other's enmity. Both were exceptionally intelligent and well-educated young men wielding great worldly knowledge and literary talents. Both were also quick to anger and prone to carrying grudges. But in the ongoing war for the queen's continually distracted attentions, these two temperamental courtiers were both being outmaneuvered by an older man of more pedestrian bearing.

He was Sir Christopher Hatton, that same mawkish parliamentarian whom the queen had doted on since he'd danced his way into her heart in 1562. Since the royal flirtations cited in a previous chapter, "Lids" had slowly climbed the ladder of court advancement. In 1577, Hatton had been knighted, appointed vice chamberlain of England, and made a member of Her Majesty's Privy Council. He was no match for de Vere or Sidney in a war of wit or intellect. But he was charismatic, a smart politician, could dance a pretty galliard, and he still cut a handsome figure. Hatton was also a team player, whereas the earl of Oxford was all renegade.

In the spring and early summer of 1579, Hatton had joined with Leicester in opposing the Alençon marriage. With a Leicester alliance in place, de Vere now had double the cause to oppose Hatton. Leicester and Hatton flexed their power on the Privy Council to win a near-unanimous vote against the Alençon match. (With considerable political skill, Hatton also played both sides against the middle, condemning the anti-Alençon pamphleteer John Stubbs in Parliament and remaining on close terms with the French envoys.)

Throughout the Alençon affair, Hatton was still the dispenser of syrupy epistles to Elizabeth. "The writing of your fair hand, directed by your constant and sacred heart, do raise in me joy unspeakable," he gushed in a 1580 letter, signed "Your Majesty's 'Sheep' and most bound vassal." An undated letter the "Sheep" wrote was also probably penned around this time. Hatton wrote to his queen:

> You are the true felicity that in this world I know or find. God bless you forever. The branch of the sweetest bush I will wear and bear to my life's end. God doth witness I feign not. It is a gracious favor, most dear and welcome unto me. Reserve it to the "Sheep"–he hath no tooth to bite; where the "Boar's" tusk may both raze and tear.

The "Sheep" promised to adorn himself with a branch of rosemary or some other "sweet bush." This nonsensical piece of costuming would forever remind him of his beloved–and would also, no doubt, make him a laughingstock among everyone else at court. The tusk of Hatton's nemesis, a certain "Boar"–the animal on de Vere's heraldic crest–was evidently on the "Sheep's" mind too. And for good reason. According to perhaps the most tantalizing paper trail in de Vere's life, the earl was doing some noteworthy razing and tearing at the time.

This is one instance that an original play manuscript written by de Vere survived–for at least a century and a half, if not down to the present day. A

comedy de Vere wrote around the time of Hatton's letter made its way into the collection of de Vere's sometime secretary and literary protégé Abraham Fleming. During the early eighteenth century, Fleming's archives transferred to the household of the antiquarian Francis Peck. Peck, an assiduous if disorganized scholar, published in 1732 a long list of documents he intended to bring into print soon. One of them was "a pleasant conceit of Vere, earl of Oxford, discontented at the rising of a mean gentleman in the English court, circa 1580." Peck died eleven years thereafter, never having gotten around to this "pleasant conceit," or indeed anything else from the Fleming vaults. No trace of Fleming's papers has surfaced since.

If someday the Fleming archive can be relocated, the "pleasant conceit" that nearly surfaced in the eighteenth century could well be one of the great leviathans of literary history. De Vere's "pleasant conceit discontented at the rising of a mean gentleman [*Hatton*] circa 1580" is arguably an early draft of *Twelfth Night.* As the first Shake-speare manuscript ever–no original notes or drafts of any Shake-speare play or poem has ever been found–this document would join the ranks of the Nowell Codex *(Beowulf)* as one of the priceless treasures of Western culture.

There are at least three reasons for equating an early *Twelfth Night* with Peck's "pleasant conceit by Vere, earl of Oxford . . . circa 1580."

The first is that de Vere and Hatton were notorious rivals circa 1580, and *Twelfth Night* mocks Hatton relentlessly: *Twelfth Night*'s self-infatuated clod MALVOLIO is a barely concealed caricature of Queen Elizabeth's "sheep." SIR TOBY BELCH, for one, calls MALVOLIO a "rascally sheep-biter." Moreover, MALVOLIO happens upon a prank letter designed to make him look like an ass in front of the entire household. The letter is signed "The Fortunate Unhappy"–an English reversal of the Latin pen name (*Felix Infortunatus;* "the happy unfortunate") that Hatton used.

The second reason is that *Twelfth Night* refers to the 1580–81 English mission of the Jesuit priest Edmund Campion. Campion, who was one of de Vere's commencement speakers at Oxford University in 1566, had spent much of the 1570s preaching his message abroad, primarily in Prague. Campion had returned to England in 1580, however, at a time of heightened tensions. The pope had recently openly advocated for the assassination of Queen Elizabeth.

Upon the urging of the queen's more stringent antipapists (Burghley, Walsingham, Leicester, and Hatton), Campion was to be made an example. He was arrested in 1581 and tortured. His treason trial was a farce, even by the standards of the day: Racked so brutally that he couldn't even raise his right hand to be sworn as a witness, Campion was given all of two hours to work on his courtroom defense. He was even denied use pen, ink, or paper to compose his thoughts.

One of de Vere's secretaries, Anthony Munday, served as a witness at Campion's trial. De Vere thus enjoyed unusual access to the facts surrounding Campion's case. In perhaps the most enigmatic scene in *Twelfth Night* (Act 4, Scene 2), MALVOLIO is thrown into a mock prison and denied pen, ink, and paper. The fool FESTE cross-examines MALVOLIO with his characteristically witty doublespeak, tossing off an aside about a "hermit of Prague who never saw pen and ink." FESTE then cross-examines MALVOLIO, who only wants what Campion couldn't have.

> MALVOLIO Good fool, as ever thou wilt deserve well at my hand, help me to a candle and pen, ink, and paper. . . . Fool, there was never man so notoriously abused. I am as well in my wits, fool, as thou art.
>
> FESTE But as well, then you are mad indeed if you be no better in your wits than a fool.

This scene presents Campion not as a character–MALVOLIO still represents Hatton and FESTE still represents de Vere–but rather as a point of contention. De Vere puts Hatton in Campion's shoes, expressing his discontent with a crooked system that could so heartlessly demolish a man in the name of religion.

The third reason for equating *Twelfth Night* with the "pleasant conceit of Vere, earl of Oxford," has to do with the geopolitical scene "circa 1580." *Twelfth Night* captures the mood of a brief moment on the international stage between 1578 and '80. During the 1570s, Spain commanded a strong but hardly invincible navy. However, in 1578 King Philip of Spain was handed a golden opportunity when King Sebastian of Portugal turned up missing in action after personally leading an idiotic crusade against Morocco.

If Philip secured the Portuguese throne, he could then consolidate his navy with Portugal's and turn his country into the undisputed military powerhouse of sixteenth-century Europe. Between 1578 and 1580, all eyes in Elizabeth's court were on Portugal and King Philip's attempts to secure the Portuguese crown. King Sebastian of Portugal had left no heir or clear line of succession, and to make matters worse, no one was even certain that Sebastian had died in 1578. On January 31, 1580, King Philip of Spain prevailed. The Portuguese kingdom and military were now to be under Spain's command. English strategists had, with one act of succession, seen their country's future. A Spanish armada launching a full-fledged invasion of England was suddenly not such a crazy idea.

Yet, if Sebastian washed ashore someday, he could rightfully seize the crown back from Spain and cripple the Spanish menace. Rumors persisted well after Spain's absorption of Portugal–indeed, well into the seventeenth century–that Sebastian was still alive and preparing to make his triumphant return. Many in Elizabeth's court had also championed the cause of Antonio, a pretender to the Portuguese throne. Antonio visited England in 1580 and '81

to muster support for his case as the rightful king of Portugal. Antonio found two supporters in Sidney (SIR ANDREW AGUECHEEK) and Hatton (MALVOLIO).

The story of *Twelfth Night* is in part the story of two friends, ANTONIO and SEBASTIAN, who are reunited when the latter washes ashore and into the action of the drama. SEBASTIAN is widely believed to have perished at sea, and he and his chum ANTONIO spend much of the play attempting to disentangle themselves from a series of misapprehensions that are the stock-in-trade of Shake-spearean comedy.

The "pleasant conceit of Vere, earl of Oxford, discontented at the rising of a mean gentleman in the English court, circa 1580," may, like the long-lamented King Sebastian, one day turn up and change the fate of every character in the ongoing drama of the legacy of Shake-speare.

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Just north of the old London city walls, at the intersection of Houndsditch and Bishopsgate Street, a luxurious two-acre property stood out amid the surrounding real estate, with gardens and a bowling green skirting the central mansion. The palatial home, built by the goldsmith Jasper Fisher, was known to locals as Fisher's Folly or Mount Fisher. De Vere bought Fisher's Folly sometime in early 1580. One of de Vere's ancestors had probably occupied this land during the twelfth century, and now the seventeenth earl sank his ever more burdened purse into this money pit. The Folly, a long and luxurious house with its own private chapel, was set back from Bishopsgate behind a row of gardens and shade trees. The chronicler John Stow said that Queen Elizabeth once visited the mansion, although whether the royal stay occurred during de Vere's tenancy or the subsequent owner's is unknown.

Across the street from Fisher's Folly stood the notorious Bedlam insane asylum, where two to three dozen emotionally disturbed men and women from around London were held. Bedlam was closed to the public–although a curious lord would have been able to finagle a tour of the prisonlike grounds, if he were so curious. Bona fide OPHELIAS were there for the viewing. The man who was Shake-speare clearly had studied the "distracted" mind up close at some point in his life. *King Lear*'s EDGAR, feigning madness for the purpose of disguise, gives himself the folkloric name "Tom o' Bedlam"–perhaps in homage to the institution where the author observed psychosis in its most pronounced forms.

A third of a mile north of Fisher's Folly was a site of ascending importance to de Vere: London's commercial theaters. The Theatre and The Curtain were revolutionizing the local theatrical scene, as the Venetian and Sienese commedia dell'arte had been transforming theirs. Both London theaters, so far as can be determined today, resembled their architectural offspring that later cropped up on the Bankside of the Thames: the Globe, the Swan, and the Rose. The Curtain and The Theatre were round or polygonal

structures with enclosed galleries surrounding an open yard with the stage at one end.

The location of the first two theaters was carefully chosen. Londoners had gathered for years in the adjoining Finsbury Fields to play, picnic, and sport. Finsbury's recreation grounds gave the new theaters a captive audience on any sunny summer's day. More important for their survival, the site of the theaters also lay on the grounds of a dissolved priory. Thus the properties fell under Elizabeth's jurisdiction and not the city's. Whereas London's Puritanical city fathers hated drama, Queen Elizabeth I was well known for her indulgence of players and their entertainments. She conveniently overlooked the plethora of vices–gambling, prostitution, thievery, and numerous other crimes–that took place within the public theaters' walls. The atmosphere inside the theaters was so rowdy that one could buy a ticket to a play and never hope to see a single moment of the show. A rogue could instead mill about, cut a purse or two, join in on the various games of dice and cards being played in the lobby, or even onstage, and then spend the winnings on a whore who might practice her trade at a nearby brothel or in one of the box seats.

By the time de Vere occupied Fisher's Folly in 1580, Londoners were heading daily by the hundreds to The Theatre and The Curtain, whenever the elements and the church calendar agreed. Up Bishopsgate Street and through the parks behind Bedlam, the joiners, the gentlemen, the alewives, the students, and the vagabonds all ventured. "I . . . saw such concourse of people through the fields," one pamphleteer wrote in 1589, "that I knew the play was done." Plays at the public theaters now were one thing all Londoners–save for a vocal minority of religious zealots–had in common. If de Vere hadn't recognized the potential of this new mass medium before, the crowds filing past his front yard garden every afternoon served as a diurnal reminder.

To the Puritans and hard-core moralists, though, the theaters were simply dens of iniquity and vice. No Christian nation, they said, should ever harbor such public haunts of sin and corruption. One popular polemicist, Stephen Gosson, drew a scatological comparison between the popular stage and the legendary fifth labor of Hercules. "Plays of themselves [are] as filthy as the stables of Augeas, impossible to be cleaned before they be carried out of England with a stiff stream," Gosson wrote in his 1581 diatribe *Plays Confuted in Five Actions*. "And the banishing of them [is] as worthy to be registered in the labors of Hercules as the conquering of the wild boar of Erymanthus that wasted the country round about."

Like Hatton's "boar" whose "tusk may both raze and tear," the historical identity of Gosson's boar is not hard to discern. De Vere was gaining notoriety by his involvement with the theater, and common pamphleteers–lacking the political power to challenge a nobleman by name–were crying foul.

Although de Vere had previously shown no interest in keeping his father's dramatic troupe going, by April of 1580 something had changed. During the winter or early spring of 1580, de Vere had taken over the Earl of Warwick's Men. His company, performing at The Theatre, was already causing a stir. On April 13, the Privy Council arrested two actors from the newly reorganized Earl of Oxford's Men for unspecified "committing of disorders and frays upon the gentlemen of the Inns of Court." (Whether these "disorders and frays" were of a physical or satirical nature, the Council recorder does not indicate.) This latest infraction prompted London's Lord Mayor to send an urgent letter to the queen's Lord Chancellor, begging him to shut down the theaters. "The players of plays, which are used at The Theatre... are a very superfluous sort of men and of such faculty as the laws have disallowed, and their exercise of those plays is a great hindrance to the service of God," the mayor wrote. "Therefore I humbly beseech Your Lordship... that the said players and tumblers be wholly stayed and forbidden as ungodly and perilous." The Lord Chancellor, bowing to his sovereign's tastes, did nothing.

Just days before, God had certainly sent a message to his true believers. An earthquake rattled the tankards around London during the late afternoon of April 6, when the day's plays were in progress. According to an eyewitness account recorded by de Vere's sometime servant Thomas Churchyard, some audience members in the lower galleries leaped to the yard below. Other playgoers "were so shaken, especially those that stood in the highest rooms and standings, that they were not a little dismayed, considering that they could no way shift for themselves." Puritan pamphleteers, such as Philip Stubbs, saw this as God's retribution for the theater's "devilish exercises." Conveniently left out of the pious polemics is the fact that only minor injuries were sustained at The Theatre and The Curtain, but two people were killed by falling stones in Westminster Abbey.

The first Elizabethan theatrical district was enjoying its first boom, and de Vere was living and working in the thick of it. The early seventeenth-century English playwright George Chapman arguably had de Vere in mind when he sketched out the roguish, almost FALSTAFFian character "Monsieur D'Olive" D'Olive, in a play of the same name (written circa 1604), delivers a resounding encomium to the principle of keeping an intellectually and artistically stimulating household.

> D'OLIVE Tush, man! I mean at my chamber, where we may take free use of ourselves; that is, drink sack and talk satire and let our wits run the wild goose chase over court and country. I will have my chamber the rendezvous of all good wits, the shop of good words, the mint of good jests, an ordinary of fine discourse; critics, essayists, linguists, poets, and other professors of that faculty of wit, shall at certain hours i'th' day resort thither. It shall be a second Sorbonne, where all doubts or differences of learning, honor, duellism, criticism, and poetry shall be disputed.

In the spacious galleries of Fisher's Folly, de Vere began to make his home "the rendezvous of all good wits." The homeowner had certainly hired two of London's more talented scribes.

Sometime between 1580 and 1582, de Vere had retained Anthony Munday and John Lyly as his private secretaries, servants who handled the earl's letters and personal papers and served as amanuenses for his writing projects. Munday and Lyly also occupied themselves cranking out poetry and prose for their master's consent and their own delight. And now, with the new mansion, the earl housed himself, his apprentices, and doubtless many other hangers-on, under the same roof. Fisher's Folly, one suspects, had become part literary mecca, part bohemian hangout, and part pulp factory.

Munday would use his apprenticeship to produce noteworthy–if not exactly immortal–literature. Munday's *Mirror of Mutability* (1579) is a narrative poem about the Seven Deadly Sins that experiments with blank verse and new forms of meter. Munday's *Zelauto* (1580) is a Homeric novel of worldly adventure that contains a variation on the plotline of *The Merchant of Venice*. Munday, newly returned from his own continental travels, dedicated both works to de Vere. He also collaborated with his employer on a poem that both laments and celebrates the life of the true Renaissance man.

The anonymous "Pain of Pleasure" (c. 1580), long assumed on little evidence to have been written by Munday, has recently been reattributed to de Vere by the literary scholar and novelist Sarah Smith. The "Pain of Pleasure," probably inspired by a similar poem by George Gascoigne, recites the many joys, pursuits, and vanities familiar to a well-rounded Renaissance courtier's life. "The Pain" extols the trappings of nobility (courtly love, opulence, well-bred horses and dogs, hunting, and hawking), the most laudable qualities of a man of the court (honor, erudition, beauty), the athletic prowess expected of him (fencing, climbing, wrestling, shooting, bowling, tennis, leaping, dancing), and the omnibus fields of learning he must command (medicine, law, astronomy, physiology, cosmography, philosophy, music, divinity). Each of these "pleasures" inspires between one and seventeen stanzas of poetic exposition. The author, it quickly becomes clear, writes about these diverse topics from firsthand experience. However, as the title implies, each "pleasure" exacts its price. Beauty and riches breed shallowness and avarice; sports and exercise lead to gambling and injury; a life spent feeding the mind also starves the soul; and so on.

"The Pain of Pleasure" offers a rare glimpse into the kind and quality of writing de Vere was doing at age thirty. He's still prone to molasses-mouthed alliteration ("As in such sort doth settle our delight,/ As doth our wits withdraw from wisdom quite."). He devotes too much verbiage to some things

while shortchanging others. (The rich topic of music merits only two stanzas, while he overextends himself with 102 lines about hiking and climbing.) His pacing and meter feel forced at times. And yet, the fun he has with rhythm and language can be infectious. ("Lie here, lie there, strike out your blow at length,/ Strike and thrust with him, look to your dagger hand.") He's discovering his instinct for drama and pithy dialogue, as in this excerpt about an archery tournament: "'Tush,' says another, 'he may be excused,/ Since the last mark, the wind doth greater grow.'/ At last he claps in the white suddenly,/ Then: 'Oh, well shot!' the standers-by do cry." He's using the tension of his rhetorical formula–on the one hand, on the other hand–to draw the reader's interest. As Smith notes, the poem is no *Venus and Adonis*. But, she adds, "The poet of 'The Paine of Pleasure' can (just barely) be mentioned in Shakespeare's company."

Like Munday, John Lyly would use his tenure as de Vere's secretary to publish works that were probably collaborations with his boss. In 1579 Lyly wrote one of the first English novels ever, *Euphues: The Anatomy of Wit. Euphues* tells of an Italianate courtier's travels and his travails at love. Lyly dedicated *Euphues* to Thomas West, Baron Delaware. The following year, Lyly dedicated *Euphues*'s sequel *(Euphues and His England)* to de Vere. In Lyly's dedicatory epistle to de Vere, Lyly admits that in composing *Euphues,* he regularly visited "Homer's basin" to "lap up" the literary musings that his unnamed Homer cast off. *Euphues,* Lyly says, was sent

> to a nobleman to nurse, who with great love brought him [*Euphues*] up for a year, so that wheresoever he wander he hath his nurse's name in his forehead, where sucking his first milk he cannot forget his master.

Lyly's "Homer" appears to have been de Vere.

The Euphues novels reveal both Lyly's and his master's playful side. Often read as a straightforward romance or courtly book of manners, *Euphues* actually satirizes these very same traditions. In the words of literary historian Theodore L. Steinberg, *Euphues* is England's first "anticourtesy book." Although de Vere would continue to draw from Castiglione's *Courtier* for his own writings for the rest of his life, he, too, must have recognized that the sanctimonious tone and omniscient voice of the courtly advice genre was a satirical plum ripe for the picking. Thus Lyly created a parody, with de Vere's encouragement and perhaps even collaboration, using pompous and overblown language that is the hallmark of the "Euphuistic" style, making Lyly's protagonist an antithesis of Castiglione's ideal. Euphues, as painted by Lyly's brush, is boorish, misogynistic, bullheaded, insensate, arrogant, and deaf to others' advice but quick to dispense his own. One can readily imagine the late nights of laughter and invention that went into these novels as de Vere drove Lyly's parody-in-progress ever farther beyond the pale.

The formula worked. Lyly soon found himself sitting atop a two-volume franchise that London bookstalls continued to stock well into the next century. Lyly's employer also lent his support–and probably free lodging at Fisher's Folly–to the Euphuistic authors Thomas Watson and Robert Greene. Both of these authors would dedicate works to de Vere and, not coincidentally, publish books that would influence or even serve as sources for the Shake-speare canon.

De Vere would also toy with Euphuism in plays that recall his Fisher's Folly years: *Romeo and Juliet, Much Ado About Nothing, Love's Labor's Lost,* and *Twelfth Night* in particular. Shake-speare and Lyly were to become, at least in comedy, stylistic first cousins. Scholars have long recognized Lyly as perhaps the single most influential Elizabethan playwright for Shake-speare–in demonstrating how to mix wit with romance, in relying upon female perspectives and characters for comedy, in interspersing rustic with noble story lines. The voluminous scholarship on Lyly and Shake-speare certainly has recognized a crucial relationship between these two Elizabethan literary figures, but the influence flowed both ways. John Lyly may indeed have been the source of important ideas and innovations in Elizabethan literature. But it was in the context of Lyly's job as Shake-speare's private secretary.

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One additional factor made Fisher's Folly an even more attractive buy for the earl of Oxford. Sometime in 1579, de Vere had begun seeing a younger woman, and Vere House–where his wife, Anne, had full access–could hardly have been a site for the couple's trysts. Her name was Anne Vavasour, and this nineteen-year-old courtly belle was just beginning a tempestuous life at court.

Vavasour was a tall and dark-haired country girl from the north, hailing from a family of genteel blood. (The term *vavasour* was a feudal rank between baron and knight.) Vavasour was cousins with de Vere's Catholic compatriot Charles Arundell, while her sister's mother-in-law was a Spenser, possibly of the same family as the poet. Her lean, equine features would soon be drawing the attentions of numerous courtly gentlemen–exciting the jealous rage of a queen who demanded that her maids of honor be bona fide vestal virgins.

Vavasour made a brilliant impression, dazzling courtiers with her beauty, poetic prowess, and wit. The girl's uncle, Thomas Knyvet, a groom of the queen's privy chamber, had introduced Vavasour to court and won her a place as gentlewoman of the queen's bedchamber. However, Vavasour's cousin Arundell, still part of de Vere's Catholic circle, was almost certainly the man who brought her into Shake-speare's orbit.

Of Vavasour's courtship with de Vere, four poems survive to attest to the infatuation and its aftermath. One poem, said to be "made by the earl of Oxford and Mistress Anne Vavasour," presents a commonplace pastoral

conceit: A comely young wench wanders into the woods to think aloud about love. She asks advice of the trees and rocks, and the final syllable of each question echoes back to her with an answer.

> What wight [*man*] first caught this heart and can from bondage it deliver? *Vere.*
> Yet who doth most adore this wight, o hollow caves? Tell me true! *You.*
> What nymph deserves his liking best, yet doth in sorrow rue? *You.*

Walter Raleigh wrote some verses of advice to Vavasour, urging her to beware of this charming nobleman for whom she was falling:

> Many desire, but few or none deserve
> To cut the corn, not subject to the sickle.
> Therefore take heed, let fancy never swerve
> But constant stand, for mower's minds are fickle.
> For this be sure, the crop being once obtain'd
> Farewell the rest, the soil will be disdain'd.

In *Love's Labor's Lost,* Vavasour turns up as the choosy bachelorette Rosaline. Rosaline and her wooing lord (Berowne) trade echoing barbs in courtly combats of wit.

> Berowne My gentle sweet,
> Your wit makes wise things foolish . . .
> And rich things but poor.
> Rosaline This proves you wise and rich, for in my eye–
> Ber. I am a fool, and full of poverty.
> Ros. But that you take what doth to you belong,
> It were a fault to snatch words from my tongue.

One wonders how many of Rosaline's precious snipes were indeed snatched from the lips of the Yorkshire lass with a razor's tongue.

Another Shake-spearean heroine shares key traits–witty and combative, proud and reluctant to be wooed–with Vavasour. For centuries, critics have noticed Rosaline's close kinship with *Much Ado About Nothing*'s witty protagonist Beatrice. This is for good reason. *Much Ado*'s Beatrice presents an even more candid glimpse into de Vere's affair with Vavasour.

Beatrice is a sharp-witted lynx who, as her uncle explains, is engaged in "a kind of merry war" between herself and a vainglorious soldier named Benedick. The latter claims to be a lifelong bachelor, a state of marital purgatory that de Vere must have felt very much at home in by 1580. Just below the surface of Benedick and Beatrice's sportive barbs is an adolescent flirtatiousness that one might expect to see in the teenaged Vavasour. For a thirty-year-old married nobleman with a four-year-old daughter, on the other hand, such shenanigans bespeak a man looking upon middle age and grasping at a fleeting opportunity to enjoy the carefree teenaged years he'd never had.

The affair almost exploded into an international incident in early 1580 when Vavasour became pregnant. So far as is known, Elizabeth, and indeed nearly everyone else at court, knew nothing.

De Vere, however, did partly confide in his cousin Henry Howard that he was in hot water. In late February of 1580, the two were walking along the terrace at Howard House–in London near Smithfield. Howard recalled:

> I began to deal with him about the trimming up of Fisher's Folly, and [it was] no great portion of His Lordship's wisdom considering the price. He told me that he was in hand with [Fisher's Folly] but some other should enjoy the pleasure. I demanded why, but he would not answer in a good while, till at the last he said he would deal plainly with me.
>
> "There is a cause," said [de Vere], not telling what it was, "that drives me to depart from hence. You are my cousin-german [*first cousin*] and most like of all men to be doubted and suspected for my going hence, considering your good devotion toward me. . . ."
>
> "Whither will you go, my lord?" said I.
>
> "To Spain," quoth he, "where I have promise to be well entertained."
>
> I told him that in my conceit this was the very worst course he could take, considering the jealousies between our states if ever he meant to return again. But if either debt or any such like cause should drive him hence, his best way were to bide in France, that if the [Alençon] marriage should after take effect, Monsieur [Alençon] might be witness of his good demeanor and be a means for his recovery.
>
> "But, my lord," said I, "what cause should make you lose this opportunity of benefiting both yourself and others, since you seem the likest man to wax great in Monsieur's favor if he come o'er? Else perhaps the queen will give you leave to travel, which is the surest way, because you may return at pleasure, and liberty is always acceptable."
>
> "God's blood!" said he. "Press me not about the cause, for it stands not now upon *quid est dialectica,* nor I will [*would?*] not tarry."

Quid est dialectica is Latin for "What is the logic?" De Vere, in his own mockingly formal way, told his cousin that if this crisis (the unnamed "cause") could actually be solved like a mathematical puzzle, he wouldn't be bothering with such extreme measures as fleeing to Spain. The "cause" was clearly something that could get him in trouble with the queen and with his in-laws. If his mistress carried their love child to term, he had no wish to stick around

and see what devious punishments they would cook up for him. "There is not in the world a person more ingrateful than the queen," de Vere reportedly told Howard later in the same conversation.

De Vere just wanted to flee the country and deal with the consequences later. He claimed to have £15,000 "so bestowed as it should be safer much than if he carried it about him." (This may be the missing £15,000 dowry, perhaps still awaiting de Vere's pickup.) When Howard asked how de Vere would earn a living in Spain, de Vere replied that he "would find a better trade than the bearing of a white waster"–the staff he bore in his essentially pointless ceremonial role as Lord Great Chamberlain of England.

If Howard's account of the encounter is to be believed, around Easter of 1580, a new life overseas nearly ripped de Vere out of the England he was only beginning to transform with his pen and his patronage. It was, however, an alternate world he would never have to inhabit. Vavasour miscarried.

This is the same story that *Much Ado About Nothing* obliquely tells. Pregnancy and a dead or miscarried child is often in the background of BENEDICK and BEATRICE's words. BEATRICE's first line in the play is to inquire about BENEDICK:

> BEATRICE I pray you, is *Signior Montanto* returned from the wars or no?

Signior Montanto translates to "Lord Upward Thrust." When writing verses in BEATRICE's honor, BENEDICK discovers that he can "find no other rhyme for *lady* but *baby*." And BEATRICE says that BENEDICK once lent his heart to her. "And I gave him use for it," she says. "A double heart for his single one." BEATRICE giving "use" to BENEDICK carries a sexual overtone, while the "double heart" she yielded up suggests the compounded interest of conception. BEATRICE and BENEDICK also refer several times to the labors of Hercules–penance that the ancient hero undertook for killing his own children. BEATRICE later notes, "I am not for him. Therefore, I will even take sixpence . . . and lead his apes into hell." This line comes from an old English ballad ("The Maid and the Palmer") wherein a maid leads an ape into hell by way of atoning for a dead illegitimate child.

Vavasour's miscarriage no doubt made for some very tense months in the spring and early summer of 1580. The April 1580 earthquake can only have added to the strain of de Vere's life spinning quickly out of control. ("I look for an earthquake, too, then," BENEDICK says.) Yet de Vere continued to play with fire. *Much Ado* hints at their extended temptation of the Fates: BEATRICE not only conceived a stillborn, the play suggests, but she hints that she's been inseminated again. Halfway through *Much Ado,* BEATRICE gets sick–she says she's "stuffed." In response to this, an attendant "pricks" BEATRICE with a thistle and gives the maid "distilled *carduus benedictus.*" Other than making the obvious pun on her lover's name, the cure-all *carduus* potion had one special

application for women. Renaissance doctors administered *carduus* to diagnose pregnancy.

❧

Conception, as HAMLET notes, may well be a blessing, but not for a nineteen- or twenty-year-old lady-in-waiting to the queen. And this time around, the second pregnancy–Vavasour conceived in June or early July of 1580–continued past all modest means of concealment. Vavasour was growing round-bellied, and by the end of the year, there was little hope that the queen could be kept in the dark much longer. Broad farthingales and expansive skirts might, if one was creative and not a little bit lucky, hide the pregnancy. But once Vavasour went into labor, then what? The riverside parishes of Stepney and Whitechapel were home to numerous inns that served as anonymous birthing centers–places where mistresses of the well-heeled checked in to in the dark of night. But how could a young woman whose every move was monitored by a queen and a gossipy court conceal an actual childbirth? There was little hope de Vere and Vavasour's reputations would survive this incident intact.

All eyes at court were about to witness a new melodrama of de Vere's creation. Fearing, no doubt, that his and Vavasour's child was going to provide grief enough, de Vere decided to come clean on his secret Catholic dealings. For the previous four years, he'd been keeping close friends with his Catholic cousin Henry Howard and Howard's cousin Charles Arundell. The three of them, with an elusive figure named Francis Southwell, had, in their wilder moments, plotted insurrections and wild-eyed schemes to return the British kingdom to the Roman Catholic fold. To de Vere, at least, these complots evidently had about as much basis in reality as did his drunken yarns about imagined Italian battlefield adventures and damsels in distress. De Vere decided for once in his life to quit playing around. Conceiving secret Catholic plots in England circa 1580 was like holding a lit candle over an open barrel of gunpowder. Moreoever, by playing stool pigeon on his coconspirators, de Vere stood a chance to save his own neck in a treason trial that he must have feared he would soon face.

However, de Vere could have used some outside directorial advice when it came time to stage the confrontation scene. He hadn't prepared for the showdown; he was as disorganized as always; and he wore his desperation on his sleeve. On a Friday before Christmas 1580, in the Presence Chamber, de Vere dropped to his knees in front of the queen and confessed that he, Howard, Arundell, and Southwell had reconciled to Rome courtesy of a Jesuit priest whom the French ambassador had later sneaked out of England.

The sight of the earl of Oxford prostrating himself before the entire court must have brought a smile to Sir Christopher Hatton's typically humorless face. De Vere turned to the French ambassador, Mauvissière, to corroborate the story. Admitting complicity in these conspiracies would have been political suicide

for Mauvissière, who shrugged his shoulders and told Elizabeth he had no idea what de Vere was talking about. As Mauvissière continues the story:

> On hearing this, the earl of Oxford once again threw himself on his knees before [Elizabeth] and implored her to urge me to tell her the truth. At the same time he begged me to do him the favor and recall a circumstance which touched him very closely. He reminded me that he had sent a message begging me to assist the said Jesuit [who reconciled de Vere and his friends] to return in safety to France and Italy, and that when I had done so he gave me his thanks. I replied clearly and unequivocally to the queen that I had no recollection whatever of this incident. The effect of my reply was that the earl was fairly put to confusion in the presence of [Elizabeth].

However embarrassing this moment was, the humiliation was only just beginning. On Christmas Eve and again on Christmas night, de Vere and Arundell met secretly by the maids' chamber at Westminster–where Vavasour also joined them in the shadows. De Vere tried to bribe Arundell into becoming a witness for the prosecution. Arundell would not budge. Vavasour brainstormed with her lover. Like *King Lear*'s scheming EDMUND, de Vere then tried to incite his near-kinsman to flee, a flight which he could use as a tacit admission of guilt. But nothing would become of the Christmas confab–except for Arundell's compromising revelation weeks later that de Vere had tried to buy him off.

The Privy Council issued writs for the arrest of Arundell and Howard, who sought sanctuary at the Spanish ambassador's residence. The ambassador (Bernardino de Mendoza) hid them. But when the refugees learned that they would simply be placed under house arrest, they turned themselves in. Hatton took custody of Arundell and Howard; Sir Francis Walsingham got Southwell.

De Vere, newly returned to the Anglican fold whence he had come, composed thirty-four questions to be put to Arundell and Howard. The interrogatories ranged from the pointed (Did you ever meet so-and-so or visit such-and-such a place?) to the broad sweeping (How much has the Catholic movement in England grown during your recusancy?). Among de Vere's memoranda are the following queries:

> *Item.* Whether do you know of any offer made to the earl of Oxford from Monsieur [Alençon] that if he [*de Vere*] would forsake the realm and live in France, Monsieur with the help of the king his brother would better house him and furnish him with better ability and revenue than ever he had in England....

> *Item.* What prophecies have you lately seen or heard which might concern the contempt, reproach, and overthrow of our most gracious sovereign whom our Lord God bless forever....

> *Item.* Whether Charles Arundell did not steal over into Ireland within these five years without leave of Her Majesty–and whether that year he was not [*sic*] reconciled or not to the church likewise....

What began as a fact-finding operation, however, quickly devolved. The prisoners turned the investigation on its head. Arundell and Howard were, after all, now living in the custody of one of de Vere's long-standing rivals. Under Hatton's roof, the two cousins began what the Renaissance scholar D. C. Peck has called "a perverse sort of apprenticeship in defamation."

Believing that they were destined for the gallows, Arundell and Howard began flinging mud. Their target was de Vere. Arundell and Howard–and to a lesser extent the more subdued Southwell–churned out nearly one hundred pages of invective against de Vere, accusing him of being a liar, a murderer, an atheist, a pederast, a homosexual, an alcoholic, a practitioner of bestiality and necromancy, a traitor, a vile and unredeemable creature, and a "monstrous adversary . . . who would drink my blood rather than wine."

The Arundell Libels recount the numerous elaborate fictions that de Vere had been known to tell, especially when the ale or sweet wines flowed. Evidently, not only did de Vere love to spin wild yarns, but his audience loved to hear them too. "This lie is very rife with him," Arundell said of one of de Vere's elaborate Italian fictions, "and in it he glories greatly. Diversely hath he told it, and when he enters into it, he can hardly out, which hath made such sport as often have I been driven to rise from his table laughing."

Arundell and Howard's slanders are at once the most revealing and also the most misleading documents from the whole of de Vere's life. De Vere's two previous biographers–B. M. Ward and Alan H. Nelson–have taken polar opposite views on these troublesome papers. The former finds little of any historical value in the entire Arundell-Howard docket, other than as sidelights on a nasty catfight. Nelson, on the other hand, essentially treats the Libels as statements of documentary fact.

As it happens, though, history has conducted a control experiment. Only a few years after Arundell and Howard let fly against de Vere, a nearly identical defamatory screed was leveled at the earl of Leicester. The anonymous 1584 pamphlet *Leicester's Commonwealth* similarly charges Leicester with murder, conspiracy, incest, bigamy, lechery, and generally being "overwhelmed and defamed in all vice." Arundell is, in fact, the most likely author of *Leicester's Commonwealth*. Enmity to Leicester dating from Arundell's father's execution gives Arundell motive aplenty, and the style of writing and

the intimate courtly knowledge the libel conveys all point strongly in Arundell's direction.

Historians treat the anti-Leicester libels as "gross and malevolent"; a "mass of misdemeanors and infamies"; and "not only scurrilous but dangerous, even treacherous." Yet, to quote D. C. Peck again, "in our investigations of individual charges, in this and the other libels against the earl [of Leicester], we find few to be entirely true, but few to be entirely false." The Elizabethan historian E. K. Chambers concluded that the bias of the anti-Leicester libels "is too strong to give . . . unsupported statements much credence."

So it goes with the Arundell–Howard Libels against de Vere. They cannot be wholly written off, but no responsible historian has cause to take them at face value either. Consider the Arundell Libels's most disturbing accusation against de Vere: pederasty and bestiality. De Vere, they said, "confessed buggery to William Cornwallis"; he "almost spoiled" his cook; he bragged that he "abused a mare" and "that when women were unsweet, fine young boys were in season." Similar charges would be leveled at the playwright Christopher Marlowe in 1593, just after his death. A strong antitheatrical bias colors both sets of libels: For these libelers, who hated drama, the only understandable motive for spending hours rehearsing theatrical troupes of men and boys would involve sex.

De Vere may well have engaged in any number of crazy or criminal acts. His vices may have been extreme, and perhaps he was bisexual in a culture that could only understand nonheterosexuals as perverts. The Arundell Libels are only as reliable a witness to the earl of Oxford's alleged wrongdoings as *Leicester's Commonwealth* is to the earl of Leicester's. Unless the Arundell Libels can ever be substantiated, they are best treated as they were four hundred years ago: as a compilation of malicious innuendo and hearsay. Instead, the truth must lie somewhere in between. One may provisionally accept some of Arundell and Howard's accusations (such as the many colorful anecdotes of de Vere's tall tales) and throw others out of court for lack of evidence.

As in Sherlock Holmes's "The Adventure of Silver Blaze," the fact that the dog did not bark may provide an important clue as well. De Vere would live on for another quarter century, and despite the named names and alleged witnesses that Arundell and Howard cite, no one ever pressed charges, no lawsuits came out of the libels, no investigations were called, no further accusations emerged, no other scandals arose.

Nevertheless, the queen was growing perturbed with the unbelievable accusations flying back and forth and the ignominy that fell on her court by association. *Much Ado About Nothing* was Shake-speare's response.

One of *Much Ado*'s subplots involves a malaprop-spouting constable named DOGBERRY. DOGBERRY and his fumblebum henchmen unearth a conspiracy central to the play's plotline–concerning the deception of the jealous groom CLAUDIO. The constable and his motley crew then conduct a comic

interrogation of the perpetrators. DOGBERRY's scenes onstage are uproarious, yet they often strike readers as extraneous. Critics have offered little insight as to why Shake-speare created this comic diversion. One scholar speaks of "recognition of sure marksmanship directed at a well-defined satiric target," although who or what that target is goes unsaid. But DOGBERRY's satiric target is readily appreciated when one reads the Arundell Libels.

Arundell used conflicting numbering systems to enumerate de Vere's vices. As Arundell testifies:

> First, I will detect him of the most impudent and senseless lies that ever passed the mouth of any man. . . . His third lie which hath some affinity with the other two is of certain excellent orations he made. . . . The second vice, wherewith I mean to touch him though in the first I have included perjury in something [*sic*] is that he is a most notorious drunkard and very seldom sober . . . thirdly I will prove him a buggerer of a boy . . . fifthly to show that the world never brought forth such a villainous monster, and for a parting blow to give him his full payment, I will prove against him his most horrible and detestable blasphemy in denial of the divinity of Christ our Savior and terming the Trinity a fable . . . that Joseph was a wittold [*cuckold*] and the Blessed Virgin a whore.
>
> To conclude, he is a beast in all respects and in him no virtue to be found and no vice wanting.

De Vere gave constable DOGBERRY the last word on this matter. "Marry, sir, [the accused] have committed false report," says *Much Ado*'s constable. "Moreover, they have spoken untruths, secondarily they are slanders, sixth and lastly they have belied a lady, thirdly they have verified unjust things, and to conclude, they are lying knaves."

Arundell elsewhere notes that de Vere "has perjured himself a hundred times and damned himself into the pit of hell." Or as DOGBERRY puts it, "Why, this is flat perjury to call a prince's brother 'Villain.' . . . O villain, thou wilt be condemned into everlasting redemption for this!"

Divining Edward de Vere's close friends at court is, with the exception of his steadfast ally the earl of Sussex, never a trivial task. However, by mid-January of 1581, de Vere's chief enemies were now known to everyone. Previous tiffs and scuffles no doubt appeared in a new and less partisan light. With a bastard child on the way and two unscrupulous adversaries charting new frontiers in defamation, the Sidney tennis-court quarrel must have now seemed a trifle.

De Vere began to mend severed ties with Sidney. The late duke of Norfolk's eldest son, Philip Howard, had recently inherited the earldom of Arundel, and on January 22 the young Howard hosted a tilt in honor of his new

title. Arundel–not to be mistaken for the libeler Charles Arundell [*sic*]–assumed the persona of a knight named "Callophisus" or "lover of beauty." "Callophisus" and his minion "the Red Knight" (Sir William Drury) stood their ground on the tilt field at Whitehall, armored and festooned in their chivalric finery, offering to stand in defense of the honor of Queen Elizabeth. De Vere and Sidney, among other allied comrades-in-arms, responded to the call. Sidney, as the "White Knight," stepped forward, pretending not to know which sovereign mistress "Callophisus" was fighting for. Sidney offered instead to combat the earl of Arundel in honor of his own "sovereign mistress that royal virgin, that peerless prince, that Phoenix and paragon of the world whom with all devotion I serve." To cheers and jeers from the royal reviewing stand and the capacity crowds filling the bleachers, Sidney made a valiant attempt–but did not outscore the young and eager "Callophisus."

Sidney had left it to his former adversary to pick up the fallen standard. De Vere's challenge was, in fact, one of the most elaborately conceived Elizabethan tiltyard productions ever recorded. Like a nervous actor on opening night, de Vere had watched his jousting predecessors from behind the curtain of a luxurious orange tawny taffeta tent in plain view of the crowds and the tiltyard. At the appointed time, according to a contemporary account of the event,

> from forth this tent came the noble earl of Oxenford in rich gilt armor and sat down under a great high bay tree–the whole stock, branches, and leaves whereof were all gilded over that nothing but gold could be discerned. . . . After a sovereign sound of most sweet music, he mounted on his courser very richly caparisoned [*decked out*], when his page, ascending the stairs where Her Highness stood in the window, delivered to her by speech his oration.

De Vere himself acknowledged Sidney's athletic prowess and courtly worthiness–uncharacteristic words of praise that must have caused some double takes in the queen's reviewing stand. De Vere said:

> But whereas he [*"Callophisus"*] vaunts himself to honor [the queen] above all . . . this is so far beyond his compass, as the White Knight is above him in zeal and worthiness. . . . Wherefore as a friend to his [*Sidney's*] mind . . . I mean to try my truth with no less valor than I have desire, not minding to disorder so noble a presence but rather to entertain the same with a longer abode by diversity and change of arms–and to join with this worthy White Knight, if the next day may be given to the sword.

For his own tiltyard *nom de guerre,* de Vere borrowed from the Norse legends of a great golden tree in the center of the universe (Yggdrasil), representing the sun. The earl of Oxford's page stood before the queen and recited

the following myth: Once upon a time there was a knight who had once lived in a verdant grove where the trees began to succumb to infections and worms. So he made his way out onto the plains. But the barren lands there were so harsh and unforgiving that the knight soon had to leave the plains too. This is when he first encountered the Yggdrasil. "This tree, fair knight, is called the Tree of the Sun," an old hermit told him, "whose nature is always to stand alone, not suffering a companion, being itself without comparison." The Tree of the Sun was so fair and beautiful that the knight could scarcely believe his eyes. So he kissed the ground and "swore himself only to be the Knight of the Tree of the Sun, whose life should end before his loyalty." The newly dubbed Knight went to sleep sheltered by the Yggdrasil's canopy and there dreamed that he saw "diggers undermining the Tree behind him." De Vere's page continued the tale:

> That Sun Tree suspecting the Knight to give the diggers aid might have punished him in her prison. But failing of their pretense and seeing every blow they struck to light upon their own brains, they threatened him by violence whom they could not match in virtue. . . .
>
> This he will avouch at all assays: himself to be the most loyal Knight of the Sun Tree, which who so gainsayeth, he is here pressed either to make him recant it before he run or repent it after, offering rather to die upon the points of a thousand lances than to yield a jot in constant loyalty.

In the Elizabethan cosmos, the Sun Tree symbolically represented Elizabeth. Assuming the persona of the Knight of the Sun Tree, de Vere was genuflecting before his sovereign, humbly asking her to forgive his recent transgressions. Yes, he had wandered from the grove where he was born (in other words, he had become disillusioned with the Anglican faith in which he was raised), he had spent time in the company of diggers (Arundell and Howard) who were trying to uproot the mighty Sun Tree. But the Sun Tree recognized that her Knight was steadfast and decided not to punish him. The diggers threatened the Knight, but he was unafraid. It was a pat story that obviously stretched the truth, but the man behind the Knight of the Sun Tree armor must have hoped that his queen would nevertheless buy it.

"And after the finishing of the sports," the account of the tournament concludes, "both the [gold-embossed] bay tree and the beautiful tent were by the standers-by torn and rent in more pieces than can be numbered." The crowd looted de Vere's props and scenery. The day ended in both tragedy and triumph–tragedy because crowds had gathered in the stands in such abundance that several were killed and several more injured when the bleachers collapsed. On the other hand, the Knight of the Sun Tree took top honors for the day. The queen presented de Vere with his prize.

What the prize was goes unrecorded, although it was probably comparable to what de Vere had won at the tilt ten years earlier: a "table of diamonds." Shake-speare's Sonnet 122 rhapsodizes over just such a trinket:

> Thy gift, thy tables, are within my brain
> Full character'd with lasting memory,
> Which shall above the idle rank remain,
> Beyond all date, even to eternity.

This may be the ultimate thank-you note for the queen's generosity at the tilt-yard.

Yet the Sun Tree was not in a forgiving mood. In the early spring of 1581, Queen Elizabeth finally learned of Vavasour's pregnancy. The queen's maid of honor gave birth on March 21. It was a boy, whom the mother named Edward Veer. The father's first impulse, prevailing rumors had it, was to flee–what was called a "jade's trick" of squirming out of the yoke that constrained him. (In *Much Ado,* BEATRICE uses these words to criticize BENEDICK.) Two days after the birth, Sir Thomas Walsingham noted in a letter:

> On Tuesday at night, Anne Vavasour was brought to bed of a son in the maiden's chamber. The earl of Oxford is avowed to be the father, who hath withdrawn himself with intent as it is thought to pass the seas. The ports are laid for him and therefore if he have any such determination, it is not likely that he will escape. The gentlewoman [on] the selfsame night she was delivered was conveyed out of the house and the next day committed to the Tower. Others that have been found in any ways parties to the cause have been also committed. Her Majesty is greatly grieved with the accident [*incident*], and therefore I hope there will be some such order taken as the like inconvenience will be avoided.

If de Vere ever managed to leave the country, his departure was swiftly followed by an enforced return. A family of international investors, the German Fugger dynasty, noted the scandal in one of their newsletters:

> The earl of Oxford . . . is in the Tower for forgetting himself with one of the queen's maids-of-honor, who is in the Tower likewise. This in spite of his having a pretty wife, daughter of the [Lord] Treasurer. But he will not live with her.

The Jacobean Master of the Revels Sir George Buc would later write that for fathering this "base son," de Vere "was committed to the Tower and was [a] long time in [the queen's] displeasure."

The royal opprobrium de Vere had brought on his head–for refusing to reconcile with his wife, for creating such a scandal with Messrs. Howard and Arundell, and for getting one of Her Majesty's maids of honor pregnant–spelled the beginning of a long, cold period away from the hearth of Queen Elizabeth's court. Once the queen had made her disillusionment with the earl of Oxford known, she had effectively declared open season on him. Although de Vere's fellow courtiers had regularly honored him with anywhere between four and eight votes for the prestigious knighthood of the Garter, after Elizabeth dumped him from her list of favorites, he couldn't inspire a single one of them to cast a ballot in his support.

De Vere remained imprisoned in the Tower of London for two and a half months after his attempt to escape the country. For a nobleman, time spent in the Tower meant confinement to a modest but still comfortable furnished space. A courtier, even in disgrace, was well fed, allowed access to his servants, and given plenty of wood and coal for the fireplace. He was allowed to take fresh air and to exercise on the Tower's battlements. A well-heeled prisoner could also receive visitors and enjoy conjugal visits with his spouse–a privilege one may presume that de Vere did not partake in. On the other hand it is safe to assume that his secretaries, Munday and Lyly, made regular visits to their incarcerated master.

One play probably written by de Vere suggests the Tower of London as its birthplace. The unpublished proto-Shake-spearean play *Sir Thomas More*–a manuscript primarily in Munday's handwriting–tells the story of King Henry VIII's famous counselor. More, most famous today for writing the book *Utopia,* tells the story of a loyal servant to Henry VIII who quells an insurrection and is later thrown in the Tower and executed. More, as portrayed in the play, is a spirited and genial courtier whose downfall comes not due to his own failings but rather to the fickle whims of the fates. *Sir Thomas More* is ultimately a cosmic tragedy about a courtier's loyalty to his monarch despite his own unfairly marred fortunes. MORE expresses his contempt for rebellion in stark terms that have been compared to the 1570 *Homily Against Disobedience and Willful Rebellion*–a homily that, as previously noted, may have come from de Vere's own pen. *Sir Thomas More* even castigates those who would try to flee their country.

> MORE Who will obey a traitor?
> Or how can well that proclamation sound
> When there is no addition but a rebel
> To qualify a rebel? . . .
> What country by the nature of your error
> Should give you harbor? Go you to France or Flanders,
> To any German province, Spain or Portugal,

> Nay, anywhere that not adheres to England,
> Why, you must needs be strangers. . . .
> Give up yourself to form, obey the magistrate,
> And there's no doubt but mercy may be found if you so seek it.

Current scholarship shows that the *Sir Thomas More* manuscript was later revisited and revised by at least five other hands. The original story upon which the alterations build, however, is universally agreed to be in Munday's handwriting. It is thus suggested that Munday's foundation laying for *Sir Thomas More* came in the spring of 1581 in the Tower of London with a frenetic and clemency-seeking earl padding up and down his stony cell, reciting lines into the echoing air.

De Vere, who varying reports suggest paid anywhere from nothing to £2,000 in child support to Vavasour, was probably not seeing his mistress during his imprisonment. Vavasour was not only busy caring for the infant Edward Veer, she may also have started seeing another man–whether during her stint in the Tower or after her unspecified release date. The queen's tiltyard champion Sir Henry Lee was, it has been argued, probably Vavasour's jailer. Lee and Vavasour would have a long and passionate love affair that began as early as 1581–and would later land Lee in hot water just like de Vere before him. A manuscript poem thought by E. K. Chambers to have been written by Vavasour certainly would have made a fitting end to a fiery affair. The departing lover concludes:

> Thus farewell, friend, I will continue strange.
> Thou shalt not hear by word or writing ought.
> Let it suffice my vow shall never change;
> As for the rest, I leave it to thy thought.

On June 8, 1581, Elizabeth ordered de Vere released from the Tower, although he was to remain under house arrest for a month or more. Sometime in July, de Vere wrote his father-in-law a letter "touching my liberty." Elizabeth had sent the earl a Dutch hat of black taffeta, indicating her acknowledgment of his freedom. De Vere thanked Burghley for having done whatever could be done while he was in the Tower. But, de Vere cautions, the queen would probably forget all about her newly released Lord Great Chamberlain. He notes that the salacious slanders still being kicked out by Arundell and Howard–"the two lords," as de Vere calls them–would continue to sway Elizabeth against him unless certain powerful in-laws could continue to put in a good word. De Vere writes:

> Unless Your Lordship shall make some [move] to put Her Majesty in mind thereof, I fear, in these other causes of the two lords, she will forget me. For she is nothing of her own disposition, as I find, so ready to deliver as speedy to commit–and every trifle gives her matter for long delay.

De Vere goes on to put in perspective the libels and rumors circulating about him. He as much confesses to a shadow of truth to these slanders but at the same time urges Burghley to recognize that they have been blown far out of proportion. "The world is so cunning," de Vere notes, "as of a shadow they can make a substance and of a likelihood a truth. And these fellows, if they be those which I suppose, I do not doubt but so to decipher them to the world, as easily Your Lordship shall look into their lewdness and unfaithfulness."

De Vere would later be vindicated when Arundell and Howard were implicated in the "Throckmorton Plot" on the queen's life in 1583–which would see the former take up exile in France and the latter end up in prison again. Both would again write scurrilous libels to try to extricate themselves from their continued troubles. But in the summer of 1581, de Vere still had to deal with the aftereffects of the Libels.

It was a lonely summer and fall that year, with neither mistress nor wife to turn to for comfort and succor. The emptiness of life outside court and outside his own family was clearly affecting him. De Vere distanced himself from Anne Vavasour and his son, Edward Veer, while at the same time applying to the Court of Wards to serve as foster father to a four-year-old Essex lad named Henry Bullock. By November, de Vere had been declined this wardship.

In December, de Vere started corresponding with his wife again. Copies of two letters from Anne to her wayward husband survive, dated December 7 and 12, 1581. The copies are written in Burghley's handwriting, with his own emendations and interlineations, indicating that they are drafts of a text the spymaster intended for his daughter to copy out in her own hand and sign. In the first letter, "Anne" takes note of "your favor that you began to show me this summer." "Her" words of protest–perhaps written as a collaboration between father and daughter–ring out with the studied eloquence of so many wrongfully accused Shake-spearean heroines:

> My good lord, I beseech you in the name of that God, which knoweth all my thoughts and love towards you, let me know the truth of your meaning towards me, upon what cause you are moved to continue me in this misery, and what you would have me do in my power to recover your constant favor–so as Your Lordship may not be led still to detain me in calamity without some probable cause, whereof, I appeal to God, I am utterly innocent.

Five days later, she acknowledges the receipt of a letter in response (now lost). Anne says she's "most sorry to perceive how you are unquieted with the

uncertainty of the world"–and adds the zinger "whereof I myself am not without some taste." She assures her husband that her father wishes only the best for him.

Finally, sometime in late December of 1581, de Vere and his wife made their peace. The Alençon marriage proposal was falling apart, but the earl and countess of Oxford were coming back together. Richard Madox, a court observer at Oxford University, wrote on March 3, 1582, that he'd learned "the earl [of Oxford] hath company with his wife since [last] Christmas and taken her to favor." The long-suffering Anne Cecil de Vere, countess of Oxford, had at last taken her long-erring husband back into her bed.

CHAPTER 7

FORTUNE'S DEAREST SPITE

[1582–1585]

By January of 1582, the Alençon marriage was virtually a dead letter. Alençon, who had been in England since October, had not given in to Burghley's increasingly untenable demands, including that France give Calais back to England. At the same time, Burghley was also advocating that Sir Francis Drake's recent plunder of Spanish treasure be returned to Spain as a good faith gesture. The Lord Treasurer had begun to hedge his bets. When Alençon embarked on his final journey to France, on February 7, 1582, Her Majesty was outwardly mournful and spoke of Alençon as her "brother." Yet, in the confines of her chambers, she danced for joy that the Alençon match had fallen through. But the end of the Alençon match also spelled the end of hopes for an heir to the throne from Elizabeth.

It also spelled the end of the first Age of Elizabethan mythology. Poets, playwrights, pamphleteers, and painters had to date portrayed their monarch as a nubile and marriageable beauty, a heaven-sent Venus and a terrestrial Minerva. (The latter-day belief that Elizabeth had sworn a vow of virginity upon her accession in 1558 is a posthumous myth.) It was only in 1582, at the collapse of the French marriage, that the cult of the Virgin Queen gained its footing. Henceforth, Elizabeth would become an earthly manifestation of the moon goddess Diana (a.k.a. Cynthia). By the close of the decade, Edmund Spenser's portrayal of Elizabeth as the perpetually chaste Belphoebe would represent the essence of the Virgin Queen's public image. The works of Shake-speare, however, do not recognize this shift in propaganda. The Elizabeth of the author's imagination would remain the marriageable young woman he had intimately known circa 1573–74.

Then again, Elizabeth circa 1582 had become about as foreign a figure to de Vere as the prince of Siam. The Lord Great Chamberlain of England was

still on the outs with Her Majesty. One further complication would ensure he'd remain so for some time to come.

In early February, court observers recorded an unexpected aftershock stemming from de Vere's former affair with Vavasour. To redeem Vavasour's reputation, her family took to the sword. Two contemporary and all-too-terse reports survive of what Burghley would later colorfully term the "brabbles and frays" between the Vere and Vavasour clans. Vavasour's uncle Thomas Knyvet took charge of the operation. In the words of Walsingham's secretary (Nicholas Faunt) in a letter of March 17:

> In England of late, there hath been a fray between my lord of Oxford and Mr. Thomas Knyvet of the Privy Chamber–who are both hurt, but my lord of Oxford more dangerously. You know Mr. Knyvet is not meanly beloved in court, and therefore he is not like[ly] to speed [*come to*] ill whatsoever the quarrel be.

One of de Vere's servants was killed in the melee. Nothing else is known of this first skirmish in an interfamily war. Where this duel took place, for instance, is not known–certainly not where de Vere would later set it: "In fair Verona, where we lay our scene . . ."

The injury de Vere sustained from his sword fight with Knyvet did not immediately incapacitate him, as de Vere would remain able-bodied enough to ride in another tournament a few years later. However, near the end of his life de Vere would complain, both in his private letters and in the Shakespeare Sonnets numbered 37 and 89, of a debilitating lameness. ("Thus I made lame by fortune's dearest spite/Take all my comfort of my worth and truth.")

The result was that, as the historian Albert Feuillerat observed of the Vere–Vavasour war, "like another time in Verona, the streets of London were filled with the clamorous quarrels of these new MONTAGUES and CAPULETS." Soon after the duel, several men claiming to be employees of de Vere–Burghley would later deny they held any affiliation with the earl's household–began a campaign of attrition against Knyvet and others.

The Italian fencing master Rocco Bonetti was first on their list. Bonetti had in 1575 secured crown patents (injunctions) to protect himself from "the earl of Oxford's men." True-blue Englishmen saw Bonetti's Italian fighting style as cowardly, and no officially sanctioned English fencing school would teach it. So a few courtiers, including de Vere's brother-in-law Peregrine Bertie, imported Bonetti for private instruction. Since the Italian tutor took away business from the crown monopoly of English fencing schools, Bonetti was also seen as a threat. And the fact that he almost never stood up for himself only encouraged bullying. (On one of the two recorded instances Bonetti ever drew his sword in anger, he answered the challenge of an inebriated and unarmed boatman who still managed to "soundly [beat Bonetti] with oars and stretchers for his pains.")

In 1582 Bonetti had just returned from a self-imposed exile in Scotland. Now that the Bergamo native had returned to England, taking up residence in the western Ludgate section of London, Bonetti found that the ostensible earl of Oxford's retainers were still hectoring him. On April 16, Bonetti sought protection at the residence of the French ambassador, Mauvissière. "He tells me that he is threatened by the people of the earl of Oxford, which puts him in great trouble and despair of ever being able to live securely in this realm," the ambassador wrote to the spymaster Sir Francis Walsingham on April 16.

Bonetti's story excites mixed sympathies. After all, if the man were truly so adept at teaching the martial arts, it's hard to believe he was incapable of fending off a few common desperadoes. Still, Bonetti's reputation as a fencing instructor extraordinaire preceded him, and *Romeo and Juliet* pays tribute to the innovations in swordsmanship that Bonetti introduced to England. The play's sword-and-buckler and rapier-and-dagger fights are, in the words of the historian Charles William Wallace, "a mimetic resumé of changes in Elizabethan fencing wrought by Rocco." Bonetti had famously boasted that he could "hit any Englishman with a thrust upon any button," and this finds its way into *Romeo and Juliet* as well. MERCUTIO jests at Bonetti's expense when he compares TYBALT to

> MERCUTIO the very butcher of a silk button–a duelist, a duelist, a gentleman of the very first house, of the first and second cause. Ah, the immortal *passado,* the *punto reverso,* the hay!
> BENVOLIO The what?
> MER. The pox of such antic lisping, affecting phantasimes, these new tuners of accent.

Bonetti would, in just a few years' time, brush off his pugnacious tormenters and establish his own martial arts "colledge." This renegade school of defense, like the London theaters, was to be established on a former church property–a site where the city fathers had no jurisdiction. In 1584, Bonetti set up shop on the Blackfriars "liberty," a converted monastery in Central London nearby where Fleet Ditch meets the Thames.

Blackfriars was a poorly policed neighborhood where rogues and ne'er-do-wells such as "the earl of Oxford's servants" could conduct their mischief with relative impunity. On June 18, two ostensible de Vere retainers named Gastrell and Horsley took advantage of the Blackfriars' liberties to wreak some havoc. That day, Knyvet and four associates were walking through the narrow streets by the Blackfriars gatehouse when the two belligerents jumped the unsuspecting targets.

Sword clashed with pike clashed with fist. Little was visible to anyone but the inner circle gathered around the scrum. (Unlike the de Vere–Knyvet duel in February, this battle resulted in multiple arrests and depositions. Therefore, much more is known about it.) A din of shouts, cries, and exclamations reverberated through the narrow Blackfriars alleys as the afternoon sun cast heavy shadows on the gathering crowds. Arriving waves of boatmen and boat riders craned their necks over the spectators to see the action, and the early comers jumped in with their weapons drawn to get a piece of the action, keep the peace, or perhaps a little of both.

A lawyer named Roger Townshend shuttled back and forth that afternoon between representatives of the disputing families. De Vere had spent part of the afternoon with his sister Mary and her husband, Peregrine Bertie, at their house in the Barbican. In subsequent testimony, Townshend notes he'd heard rumors that de Vere and Bertie were planning to ambush Knyvet and his kin later that day. The rumor was untrue. (Or did de Vere or one of his minions hire Gastrell and Horsley to do the job for him? Or were the "servants" seeking revenge for other parties? The evidence is unclear.) So Townshend went to confront Bertie and de Vere to find out their story. When Townshend arrived at Bertie's house, he discovered Bertie enjoying a walk in his garden. Bertie said he and de Vere had heard that Knyvet and his party were planning to attack *them*. "Thereupon," Townshend notes, "my lord of Oxford himself (and also his men) was somewhat grieved at it."

Monday's tussle generated only bruises, cuts, and animosity. But four days later, on Friday, June 22, Gastrell and another man named Harvey set upon Knyvet's men again near the Blackfriars. Both Gastrell and Harvey sustained wounds in the skirmish, the latter, accidentally, at the hands of the former.

By the third street battle, the authorities were growing tired of vendettas. Something quieted the quarrelers down–for a time, at least. *Romeo and Juliet* begins at just this point, with the PRINCE OF VERONA breaking up another MONTAGUE–CAPULET melee with a new and wary resolve

> PRINCE Three civil brawls bred of an airy word
> By thee, old CAPULET and MONTAGUE,
> Have thrice disturb'd the quiet of our streets
> And made Verona's ancient citizens
> Cast by their grave-beseeming ornaments
> To wield old partisans, in hands as old,
> Canker'd with peace, to part your canker'd hate.
> If ever you disturb our streets again
> Your lives shall pay the forfeit of the peace.

These words were probably set down years later, as de Vere recollected the gladiatorial strife. If Lord Burghley is to be believed, the earl of Oxford had nothing to do with the Knyvet quarrelers beyond the original duel. However, the Shake-speare canon suggests something else. As ROMEO laments,

> Doth not [JULIET] think me an old murderer
> Now I have stain'd the childhood of our joy
> With blood remov'd but little from her own?

Romeo and Juliet retains an accurate–if dramatically embellished–chronology of fatalities: First come the three battles mentioned in the beginning of the play. Then, in a subsequent melee, a MONTAGUE falls. (A "slain" servant of de Vere's is buried eight months after the Blackfriars tussles.) Finally, before the armistice that concludes the play, the MONTAGUES fell one last CAPULET on Verona's bloodied streets. (A month after de Vere's man is slain, Burghley records the killing of one of Knyvet's servants.) As a last act, in 1585 de Vere himself was challenged to another duel; he did not answer and the war finally sputtered and died.

A decade later, the author Thomas Edwardes would, in his book *Narcissus* (1595), memorialize the de Vere–Knyvet violence–and the earl's attempts to distance himself from it. Edwardes's book contains an epilogue consisting of a set of laudatory verses about the great poets of the Elizabethan Age. The epilogue to *Narcissus* praises the work of such contemporary writers as Edmund Spenser, Christopher Marlowe, and Shake-speare.

But then Edwardes turns cryptic. Immediately after Edwardes's Shake-speare allusion (a tribute to Shake-speare's epic 1593 poem *Venus and Adonis*) appear a dozen lines about an unspecified nobleman with a "bewitching pen" who "should have been of our rhyme/The only object and the star." This superlative courtly author is, Edwardes implies, in disgrace, "in purple robes disdained"–who also "Differs much from men/Tilting under friaries." Translation: The disgraced courtier poet has distinguished himself from those who brawl and quarrel under the protection of converted friaries such as the Blackfriars.

The mystery poet is, in other words, recognizable as Edward de Vere. *Narcissus*'s Shake-speare commemorative verse and its de Vere commemorative verse, two adjacent sections of the same poem, are arguably one eighteen-line homage to the same person. Edwardes's *Narcissus* appears to be one stunning contemporary allusion to de Vere as Shake-speare.

After June's brabbles and frays, the remainder of 1582 was a quiet year. Expelled from court and low on money, de Vere was exiled as thoroughly as ROMEO is to Mantua. Book dedications, and with them requests for patronage, had slowed to a near standstill. During the banner years of 1579 and '80, when Fisher's Folly must have been a hive of activity, five books had been

dedicated to de Vere–all of them proudly displaying full-page reproductions of the seventeenth earl of Oxford's coat of arms. These authors, including de Vere's secretaries Lyly and Munday, had showcased their affiliation as a prize-winning athlete shows off a trophy. The year 1581, on the other hand, saw just one book dedicated to de Vere, with no coat of arms; and this publication had nothing to do with creative literature or the liberal arts–it was merely a translation of the sermons of John Calvin by Thomas Stocker, someone who had grown up in the sixteenth earl of Oxford's household.

In 1582, however, the poet Thomas Watson had the courage to dedicate to de Vere a book of sonnets, *The Hekatompathia*–one of the most distinguished books of Elizabethan poetry that had yet been published. By throwing his lot in with the disgraced earl of Oxford, Thomas Watson was sharing his patron's disgrace; yet Watson had no qualms. Watson had written out a hundred sonnets and had given the manuscript to his patron to scrutinize. De Vere's approval ensured the work would be published. "For since the world hath understood (I know not how) that Your Honor had willingly vouchsafed the acceptance of this work and at convenient leisures favorably perused it, being as yet but in written hand," Watson wrote to de Vere in his dedicatory letter, "many have oftentimes and earnestly called upon me to put it to the press, that for their money they might but see what Your Lordship with some liking had already perused."

Unlike the authors of most contemporary over-the-top book dedications, Watson seems to have been guilty of understatement. De Vere did more than peruse the manuscript. Prefixed to every sonnet in Watson's book is an unsigned introduction that knowingly speaks of and sometimes even criticizes Watson. The comments quote and translate various lines of poetry and philosophy that each of Watson's sonnets references. Furthermore, Watson is always spoken of in the third person.

The breadth of mastery and depth of knowledge in these introductory comments is truly Shake-spearean. To bolster his literary arguments, Watson's unnamed critic offhandedly excerpts Seneca, Sophocles, Lucan, Theocritus, Horace, Martial, Xenophon, Pliny, Ronsard, Virgil, Homer, Petrarch, and Ovid. Obscure French, Italian, and Latin poets (Forcatulus, Fiorenzuola, Strozza, Tibullus, and Parabosco) are also quoted as matter-of-factly as someone might detail what he ate for supper last night. As C. S. Lewis observed about the *Hekatompathia,* "These notes are the most interesting part of the book." Even some orthodox scholarship has pointed to de Vere as the likely author of these glosses–which, if they were from de Vere's pen, would be Shake-speare's only known work of literary criticism.

The commentary in *The Hekatompathia* is generally illustrative, concise, and direct. When the commentator likes a sonnet, he says so. And when he doesn't, he doesn't mince words. In the gloss to Watson's Sonnet 41, for

instance, the anonymous critic points out Watson's overuse of word repetition (technically called *reduplicatio*). To give an example, the critic quotes from memory from the German rhetorician Johannes Susenbrotus.

> This passion [*sonnet*] is framed upon a somewhat tedious or too much affected continuation of that figure in rhetoric which of the Greeks is called παλιλογι'α or 'αναδι'πλωσιζ, of the Latins *reduplicatio:* Whereof Susenbrotus (if I well remember me) allegeth this example out of Virgil:
>
> *Sequitur pulcherrimus Austur*
> *Austur equo fidens*

The definitive study of Shake-speare's classical learning, by T. W. Baldwin, devotes an entire chapter to Susenbrotus's wide-ranging influence on the Shake-speare canon. The erudition so casually on display in the commentary to Watson's sonnets reveals a mind that is finely tuned to literary nuance, rhetorical structure, and the most arcane of allusions. Sir Thomas Smith and the tutors of Cecil House would have been proud to claim the anonymous commentator as their former student. If the author of Watson's glosses were not de Vere, an additional Elizabethan literary genius still awaits the light of discovery.

Watson, whose influence on Shake-speare has been widely recognized, may be referring to de Vere in his Sonnet 71. In this poem, Watson addresses an otherwise unnamed "ancient friend" whom he calls "Titus." (*Ancient* here is probably used in the honorific or legal sense, meaning the friend is of an exalted or courtly rank.) Watson, newly distracted by a love affair, writes:

> Alas, dear Titus mine, my ancient friend,
> What makes thee muse at this my present plight,
> To see my wonted joys enjoy their end
> And how my muse hath lost her old delight?

Watson's nickname for his "ancient friend" would be particularly appropriate in 1582, since some have speculated that de Vere was working on a version of the play *Titus Andronicus* as his first response to the shame and scandal of his exile from court. Banishment plays an important role in the latter half of *Titus.* When the title character learns that his son Lucius has been exiled from Rome, for instance, Titus sees it as a good thing.

> Titus O happy man! They have befriended thee.
> Why, foolish Lucius, dost thou not perceive
> That Rome is but a wilderness of tigers?

At the play's conclusion, as LUCIUS returns from banishment, he recites the catalog of woes faced by a man of the court blockaded from the life he once knew.

> LUCIUS [M]yself unkindly banished,
> The gates shut on me and turn'd weeping out
> To beg relief among Rome's enemies;
> Who drown'd their enmity in my true tears,
> And op'd their arms to embrace me as a friend....
> My scars can witness, dumb although they are,
> That my report is just and full of truth.
> But soft, methinks I do digress too much,
> Citing my worthless praise: O, pardon me;
> For when no friends are by, men praise themselves.

Exile and banishment also figure prominently in a second Shake-speare play that comments on the events of 1582. *Timon of Athens* charts the downward spiral of a man who cannot manage power, money, or responsibility. The title character, a prodigal patron and manic spendthrift, occupies the first half of the play running through his cash and the second half discovering the pain of desertion brought about by his destitute state. However, before TIMON's final and complete downfall, he faces some painful moments of reckoning with his faithful steward FLAVIUS. The wastrel master learns that his dwindling estates cannot pay his mounting debts–a gloomy fate that de Vere must have recognized was becoming all too probable.

> FLAVIUS O my good lord
> At many times I brought in my accounts,
> Laid them before you; you would throw them off,
> And say you found them in mine honesty....
> My loved lord,
> Though you hear now, too late!–yet now's a time–
> The greatest of your having lacks a half
> To pay your present debts.
> TIMON Let all my land be sold!
> FLAVIUS 'Tis all engaged, some forfeited and gone,
> And what remains will hardly stop the mouth
> Of present dues.

FLAVIUS, fearing TIMON's retribution, defends his actions as those of a true and steadfast retainer. "If you suspect my husbandry or falsehood," the steward tells TIMON, "Call me before the exactest auditors/And set me on the proof."

This is what John Lyly encountered in the summer of 1582. As de Vere faced more and more financial difficulties, he first sought to fix the financial blame on someone else, his trusted secretary. As with the countess of Oxford's alleged infidelities, it was only in retrospect that de Vere came to appreciate the selfless and loyal service of his own personal FLAVIUS. Sometime in July, Lyly wrote to Burghley begging that the Lord Treasurer intercede:

> It hath pleased my lord [Oxford] upon what color I cannot tell, certain I am upon no cause, to be displeased with me–the grief whereof is more than the loss can be.... This conscience of mine maketh me presume to stand all trials, either of accounts or counsel, in the one I never used falsehood, nor in the other dissembling.

Since Lyly was welcoming audits of his "accounts," the secretary was clearly also serving as the earl's bookkeeper.

As of October, de Vere had, like TIMON, cast himself out of the city gates. On October 2, he even made a rare appearance at his ancestral family seat, in the feudal role of lord of the manor of Castle Hedingham. (Records preserve de Vere's appearance in town to sign off on the creation of a butcher shop in the Castle Hedingham village.)

As the trip involved transporting his wife and the few servants he could still afford, de Vere probably split the sixty-mile trip from London to Hedingham into a two or three days' journey. Essex roads, still the boggy trails of sodden earth and thigh-deep ruts that de Vere knew as a child, were downright treacherous in the autumn. One nearly risked drowning in the gaping ruts that filled with water during the rainy season. The countess and her household's servants probably journeyed via coach, together with horse-drawn carts that carried luggage and provisions. The unsprung wagons would have painstakingly navigated through deep, sloshy channels of water, mud, and manure, while de Vere would have accompanied the train on horseback.

With little in London to draw them back, de Vere and Anne probably spent the rest of 1582 and perhaps the early part of 1583 at Hedingham. Without a court to attend or a court culture to keep up with, these days were probably much like the bucolic life under Sir Thomas Smith. Smith, now known only to eternity, had set the example of a country lord's duties: study, learn, explore, question, read, write, and, in the old master's words, "pass [one's] time now and then with hawking and hunting and now and then with looking on a book."

Away from the distractions of the Elizabethan court, almost eleven years after saying "I do," de Vere finally began to lead some semblance of a married life. By Christmas, the twenty-six-year-old countess of Oxford was once again pregnant.

The months of solitude during the fall and winter of 1582–83 spawned at least one creative by-product: a comedy that recaps the offenses that had landed de Vere in the queen's displeasure. The play was an Italianate jape arguing that de Vere's missteps of 1576–81 were much ado about nothing.

De Vere does not show himself at his best, or his most political. His accusations of infidelity against his wife appear in *Much Ado* as the rash actions of a jealous groom (CLAUDIO) who unjustly rages against a chaste fiancée (HERO). This might begin to atone for the author's previous misbehavior toward his wife; *Much Ado* acknowledges that HERO was chaste and CLAUDIO was clearly in the wrong to doubt her. However, in the crucial matter of assigning blame, CLAUDIO is given a full pardon without ever apologizing. The agent of evil is the mischief maker (DON JOHN). "Yet sinn'd I not–but in mistaking," says CLAUDIO, and nobody disagrees.

Moreover, de Vere's extramarital affair with Anne Vavasour is alchemized into the story of a proud and witty soldier (BENEDICK) wooing an equally proud and witty maid (BEATRICE). Thomas Knyvet's challenge to de Vere spawns BEATRICE's wronged uncle's challenge: "Win me and wear me, let him answer me! Sir boy, I'll whip you from your foining fence, nay, as I am a gentleman, I will!" This may have made for an entertaining recap of recent courtly and amorous affairs. But, again, *Much Ado* offers up nothing to suggest the author's contrition. Instead, the audience enjoy themselves as the unlikely couple of BENEDICK and BEATRICE fall in love and rattle off countless jokes and quips to charm even an iron-hearted curmudgeon. It's a recipe for great romantic comedy. But it was horrible politics, if de Vere was also attempting to atone for his extramarital dalliances with his own BEATRICE.

Third, in *Much Ado* the Arundell–Howard Libels against de Vere become a series of outrageous allegations recorded by an incompetent constable (DOGBERRY). To take DOGBERRY's libels seriously is to accept the witness of an utter imbecile. Yet, as late as May of 1583, Elizabeth was considering reopening the investigation into the charges Arundell and Howard filed against de Vere. As spoofs of the Arundell Libels, the DOGBERRY Libels are timeless expressions of a timeless wit. But as a dramatic apology for the Arundell–Howard affair, DOGBERRY leaves much to be desired. On all three counts, *Much Ado About Nothing* insulted the intelligence and integrity of anyone–the queen in particular–who was angry at de Vere for his misdeeds.

De Vere gave it a shot all the same–or so the courtly records would suggest. On the night of Shrove Tuesday (February 12, 1583), the Merchant Taylors' Boys, one of the queen's favorite troupes, headed by Richard Mulcaster, appeared at Richmond Palace to stage a play. The text Mulcaster's boys performed does not survive, although the title does: *A History of Ariodante and Genevora.* The Italian legend of Ariodante and Genevora, from Ariosto's *Orlando Furioso,* is the source text upon which much of *Much Ado About Nothing* is based. Ariodante is the prototype for CLAUDIO, as Genevora is for HERO. *Ariodante and Genevora,* after successive rewrites, would ultimately have been published in 1600 as Shake-speare's *Much adoe about Nothing.*

De Vere appears to have argued for his reinstatement at court in a second play, which appears on the Revels calendar for the 1582–83 season. On Twelfth Night (January 5), the troupe of de Vere's ally and mentor the earl of Sussex presented the old chestnut *The History of Error.* (As noted in Chapter 5, Shake-speare's *Comedy/History of Errors* also tells the story of a jealous groom and unjustly accused spouse.) The apology that *The Comedy of Errors* makes for the author's errors in matrimony was an appropriate sentiment to convey to Her Majesty in early 1583, as she considered whether to allow her estranged earl to return to court. The split personality of *Comedy of Errors* protagonists–embodied as the twins ANTIPHOLUS OF EPHESUS and ANTIPHOLUS OF SYRACUSE–provides a metaphor for authorial regret: My marriage has been a mess, the author implies, because it united my bride with only one half of my whole self. As the DUKE OF EPHESUS observes of the twin brothers:

> One of these men is genius to the other:
> And so of these, which is the natural man,
> And which the spirit? Who deciphers them?

Between these two protoShake-speare texts, *The History of Error* and *Ariodante and Genevora,* the message sent to the queen in January and February of 1583 would have been plain: The misunderstandings that had led to the earl of Oxford's downfall were ultimately not his fault. The Arundell/DOGBERRY libels were preposterous on their face. Third parties deceived a noble CLAUDIO into slandering his chaste and fair HERO. And the BEATRICE love affair was just a fling that appealed to the wild side of the author's untamed personality, the ANTIPHOLUS OF SYRACUSE in him.

The queen, however, accepted no such message. De Vere remained exiled from court as the 1582–83 revels season drew to a close. Had he given even a hint of acknowledging some of his own shortcomings, Elizabeth's reaction might have been different. Instead, he did little more than confess that "mistakes were made." And that's no apology.

After the revels season, de Vere farmed out any remaining theatrical pleas for clemency to his secretary John Lyly–with whom de Vere had evidently settled his differences. For Lyly, de Vere rented the indoor theater at the Blackfriars, the same building outside of which the men professing to be de Vere's servants had attacked Thomas Knyvet and his minions. During the spring or summer of 1583, Lyly and the Welsh scrivener Henry Evans began holding open rehearsals of a troupe of boy players in front of paying crowds. Lyly–with

de Vere as patron and overseer–worked on the text, while Evans rehearsed the children.

Unlike the public theaters near Fisher's Folly, the "private" theater of the Blackfriars served a more elite crowd. The theatrical space resembled a Tudor banquet hall, converted to house public performances with the rows of wooden bleachers across the floor and the modest stage at the far end. Admission prices were steeper and the plays' subject matter was typically courtly allegories and commentary intended for the queen's ear. Aspiring courtiers often sat onstage at the Blackfriars, the better to draw attention to themselves. The satirist Thomas Dekker would later jest, in a spoof of the courtly advice book, that all proper gallants who sat onstage should feign detachment. "You publish your temperance to the world, in that you seem not to resort thither to taste vain pleasures with a hungry appetite," he wrote, "but only as a gentleman, to spend a foolish hour or two, because you can do nothing else."

The literary team of de Vere, Lyly, and Evans was known for its poisoned pens and mastery of court gossip. As one correspondent wrote at the time, "Take heed and beware my lord of Oxenford's man called Lyly, for if he sees this letter he will put it in print or make the boys in Paul's play it upon a stage." With a touch of self-mocking irony, de Vere parrots these same anxieties in *Hamlet* when he has the prince's friend ROSENKRANTZ complain about "an eyrie of children, little eyases" who "so berattle the common stages . . . that many wearing rapiers are afraid of goose quills and dare scarce come thither." The Blackfriars–and the courtly stages where the workshopped Blackfriars plays ended up–was fast becoming the one place in high society where a gentleman did not want to hear his name or see his likeness.

Lyly was developing two plays at the Blackfriars in the spring of 1583. One, *Sappho and Phao,* was an allegory about a failed courtship of Venus–no doubt a nod to the recently concluded Alençon nuptial negotiations. Lyly's other production (titled *Campaspe*) was more of a gamble. It appears to have concerned de Vere's affair with Vavasour. But this time, instead of glorifying the amorous fling as a battle of wits à la *Much Ado About Nothing,* Lyly's drama portrayed de Vere as a detached statesman, Alexander the Great, who willingly gave up his paramour to another man.

Her Majesty would surely find de Vere more forgivable if he were portrayed as someone who had given Vavasour his blessing to pursue another lover. This ploy was true too: Vavasour had wasted little time in seducing the queen's tiltyard champion (and also her jailer at the Tower) Sir Henry Lee. Lee would become so besotted with Vavasour that he would have a suit of armor made with her initials engraved all over it.

If there was a hot ticket in London in 1583, *Campaspe* was it. For here, court observers knew, was an exiled courtier's dramatic plea for royal forgiveness–a second time around. *Ariodante and Genevora* may have failed to excuse de

Vere's extramarital dalliance, but Lyly's production gave de Vere the opportunity to argue that his scandalous affair with the temptress Anne Vavasour was now ancient history.

A family tragedy may have thawed Elizabeth's heart more than these plays. In the spring, the countess of Oxford delivered a son, the heir apparent to the earldom. However, at only two days old, the boy died. According to an epitaph credited to Anne and published the following year in a book written by the hack poet John Soowthern, the queen wept profusely over the boy's death. (As the plodding, meterless verse of the epitaph sounds the same as Soowthern's accredited poetry, Soowthern probably wrote the funereal verse and gave the countess the dubious distinction of its authorship.) The epitaph recalls a legend of the goddess Venus crying so greatly over the death of her beloved Adonis that flowers appeared where the goddess's tears struck the ground. In the words of the elegy, Queen Elizabeth "caused more silver to distill from her eyes than when the drops of her cheeks raised daisies."

Death had been a regular visitor to the de Vere household in the spring of 1583. In April, Anne's sister, Elizabeth, died. Anne's father, Lord Burghley, became so distraught that he left court, as the queen put it, "to wrestle with nature." Furthermore, the Lord Chamberlain earl of Sussex–de Vere's longtime mentor and military commander from the Northern Rebellion days–was dying. On April 20, Sussex made out his will and moved to his estate in Southwark to ease his passing into death.

To bury their son, de Vere and his wife held a private ceremony at Castle Hedingham. There in St. Nicholas's Church, just down the hill from the Norman keep, lies a monument to the fifteenth earl of Oxford. This is where de Vere and his countess buried their infant on May 9, 1583. The service at St. Nicholas's Church was probably an understated affair, as de Vere lacked the money for ceremony and the political connections for drawing noteworthy mourners. And with only three servants in de Vere's train, the boy's funeral banquet could hardly have been the feast that befitted the passing of an heir to England's oldest earldom.

For perhaps the first time in his life, de Vere entered St. Nicholas's Church and opened the family crypt. There in the chancel stood the imposing alabaster monument to his grandfather the fifteenth earl–a monument that by this time may also have contained the remains of the reinterred sixteenth earl as well. Into a tomb beneath the floor de Vere laid his son's remains among the bones of the infant's progenitors. In coming to St. Nicholas's Church to bury a son, the seventeenth earl of Oxford had unwittingly immersed himself in the presence of family ghosts.

Specters from beyond were not mere metaphors. A nearby de Vere family property in the Essex town of Earls Colne was reputed to be haunted. One seventeenth-century legend alleges that the ghost's visitations were announced

by the bell in the nearby priory's tower ringing once, the cue that announces the presence of *Hamlet*'s ghost.

The spring winds must have seemed particularly chilly and foreboding on those starry nights at Hedingham. Astrological almanacs had forecast that the conjunction of Saturn and Jupiter would make 1583 a year of grave consequences. With a newly buried son and dismal prospects for advancement at court, de Vere would have scorned these distant lamps of doom overhead. Brought low by fortune's spite, the earl trod the same cold stone floors where his illustrious father's dramatic troupe had once entertained the queen, when he himself had been a child.

From atop the ancient castle's battlements, on a clear night, one could see across the Essex and Suffolk countryside for ten or more miles. From these brave walls, many earls of Oxford had surveyed towns that swore their fealty to the lord at Castle Hedingham. Now inhabiting the Norman castle that his father and mother had once called home, de Vere may have pondered long-dormant questions: What was Father like? How did he die? Why did Mother remarry so dishonorably? Why had marriage to Anne been so troubled? What had *really* happened with her first pregnancy? And why had she continued to sanction her father's spying on us?

The outlines of *Hamlet* are so pronounced within de Vere's life that one invariably illuminates the other. De Vere appears to have begun work on his masterpiece by 1583. (*Hamlet*'s GRAVEDIGGER explains that YORICK, the royal jester whom HAMLET once knew, had died twenty-three years anterior to the play's action; YORICK's likely inspiration, the famous royal jester Will Somers, whom de Vere would have known as a child, had died in 1560.) And as with the rest of his early works that matured into Shake-speare, de Vere would continue revising this play throughout his life.

If the earl could only get back into royal favor, he'd have the right troupe to play it too. In the spring of 1583, the best actors in London–including one of the Earl of Oxford's Men–merged to form a new company, the Queen's Men. Exiled from court when the troupe was founded, de Vere had no immediate access to them. But, ultimately, the Queen's Men performed early versions of plays that were later revised and published as Shake-speare's.

Upon returning to London sometime after his son's funeral, de Vere had two good reasons to visit his father-in-law. First, he needed more than ever to return to the queen's favor. And second, there were all those words, words, words to be found in Burghley's library. In addition to most of the other texts from which Shake-speare's plays are derived, two of *Hamlet*'s primary sources (the chronicle histories of Belleforest and Saxo Grammaticus) were to be found within Burghley's collection. Burghley's doppelgänger POLONIUS accosts HAMLET when the prince is reading a book; this kind of interaction would have been a regular occurrence at Cecil House.

Yet why write a play about Denmark, of all places–in 1583, of all times?

To begin with, it was the subject of current family table talk. De Vere never had the chance to see Denmark himself–although his German mentor, Sturmius, had once confided in Burghley his hopes that de Vere and his wife might visit Elsinore. Instead, de Vere would see the royal Danish court through the eyes of a family member. The previous summer, de Vere's brother-in-law Peregrine Bertie, who in 1580 inherited the title of Lord Willoughby de Eresby, had paid an extended visit to Elsinore. On a mission from the queen, Bertie traversed the North Sea in June of 1582 to invest King Frederick II of Denmark as a knight of the Garter.

Elizabeth needed the Danish king to stop harassing English ships as they passed through nearby seas. The English Muscovy Company was doing a brisk trade with Russia, and their business was greatly inconvenienced by levies exacted from them for using Danish sea lanes. So the queen sent her Lord Willoughby to induct the king into the Order of the Garter and to win a more favorable shipping treaty.

Bertie proved a fine match for the blustery monarch, and the two hit it off famously–although Bertie never did manage to change Frederick's mind on any of the seafaring matters he'd been sent to address. Between the 1582 voyage and a subsequent 1585 trip to Elsinore, Bertie spent five months in the castle that *Hamlet* immortalizes. Lord Willoughby's two embassies included royal feasts, hunting expeditions, and fireworks. Bertie chronicled his trip in a handwritten memoir circulated at Elizabeth's court. He no doubt also regaled friends and family with his exploits. The Danish king, pleased to be honored with Elizabeth's knighthood, feted Bertie with multiple nights of revelry that included grand speeches about Her Majesty and the Order of the Garter. "All which [were] performed after a whole volley of all the great shot of the castle discharged," Bertie notes. *Hamlet* chronicles this peculiarly Danish drinking ritual: "There's no health the king shall drink today but the great cannon to the clouds shall tell," says KING CLAUDIUS.

In his capacity as ambassador, Lord Willoughby met top Danish officials–including one courtier with the family name of Rosenkrantz and two surnamed Guldenstern. Bertie also visited the legendary astronomer Tycho Brahe at his observatory. Ten years before, Brahe had observed a supernova in the constellation Cassiopeia–the same bright "star that's westward from the pole" that *Hamlet*'s guards on the Elsinore battlements notice. Brahe had also used his Danish observatory to make the most accurate observations ever of planetary conjunctions, oppositions, and retrograde motions. From this data, Brahe had concluded that the ancient geocentric theory of the universe was correct, that the Earth was indeed the celestial body around which everything else in the celestial spheres orbited. The Danish king touted his court astronomer's achievements, a fact that escaped neither Lord Willoughby nor his brother-in-law. *Hamlet's* KING CLAUDIUS denies the PRINCE's request to return to school by noting that it would be "retrograde

to our desire"; he says HAMLET's excessive mourning is in "peevish opposition" to the facts of life and a "fault to heaven"; he says that his new wife, GERTRUDE, is "conjunctive" to his soul, and that he orbits her as a "star moves not but in his sphere."

For providing such bountiful local color, de Vere ultimately gave his brother-in-law a tip of the pen. *"Enter... English Ambassador"* the stage directions read as *Hamlet* draws to a close. With six dour lines to recite–one of which is "ROSENKRANTZ and GUILDENSTERN are dead"–*Hamlet*'s ENGLISH AMBASSADOR to Elsinore is hardly an ample stand-in for the colorful Lord Willoughby. Still, to those in on the joke at court, no further explanation was necessary. PETRUCHIO had made his cameo.

Ultimately, it took more than staged entertainments to win de Vere back into Her Majesty's good graces. The task required the intercession of a rising star at court, one with a bright future ahead of him.

On May 11, 1583, at the end of the haunted week that began with the burial of de Vere's son, a third party argued the earl of Oxford's case before the queen. Walter Raleigh (later Sir Walter) put in a good word with Elizabeth about de Vere's reinstatement. Raleigh had ferried the challenges and communications between Sidney and de Vere following their tennis-court blowup. De Vere and Raleigh had also enjoyed moments of conviviality during the Arundell–Howard years. But somehow, Raleigh had escaped the ensuing Arundell–Howard scandals. In 1583, Raleigh was riding higher than nearly anyone else at court. Six feet tall and with an athletic frame, Raleigh wielded power with the queen that even de Vere's father-in-law did not enjoy.

Elizabeth replied that she still harbored doubts about de Vere. In fact, she said she was considering reopening legal proceedings against him for his disloyalty to the crown. But by this, she told Raleigh, "she meant... only thereby to give the earl [of Oxford] warning." Rumors were continuing to spread about de Vere's alleged treacheries. The traitor Henry Howard was at the time preparing to publish a pamphlet *(A Defensative Against the Poison of Supposed Prophecies)* repeating accusations that de Vere owned prophetic books relating to the succession of the English throne, which itself was considered an act of treason. De Vere, never arraigned on these charges, would get the last word: He mockingly quotes from Howard's libelous tract in the plays *Hamlet, Macbeth, Antony and Cleopatra,* and *Henry VI, Part 1.*

Raleigh had seen satirical wounds cut into the reputations of Sir Christopher Hatton (MALVOLIO in *Twelfth Night*) and Sir Philip Sidney *(Twelfth Night*'s SIR ANDREW AGUECHEEK and SLENDER in *The Merry Wives of Windsor)*. Raleigh must have wondered what would stop the literary earl from lambasting him. In a letter to Burghley, Raleigh recalls the Greek legend of a man who nursed back to health a snake that ultimately attacked its benefactor: "I am content, for your sake," Raleigh wrote, "to lay the serpent before the fire, as much as in me lieth, that having recovered strength, myself may be most in danger of his poison and sting." Raleigh's fears may have eventually been realized: The nouveau riche landowner, the florid and flattering Raleigh, does share these same qualities with the equally nouveau, florid, and flattering courtier OSRIC–whose main purpose in *Hamlet* is to deliver the challenge for a duel, the same role Raleigh had played in de Vere's life.

Raleigh's words in de Vere's favor apparently worked. On Saturday, June 1, 1583, de Vere and Elizabeth finally reconciled their differences. The reconciliation took place at the royal palace at Greenwich. The queen had just arrived from Cecil House, the Lord Treasurer's mansion on the Strand. "The earl of Oxford came to her presence," one eyewitness wrote, "and after some bitter words and speeches, in the end all sins are forgiven, and he may repair to the court at his pleasure. Master Raleigh was a great man, whereat Pondus [*Lord Burghley*] is angry for that he could not do so much."

De Vere's welcome back to court was bittersweet: On June 9, his mentor the earl of Sussex finally gave up the ghost. The widowed countess of Sussex lamented in a letter circulated at court about the "sea of sorrows" that she now faced, and that "were it not for the fear of God's revenge, I could with all heart redeem them with the sacrifice of my life." These morbid sentiments recall HAMLET's musing over suicide and taking "arms against a sea of troubles."

Sussex had for decades been the leading voice of opposition against Leicester's pernicious influence at court. At one point, in 1566, the Sussex and Leicester factions had been so well demarcated that Sussex's supporters wore yellow ribbons and Leicester's wore purple ribbons. As he lay on his deathbed, Sussex issued a grave warning about Leicester, whom he derisively called "the gypsy": "I am now passing into another world and must leave you to your fortunes and to the queen's graces," Sussex said. "But beware of the gypsy, for he will be too hard for you all. You know not the beast so well as I do." Sussex had been an outspoken isolationist, feeling that England had no business meddling in The Netherlands. But now that he was no longer able to oppose Leicester, the scales began to tip further toward English military interventionism. The role of counterbalancing Leicester's influence fell to Burghley–and to a lesser extent, to de Vere.

The earl of Sussex–the loyal subject, brave warrior, cunning courtier, chivalrous nobleman, and surrogate father to de Vere–presents the idealized paternal qualities that are projected onto the late KING HAMLET. "See what a grace was seated on this brow: Hyperion's curls, the front of Jove himself," the PRINCE observes. Leicester had taken over many of de Vere's lands upon Earl John's death in 1562–reminding a reader of CLAUDIUS's usurpation of HAMLET's inheritance upon KING HAMLET's death. No evidence suggests that Leicester

poisoned Earl John, as CLAUDIUS did HAMLET SENIOR. But in 1584, Charles Arundell would publish a new set of libels, alleging that Leicester poisoned Sussex.

Scholars today treat *Leicester's Commonwealth* as a problematic and often unreliable source. Arundell claimed Leicester was a "rare artist in poison"–as reckless hyperbole as Arundell's more outrageous charges against de Vere. One nineteenth-century chronicler wrote, "[Leicester] was said to have poisoned Alice Drayton, Lady Lennox, Lord Sussex, Sir Nicholas Throgmorton, Lord Sheffield, whose widow he married and then poisoned, Lord Essex, whose widow he also married, and intended to poison, but who was said to have subsequently poisoned him–besides murders or schemes for murder of various other individuals, both French and English." Yet even if one disqualifies these accusations as so much vicious hearsay, the fact remains that rumors circulated during the 1580s that the death of Sussex originated in a vial borne by the "gypsy's" hands. Leicester, whose cruelty excited "extreme fear" among those at court who dared oppose him, was certainly considered a suspect in Sussex's demise. And for a lifelong opponent of Leicester, these suspicions may well have been good enough for the purpose of art. In making Leicester the contemptible poisoner CLAUDIUS of *Hamlet,* de Vere had given himself two poignant levels of contemporary metaphor–one (with the sixteenth earl of Oxford representing KING HAMLET) in which de Vere would raise the old issue of Leicester's usurpation of his inheritance, and the other (with the earl of Sussex representing the poisoned KING HAMLET) which anticipated Leicester's power grab after Sussex's demise.

Leicester was practically unavoidable during de Vere's first few days back in the Elizabethan court. Just one day after Sussex's passing–Monday, June 10–Leicester led the court on a trip to Oxford University. The Polish prince and general Albert Laski was in town, and as chancellor of Oxford University, Leicester had arranged for four days of revels honoring the distinguished guest.

The leading courtiers, scholars, and authors of the day would be feasting, debating, and attending new dramas directed and produced by de Vere's fellow Blackfriars playwright George Peele. For more than two years, de Vere had been persona non grata at every royal banquet, entertainment, progress, and hunt. Plays performed before the queen had become as remote from him as they were when de Vere had lived in Venice. And yet, less than a fortnight after returning to court, fate had handed de Vere the prospect of a four-day-long party full of fine food, learned discussions, and courtly drama. No record exists of de Vere's presence at Oxford during this celebration. But, given the circumstances, one may suppose that the thirsty would turn down water and the frostbitten warmth sooner than the man who was Shake-speare would have let this opportunity pass.

The party centered around one distinctive figure. The warlike prince Laski

was a tall and loquacious man who had fought in dozens of battles throughout his military career, was fluent in numerous languages, and wore a long white beard nearly to his navel. Laski and his entourage stayed at Christ's Church College, and after two nights of fireworks and other entertainments, he and the court took in a new Latin play titled *Dido.* As the chronicler Raphael Holinshed noted, *Dido* was a "very stately tragedy . . . with Aeneas's narration of the destruction of Troy." The play, extant today in manuscript, was a bombastic spectacle, complete with a kennel of hounds and a simulated tempest with thunder, hail, fake snow, and rain–just the sort of theatrical hue and cry that a lifelong military man like Laski would have enjoyed. The general savored the play as if it were a fine delicacy.

Watching this play by torchlight at the college hall, de Vere may have marveled to himself at the unexpected overlaps between the classical melodrama being staged before his eyes and the Danish tragedy he was then beginning to sketch out in his mind. For in *Dido* one also finds the hero, Aeneas, haunted by his father's ghost. "How often is the sad shade of my father borne before my eyes, when quiet relaxes my limbs and a sweet sleep has overwhelmed my tired body?" muses the play's Aeneas. "How often does the sad shade of my father enter my bedchamber advising a hasty flight?"

Dido, an otherwise undistinguished university play that was never published or acted again, proved to be yet another creative spark. None of *Dido*'s words are quoted in *Hamlet;* but the Danish tragedy suggests the author had seen this production. For when the troupe of players arrive at Elsinore, HAMLET instructs one of his actors to perform "Aeneas's tale to Dido." (The real-life CLAUDIUS, Leicester, had originally commanded its performance at Oxford.) Before loosing the PLAYER KING on Aeneas's speech, HAMLET explains that the Dido play he's thinking of "was never acted, or if it was, not above once. For the play, I remember, pleased not the million. 'Twas caviar to the general." (This final line is a pun on the fact that *General* Laski did indeed relish the play like caviar and that the Latinate university drama was too refined for the *general* multitudes.)

Also on hand during this four-day festival was the Italian philosopher Giordano Bruno. At the time, Bruno was staying with his mentor, patron, and host, the French ambassador, Mauvissière–the diplomat with whom de Vere shared a chequered past. Bruno was a native of Nola, a township in the kingdom of Naples, and was one of the most free-thinking intellects of his generation. Bruno also enjoyed one of the largest egos of his day, no minor accomplishment considering the competition in the Elizabethan court. The Nolan, as he referred to himself in his writings, took great pleasure in informing his readers just how important and magnanimous he was.

At Oxford, Bruno lectured the assembled crowds on "the immortality of the soul" and "the fivefold sphere." According to one eyewitness, the stocky Bruno rolled up his sleeves "like some juggler" and laid out his argument in

Latin infused with a thick Italian accent. The university professor who then debated Bruno rebuked and embarrassed the guest. "Have them tell you with what uncouthness and discourtesy that pig acted, and about the extraordinary patience and humanity of the Nolan, who showed himself to be a Neapolitan indeed, born and raised under a more benign sky," Bruno wrote in a pamphlet that recounts the Oxford fiasco.

Oxford University and Giordano Bruno were celestial bodies in opposition. The university preached the ancient geocentric theories of Aristotle and Ptolemy. Every object in the heavens, it was said, orbited the earth, and the earth occupied the center of the universe. All matter was composed of five elements: earth, water, air, fire, and the heavenly fifth element, "quintessence." Each element seeks out its rightful place in a hierarchy of five concentric spheres. Oxford students were forbidden to defy these teachings under the penalty of a hefty five-shilling fine ($75 in today's currency). The Nolan, on the other hand, would have nothing to do with the university's retrograde approach to scholarship. Instead, he touted the novel theory of Nicolas Copernicus, wherein the earth orbited the sun. Overturning the medieval order of a fixed universe with a tidy fivefold sphere, Bruno advocated three further heresies: that the stars, contrary to fixed Church doctrine, are free-floating objects in a fluid celestial firmament; that the universe is infinite, leaving no room for a physical heaven or hell; and that elements in the universe, called "monads," contain a divine spark at the root of life itself. Even the dust from which we are made contains this spark.

These notions prefigure a vast Newtonian cosmos, as well as an emerging field in present-day physics in which monads (renamed by the twentieth-century philosopher Alfred North Whitehead as "occasions of experience") are being reconsidered as a key concept in understanding the conscious mind. Bruno, in other words, was the forward-thinker he considered himself to be. After departing England, seeking an intellectual climate hospitable to his bold ideas, Bruno settled at the University of Wittenberg, a major center for the study of Copernican theory, where he taught for two years. Wandering further across Europe, Bruno was captured by the Inquisition. He was thrown into prison for seven years and then burned at the stake for his heresies in 1600.

As *Hamlet* reveals, de Vere was moved by Bruno's remarkable show at Oxford: Each of Bruno's tenets finds expression in the play. HAMLET, not coincidentally a student at Wittenberg, is Bruno's mouthpiece. To his fellow Wittenberg students ROSENKRANTZ and GUILDENSTERN, HAMLET recites the Nolan's theory of an infinite universe, although he admits he still finds the notion disturbing. ("I could be bounded in a nutshell and count myself king of infinite space, were it not that I have bad dreams.") In a poem he gives to OPHELIA, HAMLET wonders what the stars are made of and whether they are indeed fluid or fixed in place. ("Doubt thou the stars are fire/ Doubt that the sun doth move/ Doubt truth to be a liar/ But never doubt I love.") HAMLET

waxes existential over losing a comforting and familiar framework of five elements. ("This goodly frame the *earth* seems to me a sterile promontory, this most excellent canopy the *air*, look you, this brave o'erhanging firmament, this majestical roof fretted with golden *fire*, why, it appeareth nothing to me but a foul and pestilent congregation of *vapors*." Emphasis added.) HAMLET wonders about the essence underlying human life–the question that prompted Bruno to postulate the existence of monads–and whether this divine spark can indeed be found in inanimate matter. ("What a piece of work is a man, how noble in reason, how infinite in faculties, in form and moving, how express and admirable in action, how like an angel in apprehension, how like a god! the beauty of the world; the paragon of animals; and yet to me, what is this quintessence of dust?")

In 1583, when hints of *Hamlet*'s composition first begin to appear in de Vere's life, the author had more impetus for hatred of Leicester than of Burghley. The alleged poisoning of the earl of Sussex and old grudges of usurped family properties, rekindled by recent trips to these properties, was exacerbated by Leicester's pernicious influence at court. Burghley, on the other hand, had proved himself to be one of de Vere's staunchest allies. De Vere wrote a letter to his father-in-law on June 20, 1583, that smacks of genuine, if grudging, respect for his father-in-law. "I am in a number of things more than I can reckon bound unto Your Lordship," he wrote to Burghley. "... I hope Your Lordship doth account me now–on whom you have so much bound–as I am; so be you before any else in the world, both through match–whereby I count my greatest stay–and by Your Lordship's friendly usage and sticking by me in this time wherein I am hedged in with so many enemies."

But Burghley was still Burghley. On October 30, 1584, when de Vere wrote to his father-in-law to plead for assistance in postponing some debts to the crown, the son-in-law appended a hastily scribbled postscript. De Vere had just learned that Burghley was interrogating de Vere's servants behind their master's back: "I think [it] very strange that Your Lordship should enter into that course towards me whereby I must learn what I knew not before, both of your opinion and goodwill towards me," de Vere wrote to his father-in-law. "But I pray, my lord, leave that course. For I mean not to be your ward or your child. I serve Her Majesty, and I am that I am–and by alliance near to Your Lordship, but free. And [I] scorn to be offered that injury to think I am so weak of government as to be ruled by servants or not able to govern myself."

This stinging rebuke to Burghley sounds like the Danish PRINCE addressing the manipulative busybody in his life, POLONIUS. Both HAMLET and de Vere, at such a moment, could have dashed off Shake-speare's Sonnet 121, a poem that expresses disgust and anguish over finding oneself the target of espionage. De Vere uses the same phrase in his October 30 letter as in Sonnet

121—a quotation from Exodus 3:14 ("I am that I am," God's words to Moses from the burning bush when asked His name).

121

'Tis better to be vile than vile esteemed,
When not to be receives reproach of being;
And the just pleasure lost, which is so deemed
Not by our feeling, but by others' seeing:
For why should others' false adulterate eyes
Give salvation to my sportive blood?
Or on my frailties why are frailer spies,
Which in their wills count bad what I think good?
No, I am that I am, and they that level
At my abuses reckon up their own:
I may be straight, though they themselves be bevel;
By their rank thoughts my deeds must not be shown;
Unless this general evil they maintain,
All men are bad and in their badness reign.

To Burghley, political survival was predicated on a continuous flow of information—however duplicitously that information was obtained. As far as the Lord Treasurer was concerned, anyone at court could and should be clandestinely monitored. Burghley "was the queen's puppeteer, pulling strings to a greater degree than Elizabeth ever knew," writes the historian John Guy. "To a large extent England was his fiefdom, governed by his 'assured' Protestant clique. He wasn't the power behind the throne but the power in front of it."

Newly minted lords, as was Burghley himself, commanded the same respect and the same scrutiny from Burghley as did someone whose ancestors had served the crown since the Conqueror. "Gentility is nothing but ancient riches," Burghley was fond of saying, and there was probably no aphorism in his repertoire that angered de Vere more—as it neglected the value of generations of honor and sacrifice.

HAMLET gives voice to this frustration in his "get thee to a nunnery" speech to OPHELIA. "Virtue shall not so inoculate our old stock but we shall relish of it," HAMLET says to the counselor's daughter. Such sarcasm about the prince's ancient lineage falls in the middle of a loaded exchange between a young woman forever caught in the middle and a strong-willed young man forever under somebody's thumb. As one literary critic described OPHELIA, "She never sees through her father or her brother and follows obediently to her fate. She permits herself to be used by everyone and in a sense thus justifies the smut of HAMLET's remarks." Any love shared between HAMLET and OPHELIA remains subjugated to the political realities of their life under the influence of POLONIUS. The same could be said of de Vere, Anne Cecil de Vere, and her prying father.

Just as Burghley relied on espionage in his public life, so was he often found hiding behind the arras in family matters. The troubled and compromised relationships between HAMLET, OPHELIA, and POLONIUS bear a tragic resemblance to the family triangle of de Vere, his wife, and her father.

De Vere's feudal heritage and upbringing ill prepared him for life among the upwardly mobile and the arrivistes who populated Gloriana's court. In the 1580s, one conspicuous vestige of the chivalric orders was the Accession Day tilts—jousts held in honor of the anniversary of the queen's accession to the throne, November 17. Although de Vere participated in at least three other court tournaments in his lifetime, November 17, 1584, was the only time in his life that history records the earl of Oxford's participation in the Accession Day celebrations.

The tiltyard at the fields of Whitehall was the site of this annual glance toward England's feudal past. Jousting knights entered the yard in pairs with trumpets sounding each jouster's tucket—their signature melody—as they rode toward the queen. Each combatant and his servants came attired in costume, some dressed as Irishmen, some as horses, some as savages. The servant would then mount the stairs to Elizabeth's box seat and deliver an oration and, should she so desire, dance a caper for her too.

A manuscript of Accession Day Tournament speeches and poems delivered to Elizabeth ("the Ditchley Manuscript") now sits in the British Library, and one anonymous oration thought to date from the 1584 tourney records a skit with multiple players. This theatrical script features two knights—"th' one following desire and innocency, th' other truth and constancy"—whose quarreling at the Temple of Peace had sent them into exile from their homeland. For their penance, the temple's high priestess instructed these wayward knights to travel to a land called "Terra Benedicta, where the rarest princess and most virtuous and greatest friend in the world to peace now holdeth the scepter."

As dusk approached, Leicester bade the riders to cease. The paying crowd milled about in the reviewing stands, and Elizabeth descended from her box to present the day's awards. For top honors, she singled out de Vere and the late duke of Norfolk's eldest son, Philip Howard, earl of Arundel (not Arundell the libeler). Both de Vere and his kinsman secured important recognition at the tournament from Her Majesty that salved their wounded reputations.

During this time of renewed favor, when the queen addressed de Vere on the floor of the House of Lords as "our most dear cousin Edward, earl of Oxford, Great Chamberlain of England," de Vere found a new assignment at Parliament. He was appointed to a committee in the House of Lords that considered petitions for adventurers seeking to explore the New World. Ten bishops and lords sat on this board, which undoubtedly helped facilitate the recently knighted Sir Walter Raleigh's ambitious plans to colonize the lands beyond the seas. (De Vere could dole out favors too.) Raleigh asked Her

Majesty to name his outpost in the New World. Since Elizabeth's final marriage proposal was now history, she knew that virginity–that trait that gave her an aura of the blessed mother of Christ–would forever remain the focus of her public image. The queen decided to name this new colony "Virginia."

In December 1584, de Vere would make a bid for an office of singular importance to the nation. It represented a departure for de Vere–but also one wholly in step with the overseas threats now facing the country.

These were ominous days for Protestant England. The newly united kingdoms of Spain and Portugal, grown rich from New World plunder, were eyeing England as a potential conquest. Aggravated by English pirate raids of Spanish galleons, Catholic Spain had practical as well as theological reasons for aggressive action against her foe. As early as 1583, Europe was already abuzz with talk of a Spanish Armada. Conflicting reports posited that the armada would invade Ireland to enlist insurrectionists or perhaps assail English raiders at sea. But whatever form Spain's military strike would assume, its shadow loomed ever larger.

By 1584, the gravest threat to Elizabeth came in the form of a united Catholic front using both native English conspirators and invading Spanish forces. The Catholic zealot Francis Throckmorton had been executed in 1584 for just such a scheme. Spain's ambassador to England, Bernardino de Mendoza, had been implicated in the Throckmorton plot and expelled from England. Elizabeth's political survival was literally a matter of life or death for her Protestant courtiers.

And if war is a quest to exploit an enemy's weaknesses, in 1584 England enjoyed one chance to exploit Spain's: The Netherlands. King Philip II had inherited the crown of the Lowlands and tried to micromanage the provinces' internal affairs from afar and to enforce his Catholicism on many Netherlanders who had already embraced Protestantism. Starting in the 1560s, Protestant Dutch forces had waged a bloody rebellion against its Spanish overlords. (In 1567, de Vere had sent his retainer Thomas Churchyard off to fight for the Protestants in the Netherlands.) Under the charismatic Prince William ("the Silent") of Orange, Dutch rebels had the potential to soak up Spanish resources and divert Spain from its plans to attack England. England could add to this diversion by abetting the Dutch rebel forces, if only the interventionists could convince the queen to do so.

Protestant patriots–including the earl of Leicester–supported William the Silent's campaign to overthrow Spanish forces in the Lowlands and lobbied the queen to give military and economic aid to the Dutch. And now that the earl of Sussex was dead and gone, little resistance remained to the notion of an English campaign in the Lowlands. To the maddeningly cautious queen,

though, such decisions were best handled by procrastination. Advisors urged Her Majesty to take action before the illustrious general Don John joined the Spanish ranks; Elizabeth did nothing. Don John then joined the fight, scoring military victories against the rebels; Elizabeth did nothing. Dutch ambassadors made personal trips to the queen, arguing for the urgency of their cause; Elizabeth did nothing. A Portuguese assassin nearly killed Prince William, and with it the Lowlands' best chance of beating Spain; Elizabeth did nothing.

In March 1584, the German scholar Sturmius–whom de Vere had studied under during his continental travels in 1575–wrote to Elizabeth pleading for an English force to be sent to The Netherlands, led by "some faithful and zealous personage such as the earl of Oxford, the earl of Leicester, or Philip Sidney." Elizabeth still did nothing.

Then, on July 10, 1584, an assassin made his way into William the Silent's home at Delft and, catching the prince off-guard, fired at him with a heavy pistol at point-blank range. As William staggered into the arms of an aide, he reportedly cried out, "My God, have pity for my soul! My God, have pity for these poor people!" He died in a matter of minutes.

Spurred in part, no doubt, by regret for not having come to the prince's aid while he was alive, Elizabeth finally agreed to give the Lowlands the military aid they had long requested. She was greeted with an outpouring of gratitude. In fact, for a brief period, it was even thought that Elizabeth might rule over the Dutch as new subjects to the English crown.

However, a logistical question soon followed: Who would lead the ground forces against Spain? Who would assume the governorship of this possible English colony? Leicester was the leading choice. As early as 1577, pleas had come in to appoint the earl of Leicester commander of England's Dutch campaign. Yet, as Sturmius's letter shows, de Vere had become a contender for the job too.

This was a candidacy that de Vere took seriously. And in the Elizabethan court's Christmas revels of 1584, he gave his aspirations voice.

On the night of December 27, 1584, Henry Evans led Oxford's Boys in a performance before the queen and her court at Windsor Castle of a play called *A History of Agamemnon and Ulysses.* This text, like nearly all court plays of that time, was never printed or preserved. Yet even the orthodox scholar Albert Feuillerat thought that de Vere might be the author of this "lost" play.

This "lost" play was probably a draft of part of Shake-speare's dark satire *Troilus and Cressida. Troilus and Cressida* contains a heated dispute between AGAMEMNON and ULYSSES, which forms the intellectual core of the larger play. AGAMEMNON and ULYSSES, as portrayed in *Troilus and Cressida,* use language and rhetorical tricks such as Euphuism that were fashionable in the early 1580s. The AGAMEMNON and ULYSSES scenes in *Troilus and Cressida*

suggest a 1584 context: AGAMEMNON notes that the Greek campaign against Troy has been going on for seven years; William the Silent's campaign against Spain had lasted since 1577.

Shake-speare's AGAMEMON and ULYSSES also argue over some of the very issues at stake in the Lowlands. The legendary figures of Agamemnon and Ulysses are Greek military leaders besieging the foreign city of Troy. In December of 1584, a play staged for Queen Elizabeth about the siege of Troy would readily have been seen as a representation of the siege of The Netherlands.

If *Agamemnon and Ulysses* was indeed an early draft of the AGAMEMNON and ULYSSES scenes from *Troilus and Cressida,* de Vere would have been arguing not only for military intervention but also for his leadership of the English forces–portraying himself as ULYSSES, a paragon of aristocratic and military ideals. As literary critic F. Quinland Daniels notes about Shake-speare's ULYSSES:

> Here we face a man of vigor and reason, and an exponent of order in all the Renaissance sense of the term, for these are Elizabethan men, for all their Greek names and the Trojan situation which is their vehicle.

On the other hand, Shake-speare's AGAMEMNON drags the audience through tiresome speeches and strained rhetorical devices. Daniels again:

> AGAMEMNON, we find, is a firm exponent of the British "endure" and "muddle through" philosophy. In him we have the "Colonel Blimp" prototype of World War II fame, a doughty figure who exalts persistence and "bulldog tenacity" but who is himself incapable of wile or strategy.... He is, we perceive, an emotionally motivated thinker and military "blowhard" whose mind works patly within its limitations, but who cannot entertain concepts which are outside those bounds.

Leicester/AGAMEMNON, Shake-speare argues, would be a foolish and simple-minded campaigner and a stale and predictable strategist.

De Vere once again stacked the deck. Just as *Ariodante and Genevora* provided pat alibis for the author's misbehavior, *Agamemnon and Ulysses* gave Elizabeth an overt choice for commander of her Lowlands campaign: the man who was ULYSSES. (In 1584, the complexity and subtlety that defined de Vere's mature literary voice were still only incipient.)

One chilly December night in 1584 found the queen and her court assembled at Windsor Castle, taking in this dramatic argument for military advancement–Shake-speare promoting himself to Queen Elizabeth as England's next generalissimo. In response to AGAMEMNON's affected discourse on disorder among the rank and file, ULYSSES effectively calls for order and sanity among the Protestant forces in the besieged Lowlands:

> ULYSSES And look how many Grecian tents do stand
> Hollow upon this plain, so many hollow factions.
> When that the general is not like the hive
> To whom the foragers shall all repair,
> What honey is expected? Degree being vizarded,
> Th' unworthiest shows as fairly in the mask.
> The heavens themselves, the planets, and this center
> Observe degree, priority, and place,
> Insisture, course, proportion, season, form,
> Office, and custom, in all line of order.

ULYSSES's words eloquently express the feudal, royalist philosophy of a divinely ordered world. (These exhortations are philosophical companions to de Vere's 1573 prefatory poem to *Cardanus's Comfort* on the "idle drone" and the "halls of high degree.") To ULYSSES, the problem now facing the invading army is the anarchy and confusion bred by too much equality within a military hierarchy that should be precisely defined and obeyed.

As the author neared thirty-five, HAMLET represented de Vere's thinking at its most progressive–revealing his fondness for the novel ideas and ideals of Italian Renaissance thinkers such as Gerolamo Cardano and Giordano Bruno. However, ULYSSES represented de Vere at his most regressive–an old-school feudalist aghast at the egalitarian and permissive ideals practiced by the Dutch. The republican notions inspired by the Dutch uprising–which later came to fruition in the British, American, and French revolutions–were anathema to the royalist Shake-speare.

The queen, no less an exponent of medieval notions of royalty than de Vere, must have found an appeal in de Vere's rhetoric of rank and deference. Foolish though it would have been to appoint her court playwright as a general and colonial governor, Elizabeth would not acknowledge as much until the last possible moment. Such was the nature of her familiar ploy to pit multiple suitors against one another–and wait to see who survived the dreary and expensive waiting game.

A portrait of an unidentified thirty-four-year-old Elizabethan nobleman, believed in the nineteenth century to be of Shake-speare, survives today at the palace of Hampton Court, twelve miles southwest of London. The confident sitter, bearing the same tight-lipped and narrow-eyed piercing gaze that defines the known images of de Vere, proudly holds his right hand on a ceremonial sword. His gold-embossed doublet, ornate buckles and holsters, and lace neck and wrist ruffs project the image of a military officer with mighty

aspirations. Infrared examination of this portrait by Charles Wisner Barrell in 1947 claimed to identify the sitter's sword with the Lord Great Chamberlain's Sword of State. Although a definitive study is still lacking, the supposition that de Vere struck a commanding pose for a court painter sometime in 1584 or early 1585–giving it to the queen as a reminder of his bid to become England's next four-star general–makes for a tempting theory indeed.

❧

On July 10, 1585, the queen put Sir John Norris in temporary command of some seven thousand Englishmen for a military expedition to rescue the besieged city of Antwerp. She then signed the Treaty of Nonsuch on August 20, formally committing her country to aid their Dutch compatriots on the battlefield. England was no longer an observer in the Spanish conflict. Elizabeth had effectively entered into an open state of war with Spain.

The Treaty of Nonsuch killed any last-ditch hope of averting a Spanish naval attack on England. This abstract fact of international politics began to carry concrete meaning on the streets of London. Royal shipwrights, working the shipyards at Deptford and Woolwich on the south bank of the Thames near Greenwich, would see their customary workload increase sixfold. Between 1584 and '86, the Royal Navy's shipwrights would crank out as many warships (thirteen) as they had built and refurbished over the preceding eighteen years. *Hamlet* pays witness to these days of feverish military buildup when one of the Danish palace guards asks:

> Why [is there] such daily cast of brazen cannon
> And foreign mart for implements of war?
> Why such impress of shipwrights, whose sore task
> Does not divide the Sunday from the week?
> What might be toward that this sweaty haste
> Doth make the night joint-laborer with the day?

On August 24, Norris and his troops embarked across the Channel, and soon thereafter engaged Spanish forces at the Dutch city of Arnhem. Norris enjoyed modest success in battle, but the queen was still playing as conservatively as ever. She would later rebuke him for disobeying orders "to defend, not to offend." Meanwhile, amid such frustrations and mixed messages, de Vere received notice that he'd been appointed commander of the horse in the Lowlands theater of war.

De Vere's dramatic pleas, it seems, had worked! "AGAMEMNON" was stuck holding Her Majesty's hand in London, while "ULYSSES" had received the first of what he must have hoped would be a series of promotions. On August 28, de Vere's advance team landed at the North Sea port town of Flushing (Vlissingen). The next day, the Spanish ambassador Mendoza reported back

to his king that de Vere had boarded a ship to cross the Channel and meet his retinue. Depending on the tides and prevailing winds, these crossings were sometimes an overnight journey. For an experienced ocean traveler like de Vere, the cramped and swaying accommodations would be familiar. The only factor that would have kept him awake at night was the anticipation and excitement of the new adventure unfolding before him.

Upon landing and greeting a grateful Dutch populace, de Vere began a progress up the coastline to The Hague, probably via Rotterdam and Delft. According to one historical account, similar English processions in the months to come would be greeted with "fifteen hundred musketeers and armed infantry and escorts of six to seven hundred, and in all of which the citizens thronged the processional route cheering and crying, 'God save Queen Elizabeth!'"

Such a welcome, perhaps more muted in tone, would have filled de Vere's breast with pride. At age thirty-five, he was finally fulfilling the earls of Oxfords' long and glorious tradition of military service to the crown. This was the kind of pomp and ceremony the Lord Great Chamberlain could revel in.

As commander, de Vere would be expected to bear much of the cost for his troops–although how this down-at-the-heels courtier could contemplate taking on such financial burdens is anybody's guess. He would also be expected to import with him a tucket, the musical logo used to distinguish one lord's soldiers from another's. Military musicians, playing single-valved trumpets, typically rattled out such ditties to rally the troops, cue them for various tasks (such as charging and retreating), and signify the unit's presence to allied commanders in the field. De Vere had long supported and remained friends with the composer William Byrd, the same man given and soon thereafter stripped of the Essex estate of Battylshall. Byrd's elaborate harpsichord piece, "The Earl of Oxford's March," full of flourishes and potential tuckets, was probably composed to honor de Vere's new military commission.

Upon arriving at The Hague on Friday, September 3–after a four-day journey from Flushing–de Vere met and dined with Lord Norris and the other superior officers. There the commanders surveyed the assembled troops and awaited further orders. (De Vere would later lard *All's Well That Ends Well* with names of various commanders in the Lowlands campaign.) Commands from London were slow in coming. No one had even been appointed to the generalship, the post for which the play *Agamemnon and Ulysses* had likely served as Shake-speare's application. De Vere had another problem as well: He had left behind no prominent advocates to continue pressing Her Majesty on his behalf. With Sussex now gone, the only ally de Vere had at court was Burghley. And the old counselor hardly had time to worry about promotions for his ingrate son-in-law.

Soon after de Vere had set sail for Flushing, the spymaster Francis Walsingham wrote to a Lowlands commander that Her Majesty was considering

sending over "a nobleman" to serve as the commanding officer. Ouch. Walsingham used no name for this "nobleman," and in this case no names were needed. Leicester had visited and advocated for a Lowlands expedition for seven years. He had previously met with the martyred prince William and enjoyed the support of commanders in the field. The winds were not in de Vere's favor, however noble and lofty ULYSSES's speech may have been.

In October, the inevitable came to pass. De Vere was recalled home from the Lowlands–as OTHELLO would be from his wars–and Leicester and Sidney captured the key roles in the campaign. Much like HAMLET, de Vere suddenly found that he "lacked advancement."

Adding insult to injury, Spanish pirates had looted a boatload of de Vere's provisions and monies. As one officer wrote to Leicester on October 14, "The earl of Oxford sent his money, apparel, wine, and venison by ship to England. The ship was captured off Dunkirk by the Spaniards on that day, and a letter from Lord Burghley to Lord Oxford found by them on board. This letter appointed him to the command of the horse." Yet de Vere transformed his second experience with buccaneers into something useful: *Hamlet* contains not only an encounter with pirates but also an analogous plot twist involving suborned letters at sea.

Sidney would die from wounds received on the battlefield in 1586, while Leicester's disastrous two-year campaign would end in ruin, leaving the ailing AGAMEMNON drained and exhausted. Leicester would die a year after returning home. The Lowlands wars would drag on for more than sixty years, claiming the lives of thousands more soldiers. Had de Vere actually stayed on in the Lowlands in 1585, he might well have died there too. And England would have been robbed of the man who gave it language.

CHAPTER 8

TO THY RUDDER TIED BY TH' STRINGS

[1586–1589]

PERHAPS INSPIRED BY ULYSSES'S ELOQUENT ADVOCACY OF THE FINEST courtly ideals, Elizabeth had at first fallen prey to her own bard's rhetoric. But when sober heads prevailed, she recognized that she'd handed de Vere the wrong assignment. The Virgin Queen had other designs for her earl of Oxford.

Once Elizabeth had sent troops to fight Spanish forces in the Lowlands, England was committed to armed conflict. Tax rates, which had remained stable since her accession, would double by the end of the decade and triple by 1593. Most of this increased cash flow would be streaming out to England's armies in Ireland and The Netherlands and to its incipient Royal Navy. Some of it, however, would be used on the home front.

Over the previous three years, the fifty-one-year-old privy councilor, Francis Walsingham, had been running the dramatic troupe the Queen's Men. But Walsingham didn't care about the artistic mission of his company. From his former post at the English embassy in Paris, Walsingham had seen the carnage of St. Bartholomew's Day 1572, when Catholics had murdered Protestants in the streets. The spymaster had made it his solemn and self-appointed task to ensure that England never witnessed such carnage. If it meant interrogating and torturing supposed subversives and keeping tabs on every Catholic-sympathizing household in the country, then so be it.

The Queen's Men's mission was political. Walsingham's new troupe applied the lessons of John Bale's *King Johan* (1562) on a nationwide scale: Recast the story of a long-gone monarch to advance the cause of Queen Elizabeth's reign; unite the British people against the scourge of Catholicism; wrap these lessons in a pretty package to entice the crowds. Walsingham recognized the propagandistic potential of the mass media of his age: the theater.

Queen's Men plays such as *The True Tragedy of Richard III* and *The True Chronicle History of King Leir* [*sic*] emphasized historical "truth." It was a particularly Elizabethan view of historical truth, one in which the facts of history meant little by themselves. History, to the English Renaissance mind and to the Queen's Men's dramatists in particular, was never just a study of the past. Instead, history became a passport to the present, affording new views on contemporary affairs as refracted through the lens of the past. History wasn't "was" as much as it was "is" and "should be."

Most scholars today assume the anonymous Queen's Men's plays *King Leir, The Famous Victories of Henry V, The True Tragedy of Richard III,* and *The Troublesome Reign of King John*–all of which were later published–served as sources for their respective Shake-spearean counterparts. But *source* is too timid a word for these texts. They are more likely to have been de Vere's first drafts, probably written in collaboration with secretaries and associates such as John Lyly and Anthony Munday.

In re-creating English history on the public stage as a means of popularizing Queen Elizabeth's church and state, de Vere was taking part in what the Elizabethan satirist and de Vere confidant Thomas Nashe later called "the policy of plays"–plays as political action and Tudor evangelism. Writing in 1592, Nashe in his pamphlet *Pierce Penniless* stood behind the use of the English stage as a propaganda tool in the ongoing war against Spain.

> There is a certain waste of the people for whom there is no use but war, and these men must have some employment still to cut them off.... If they have no service abroad, they will make mutinies at home. Or if the affairs of state be such as cannot exhale these corrupt excrements [*rowdy Londoners*], it is very expedient they have some light toys to busy their heads withal, cast before them as bones to gnaw on, which may keep them from having leisure to intermeddle with higher matters.
>
> To this effect, the Policy of Plays is very necessary–howsoever some shallow-brained censors (not the deepest searchers into the secrets of government) mightily oppugn them....

Nashe's comments appear in a section of his pamphlet in which the satirist rails against all forms of sloth. He explains, however, that theater is *not* a form of sloth, as Puritan would-be censors were claiming, but rather an expression of patriotism. The "Policy of Plays," as he called it, was a key strategy in the effort to maintain order and indoctrinate the populace. Nashe cites two successful examples of the Policy of Plays.

> How would it have joyed brave TALBOT [*from Shake-speare's* Henry VI, Part 1], the terror of the French, to think that after he had lain two hundred years in the tomb, he should triumph again on the stage–and have his bones new embalmed with the tears of ten thousand spectators at least?...
>
> All arts to [the Puritans] are vanity.... [T]ell them what a glorious thing it is to have HENRY THE FIFTH represented on the stage, leading the French king prisoner and forcing both him and the DAUPHIN to swear fealty.

The HENRY THE FIFTH to whom Nashe refers is likely from the Queen's Men's *The Famous Victories of Henry V.*

Correspondence from a six-day period during late June 1586 suggests that, beginning in 1586, de Vere was working for the state, and for his queen, in a new capacity.

On Thursday, June 21, Burghley wrote to the master of the Queen's Men to request if he'd spoken with the queen about an unnamed proposal concerning de Vere. "I pray you, send me word if you had any commodity to speak with Her Majesty to speak of My Lord of Oxford and what hope there is," Burghley wrote to Walsingham. "And if you have any [news], to let Robert Cecil understand [that] it [is] to relieve his sister, who is more troubled for her husband's lack than he himself." Anne was more worried about finances than her husband.

Four days later, de Vere wrote a letter to his father-in-law discussing a case he had before the queen–presumably the same case that Burghley had mentioned in his June 21 missive. De Vere's letter also makes clear that the master of the Queen's Men had insider knowledge about this "suit." The suit involved a considerable payout from the royal treasury. From the money that was yet to come, in fact, de Vere asked his father-in-law for a cash advance. De Vere wrote to Burghley:

> My very good Lord–
> As I have been beholding unto you divers times–and of late by my brother[-in-law] R. Cecil, whereby I have been the better able to follow my suit, wherein I have some comfort at this time from Master Secretary Walsingham–so I am now bold to crave Your Lordship's help at this present. For, being now almost at a point to taste that good which Her Majesty shall determine, yet am I as one that hath long besieged a fort and not [been] able to compass the end or reap the fruit of his travail, being forced to levy his siege for want of munition.

Strip away de Vere's florid military metaphor, and one finds a straightforward message: de Vere needed money. He continues:

> Being therefore thus disfurnished and unprovided to follow Her Majesty, as I perceive she will look for, I most earnestly desire Your Lordship that

you will lend me 200 pounds till Her Majesty perform her promise.... I would be loath to trouble Your Lordship with so much, if I were not kept here back with this tedious suit from London.... I dare not, having been here so long and the matter growing to some conclusion, be absent. I pray Your Lordship bear with me, that at this time wherein I am to get myself in order I do become so troublesome. From the court this morning.

Your Lordship's ever bounden
EDWARD OXENFORD

The day after de Vere wrote this letter, the queen "performed her promise."

On Sunday, June 26, Her Majesty affixed the seal of the Privy Council to a royal warrant for a stunning £1,000 annual salary for de Vere. This annuity, comparable to $270,000 today, was to be split into quarterly payments "during Our pleasure or until such time as he shall be by Us otherwise provided for to be in some manner relieved." She stipulated that the grant had no strings attached: "Neither the said earl nor his assigns nor his or their executors . . . shall by way of account, imprest, or any other way whatsoever be charged towards Us." It was de Vere's money to be dispersed, she proclaimed, as he saw fit. For the rest of his life, de Vere would continue to draw these quarterly payments, even into the reign of the next monarch, King James I.

Although neither the seal nor the language of de Vere's annuity hints at the queen's motives, the timing and the exorbitant amount of money give pause. Just as the Queen's Men were beginning to ramp up their performance schedule–enacting histories, some of which were prototypes, if not first drafts, of Shake-speare plays–the queen had begun to ramp up her benevolence to de Vere.

The average senior servant in Elizabeth's government had to make do with no more than £50 per year. And even most exceptions to this rule only made three-figure salaries: Her Majesty's lieutenant of the Tower, Sir Owen Hopton, pulled in £100 annually. Edmund Tylney, Master of the Revels, netted £200. Sir Robert Cecil, de Vere's brother-in-law, would soon be earning £800 a year as he took over national security and espionage duties for his aging father. As the cash-starved government stared at the prospect of a long war with Spain–one that would empty out the treasury in just ten years' time–Elizabeth seldom gave direct gifts of money to the nobility, preferring to give monopolies in goods and commodities like sweet wine or wool or tin. The new monopolist could then earn out a comfortable living, all without withdrawing a penny from the state's coffers.

Queen Elizabeth I would hand over the equivalent of nearly $5 million to her Lord Great Chamberlain. The quid pro quos–whether stated or not–lurking behind de Vere's annuity remain one of the more vexing unsolved problems

of his biography. Was Her Majesty intentionally buying him the time needed to develop what would become the Shake-speare history plays? Or was she subsidizing other related activities, such as his supervising a workshop of playwrights (*e.g.*, Munday and Lyly) who were themselves generating the Queen's Men's playscripts? Or was the queen just being exceptionally, inexplicably, generous?

Elizabeth the canny political strategist was also Elizabeth the master manipulator. In putting her flaky play-puppet on the public dole, the queen had effectively attached as many strings to his little marionette arms and legs as she needed. *The Comedy of Errors* acknowledges as much. Annual grants of £1,000, one learns, come with some very large strings attached. One of *The Comedy of Errors*'s two de Vere characters (ANTIPHOLUS OF EPHESUS) tells his servant to go out and buy some rope. The servant replies with a non sequitur that critics have scratched their heads over for centuries: "I buy a thousand pounds a year!" the servant says. "I buy a rope!"

In the words of literary scholar Seymour M. Pitcher:

> Others have gone beyond [de Vere biographer Bernard M.] Ward to suggest, with some plausibility, that the funds [behind de Vere's annuity] were intended "for the first organized propaganda. Oxford was to produce plays which would educate the English people–most of whom could not read–in their country's history, in appreciation of its greatness, and of their own stake in its welfare." In point of fact and time, a spate of chronicle plays did follow the authorization of the stipend. Is it not conceivable that they were produced with such subsidy? *The Famous Victories* [*of Henry V*] may have been one of the first plays–perhaps the very first–commissioned for the Queen's Men under this policy.

Under this scenario, the end products of the queen's £1,000 annuity were Shake-speare's *King John; Richard II; 1 and 2 Henry IV; Henry V; 1, 2, and 3 Henry VI; Richard III;* and *Henry VIII.* They were the culmination of a nuanced and sophisticated public relations campaign. Shake-speare's English history plays may contain de Vere's own snipes and personal vendettas–FALSTAFF's Gad's Hill robbery, RICHARD III's canny resemblance to Robert Cecil. But in toto they tell a story that is essentially a breathtaking apology for Tudor power and a timeless testament to English national pride–think of Laurence Olivier's film version of *Henry V* rallying the country at the height of the German blitz. Seldom has a government invested its money so well.

Just one month after the queen approved de Vere's £1,000 annuity, the Venetian ambassador to Spain reported back to his superiors that King Philip had been outraged to learn that theatrical troupes were making a mockery of him on the public stages in England. The ambassador wrote:

> What has enraged him [*the king of Spain*] much more than all else and has caused him to show a resentment such as he has never displayed in all his life is the account of the masquerades and comedies which the queen of England orders to be acted at his expense.

Some English playwright was making an impression.

De Vere's secretary John Lyly would later write a courtly allegory, *Endymion*, thanking Elizabeth for her gracious annuity. The story of *Endymion* tells of a protagonist who has a secret love affair (read: Vavasour) that angers the moon goddess (read: Elizabeth). The moon puts Endymion to sleep, symbolizing de Vere's years of royal disfavor. But ultimately, she forgives her wayward swain and awakens him with a kiss, symbolizing the £1,000 annuity. Now revived like Rip van Winkle after his dormancy, Endymion exclaims:

> Your Highness hath blessed me, and your words have again restored my youth. Methinks I feel my joints strong and these moldy hairs to molt–and all by your virtue, Cynthia, into whose hands the balance that weigheth time and fortune are committed!

In the mid–seventeenth century, a vicar from Stratford-upon-Avon named John Ward recorded some of the legends he'd heard about Will Shakspere–by then widely accepted as the author of the works of Shake-speare. In his private diaries, Ward recorded:

> I have heard that Mr. Shakespeare... supplied the stage with 2 plays every year and for that had an allowance so large that he spent at the rate of £1,000 a year, as I have heard.

The vicar never, however, wonders how "Shakespeare" could have paid out such a tidy sum as £1,000 per year: William Shakspere's cash estate never exceeded £350.

The year 1586 was an important crossroads for another prominent figure of the day. Since 1568, Mary, Queen of Scots, had been a captive of the Elizabethan state. The Scots queen had abdicated the Scottish throne in favor of her infant son, James, in 1567 and fled south in 1568, driven by a seamy murder scandal in which historians now suspect Burghley's agents played a crucial role.

Mary Stuart was a Catholic and, other than Queen Elizabeth herself, had arguably the best claim to the English throne. To English Catholics, the Scots queen was just one papally sanctioned assassination away from being crowned Queen Mary II of England–which might have ushered in Catholic–Protestant bloodshed such as Walsingham had witnessed in Paris in 1572.

Walsingham and Burghley had long been hoping for the day when Mary could be tried and executed for planning to overthrow Elizabeth–regardless of such sentimentalities as the truth of the charges. The evidence, the spymasters knew, needed to be so damning as to convince Elizabeth to sign the execution order. Elizabeth had resisted previous appeals to authorize Mary's death warrant when the duke of Norfolk allegedly planned to marry Mary and overthrow the Elizabethan state. Elizabeth's unwillingness was no mere exercise of judicial restraint. Mary was an anointed queen–God's messenger of divine order. Executing the queen of Scotland, tantamount to rebellion against heaven itself, would have set a dangerous precedent for the queen of England.

In January 1586, a brewer managed to smuggle secret letters to Mary via a watertight box inside a beer keg. The Scots queen soon opened a cryptographic correspondence with French conspirators who were planning to assassinate Elizabeth. The ringleader of the plot was a dashing young Derbyshire lad named Anthony Babington. However, the brewer, the couriers, and even a few of the French subversives were all on Walsingham's payroll. Mary was walking into Walsingham's trap.

In July, Babington wrote to Mary of his plans to "dispatch... the usurping Competitor" [Elizabeth]. Foolishly, the Scots queen wrote back. One of Walsingham's agents, recognizing the monumental significance of this piece of evidence, drew a picture of a gallows in the margin of Mary's reply. The Queen of Scots was caught at last. Babington was arrested on August 14 and tortured. He confessed to everything on August 18.

Now all that remained was to try Mary for treason. This meant assembling the nobility of England to pronounce judgment on the Queen of Scots. Before long, de Vere learned he would be a member of the jury.

Elizabeth had at the time just signed a deal with Mary's twenty-year-old son, King James VI, who had worn the Scots crown since his absent mother's hasty departure. Elizabeth had played on James's two weak points: He was broke and ambitious. The Virgin Queen gave James a £4,000 pension to ensure his loyalty to the Elizabethan state. It worked. Throughout the trial to come, James would make only nominal protests over the judicial murder of his mother. He knew if he sacrificed his mother, he stood a good chance of someday inheriting the English crown himself.

The Mary Stuart trial summoned forty-five jurors, two of whom were Catholic. They met first at the Star Chamber at Westminster on September 27 and reassembled on October 8. After much vacillation, Elizabeth had settled on the Northamptonshire castle of Fotheringhay as the site of the trial. She would not be present. Though they corresponded with each other for decades, the two cousin queens would never meet.

Couriers ferrying news back to London from Fotheringhay could make the trip in twenty-four hours, riding at speed. For de Vere and his fellow commissioners, trailing their carriages of baggage behind them, the muddy

road through the crimson-and-amber autumn woods snaked on for some three days. The medieval fortress of Fotheringhay offered an appropriately cold and foreboding refuge for the task at hand. The castle's great room had been cleared of furniture save for five long benches, two of which straddled either side of an empty banquet table in the center. At one end of the echoing hall stood an empty throne, draped with the cloth of state. This would serve as Elizabeth's symbolic presence during the proceedings.

As quickly became clear, Mary scarcely had a leg to stand on. Raised and tutored in France, she neither knew nor had any access to lawyers who knew English jurisprudence. In 1584, Parliament had effectively passed a lynch law (the Act of Association), which stated that simply being privy to a plot against Elizabeth was treason. The act made clear that it applied to both English subjects and nonsubjects–a provision written with the Queen of Scots in mind. Like the duke of Norfolk and the martyr Edmund Campion, the defendant Mary would be simply the protagonist of a tragedy produced and directed by the state.

Despite all the factors working against her, Mary raised a spirited defense and impressed the jury. She said,

> I do not deny that I have earnestly wished for liberty–and done my utmost to procure it for myself. In this I have acted from a very natural wish. But can I be responsible for the criminal projects of a few desperate men, which they planned without my knowledge or participation?

Mary prayed that God might grant forgiveness to the commission for treating her "somewhat rudely." Before her final exit from the courtroom, she whispered a few words into Walsingham's ear and turned to face her accusers, saying, "May God keep me from having to do with you again." Before the commissioners could announce their preordained guilty verdict, Elizabeth ordered the jury to reconvene at the Star Chamber in Westminster.

Upon arriving in London, where the jury's pronouncement was made, the jurors learned that death had delivered one surprise verdict: Sir Philip Sidney had been injured in action in the Lowlands and, on October 17, had died from his wounds. The knight's body had been repatriated and would lie in state at London's Church of the Holy Trinity Minories for fifteen weeks–a royal distraction from the Mary Stuart debacle.

After months of weeping and procrastination, Elizabeth finally consented to Mary's execution–while still desperately trying to insulate herself from blame. On February 1, 1587, she commanded her secretary, William Davison, to bring her the death warrant. He did; she signed it, swearing Davison to utmost secrecy.

On the morning of February 9, news arrived from Fotheringhay that Mary had been executed the previous day. At the time, Elizabeth was at

Greenwich, preparing for a hunt. Unable to reach the queen before her hunting party departed, the courier instead told Burghley, who thanked the messenger for his service but was wise enough to let someone else deliver the news to Her Majesty. The event itself, Elizabeth soon learned, had been cursed. The executioner had not completed his bloody task with the first stroke of his blade; he had required two chops to cleave the royal neck. Many saw this as God's condemnation of the execution. In the words of one contemporary ballad:

> The ax that should have done the execution
> Shunned to cut off a head that had been crowned.
> The hangman lost his wonted resolution
> To quit a queen of noblesse so renowned.
> There was remorse in hangman and in steel
> When peers and judges no remorse could feel!

To make matters worse, Mary had worn a wig to her execution. When the axman tried to hoist the queen's severed head to display to the crowd, the head fell to the floor with a thump.

Elizabeth was distraught–and not just at the axman's bumbling. She disowned any responsibility for ordering the execution and laid all responsibility at secretary Davison's feet. Elizabeth had Davison fined an exorbitant 10,000 marks ($1.8 million in today's currency) and sentenced to prison in the Tower of London. The fine was later rescinded, but Davison spent a year and a half behind bars.

The commissioners must have marveled at the queen's gall. De Vere had probably thought *he* was being disingenuous in his comedies by blaming everyone else for his own jealousy and misbehavior. Yet Elizabeth's denial of basic reality was truly stunning. If she had signed the death warrant intending that it not be enacted, as she claimed, she must have realized that she had given Burghley, Walsingham, and all of Parliament exactly what they had wanted for years. None of them was going to ask twice. Yet, she sent a letter to the king of France expressing her sorrow for the horrible snafu of Queen Mary's death and confided in the Venetian ambassador her deep regret and anger. It was as if another woman altogether had signed the death warrant.

The Queen's Men would enact this same privy chamber melodrama on the public stage in *The Troublesome Reign of King John.* In this pre-Shakespearean play, KING JOHN orders that a younger, papally sanctioned claimant to the throne (PRINCE ARTHUR) be blinded with hot pokers. The KING's servant HUBERT reports back to the KING that by inadvertence the hot pokers have actually killed the PRINCE. KING JOHN then lashes out at HUBERT for having had the effrontery to follow orders.

KING JOHN Art thou there, villain? Furies haunt thee still,
For killing him whom all the world laments.
HUBERT Why here's my lord Your Highness's hand and seal,
Charging on life's regard to do the deed.
JOHN Ah, dull, conceited peasant–knowst thou not
It was a damned execrable deed?
Showst me a seal? Oh, villain, both our souls
Have sold their freedom to the thrall of hell
Under the warrant of that cursed seal.
Hence, villain, hang thyself, and say in hell
That I am coming for a kingdom there.

In a curious plot twist, HUBERT then informs JOHN that ARTHUR isn't actually dead. But, to complete the circle, ARTHUR immediately thereafter dies in an accident. None of this actually happened during the reign of the historical King John.

The Troublesome Reign of King John suggests KING JOHN (Elizabeth) actually didn't want to sanction the death of ARTHUR (Mary, Queen of Scots); the Catholic heir to the throne was killed by accident. Shake-speare's *King John* reenacts this same strange fiction. In both the anonymous Queen's Men's play and the mature Shake-speare drama, KING JOHN's sidestepping of responsibility was a clever propagandistic trick. It revealed the inside story of Queen Elizabeth's court; but it also allowed Her Majesty a convenient out. *King John* blunted the criticism Elizabeth faced both at home and abroad for the beheading of the Queen of Scots.

In *King John,* de Vere put a spin on the royal lynching in which he'd played a part. However, as his more personal moments reveal, he must have also been quite disturbed by the Mary Stuart debacle. De Vere's Geneva Bible contains several underlined verses that suggest how sacrosanct the life of an anointed monarch was to him. In the book of I Samuel, de Vere underlined the passage in which Samuel anointed David as King Saul's successor. (I Samuel 16:13.) Later in the biblical story, King Saul jealously attempts to murder David. Given two chances to kill the corrupt Saul and seize the throne, David makes it clear that he respects Saul's sacred office. In another marked passage, David explains himself to his king. Here is the biblical passage from I Samuel 24:10–11, with de Vere's original underlining.

10 And David said to Saul, "Wherefore
givest thou an ear to men's words that
say, 'Behold, David seeketh evil against
thee?'
11 "Behold, this day thine eyes have seen
that the Lord had delivered thee this
day into mine hand in the cave, and some
bade me kill thee. But I had compassion
on thee, and said, 'I will not lay
mine hand on my master: For he is the
Lord's anointed.'"

De Vere, whose underlinings elsewhere in the biblical books of Samuel and Kings reveal that he personally identified with the figure of the poet-king David, evidently took his Old Testament lessons to heart. The darkest play in the entire Shake-speare canon suggests de Vere was even more disturbed by the Mary Stuart execution than was Elizabeth.

Macbeth would serve as the author's private answer to his own *King John.* De Vere probably began it sometime in the heat of the Mary Stuart crisis and, as he did with most of the Shake-speare canon, would spend the rest of his life revising and reworking it. The Scots queen's ultimate fate haunts *Macbeth,* a tragedy that begins and ends with an offstage beheading and the ritual display of the severed head.

Queen Elizabeth is the leading candidate for LADY MACBETH, the regicidal vixen who had bathed her country in the blood of an anointed Scots monarch. As one of *Macbeth*'s nobles, MACDUFF, laments when he first sees the body of the slain Scots king:

MACDUFF Confusion now hath made his masterpiece:
Most sacrilegious murder hath broke ope
The Lord's anointed temple and stole thence
The life o' th' building.

And as an accomplice to the murder of Mary Stuart, de Vere was as much MACBETH as any member of the jury. He and Elizabeth had arguably violated Mary's rights twice over. The Stuart queen had been a royal guest in England; according to Scots law, Mary had been in England under what was technically called "double trust." Naturally, *Macbeth* outlines this important but abstruse point of Scottish law:

MACBETH He's here in double trust:
First, as I am his kinsman and his subject,
Strong both against the deed; then, as his host,
Who should against his murderer shut the door,
Not bear the knife myself.

Macbeth, with its nihilism and criticism of both Queen Elizabeth and Queen Mary Stuart, was no propaganda piece for the Queen's Men to enact on the public stage. In fact, no evidence exists of any performance of *Macbeth*

during the reigns of Queen Elizabeth I, King James I, or even King Charles I–save for one mention of a staging at the Globe Theatre on April 20, 1611. The Scots tragedy was probably written to excise the author's own personal demons. Once a monarch has been murdered, says MACBETH, what gives anyone or anything else a greater right to life?

> MACBETH Had I but died an hour before this chance,
> I had liv'd a blessed time; for from this instant
> There's nothing serious in mortality:
> All is but toys; renown and grace is dead,
> The wine of life is drawn, and the mere lees [*sediment*]
> Is left this vault to brag of.

As high-minded as he may have been in his writings, by the time of the execution of Mary, Queen of Scots, Edward de Vere was becoming a bitter man. One would not wish the fate of Anne Cecil de Vere on anyone. By late August of 1586, Anne was pregnant for the fifth time. (After the 1583 death of their one son, the infant Lord Bolbec, she had given birth to a second daughter, Bridget, on April 6, 1584, and a third daughter, Frances, sometime in 1585 or '86.) During the final month of Anne's pregnancy, in early May of 1587, de Vere had once again chided her for her father's perceived misdeeds. The earl had so insulted his wife this time that, according to her father, she had cried all night. The cause of such distemper in her moody and unpredictable husband was neither principled nor high-minded. De Vere simply thought Burghley was leaving his son-in-law out of his perceived share of the forfeited estates of the Babington traitors.

As Burghley lamented to Walsingham on May 5, 1587,

> No enemy I have can envy this match, for thereby neither honor nor land nor goods come to their [*his daughter and son-in-law's*] children, for whom being 3 already to be kept and a 4th like to follow, I am only at charge . . . for their sustenation [*sustenance*].
>
> But if their father were of that good nature as to be thankful for the same, I would be less grieved with the burden.

On May 26, 1587, Anne delivered the couple's fourth daughter, Susan. In September of 1587, the couple's two- or three-year-old daughter Frances died and was buried north of London at the Church of All Saints, Edmonton.

De Vere now had no surviving sons and three daughters. According to both his wife and father-in-law, he could support none of his children financially. All costs and responsibilities for their upbringing fell upon his in-laws.

After the £1,000 annuity, the historical records of de Vere's life grow fewer. The corpus that would become Shake-speare was, one presumes, occupying ever greater portions of the author's time.

The record is blank for what was probably the most significant single event in de Vere's life since the death of his father: On June 5, 1588, evidently quite unexpectedly, Anne Cecil de Vere, countess of Oxford, died at the queen's palace at Greenwich. She was thirty-three years old. Anne's epitaph, printed on her tomb that stands to this day at Westminster Abbey, records that she had been "debilitated by a burning fever."

De Vere is nowhere listed as a mourner or as an attendant at his wife's funeral; no records survive to suggest what he was doing during the spring and early summer of 1588 or even if he were anywhere in the greater London area. His silence and apparent distance are made all the more remarkable by the effusion of memorial verse that Anne's death generated. At least twenty in memoriam tributes were written–in English, Latin, Greek, and Hebrew–by as many different authors. Furthermore, since Burghley was clearly distraught by the loss of his favorite daughter, several letters from peers and colleagues (including from Peregrine Bertie, Lord Willoughby) arrived at the Lord Treasurer's doorstep, expressing their condolences. Again, no letters from or to de Vere survive.

One obscure elegist, Wilfred Samonde, paid tribute to Anne's many virtues. He writes:

> For modesty, a chaste Penelope
> Another Grissel [Griselda] for her patience,
> Such patience as few but she can use,
> Her Christian zeal unto the highest God,
> Her humble duty to her worthy queen,
> Her reverence to her aged sire,
> Her faithful love unto her noble lord,
> Her friendliness to those of equal state,
> Her readiness to help the needy soul,
> His [God's] worthy volume had been altered
> And filled with the praises of our Anne,
> Who as she liv'd an angel on the earth,
> So like an angel she doth sit on high.

Samonde's praise is noteworthy for its analogy between Anne and the medieval figure Griselda. Griselda, according to the ancient legend, married a nobleman who treated her horribly; and she did nothing to fight it. Griselda simply endured. In an age that required women to bow to the whims of their husbands, however unreasonable they might be, Griselda was seen by some

Elizabethans as an example (perverse in the extreme by today's standards) for young girls to follow.

It was only through his creative work, in plays completed years after Anne was gone, that de Vere expressed what should have been plain to him while his wife was alive: He'd been married to a woman who had practically martyred herself for him. The figure of Griselda, although mentioned by name only once in the Shake-speare canon (in *The Taming of the Shrew*), nevertheless haunts most of the Shake-speare plays that grapple with the problems of de Vere's marriage to the Cecil clan: *Hamlet, Othello, The Winter's Tale, The Comedy of Errors, All's Well That Ends Well, Measure for Measure, Much Ado About Nothing, Cymbeline,* and *Two Gentlemen of Verona.* Literary scholarship is flush with comparisons between Griselda and the Anne Cecil–inspired heroines in these plays: OPHELIA, DESDEMONA, HERMIONE, LUCIANA, HELENA, ISABELLA, HERO, IMOGEN, and JULIA.

Some Griselda-like heroines die; others don't. But all represent aspects of the relationship between de Vere and his wife. HELENA presents Anne at her most ambitious and aggressive. OPHELIA stands for Anne as the pawn of her overbearing and omnipotent father. (One of the unpublished epitaphs to Anne, in fact, compares her to the legendary Anna Perenna, the Ovidian goddess who drowned herself in a brook–suggesting one possible source for OPHELIA's ultimate fate.) DESDEMONA becomes a channel into which the author focuses his most selfish and maliciously misled feelings of jealous rage.

On the other hand, three of Shake-speare's Cecilian heroines exist in a kind of limbo between living and dead: *Much Ado About Nothing, Cymbeline,* and *The Winter's Tale* all guide their Griselda characters (HERO, IMOGEN, and HERMIONE respectively) through a course that begins with suspicions of infidelity, follows with the heroine's counterfeit death, and ends with her apotheosis. All three stories effectively perform an emotional autopsy on a disastrous marriage, exploring the realms of the author's psyche that led him to such vile behavior toward his wife.

The simplest of these three Shake-spearean resurrection fables comes in *Much Ado,* wherein HERO's betrothed (CLAUDIO) unjustly accuses her of infidelity. To teach the groom a lesson, HERO is spirited away into hiding. Everyone else in the play is then told that CLAUDIO's emotional cruelty has killed HERO. The ghostly father who devises this scheme (FRIAR FRANCIS) explains his motives thus:

> She dying, as it must be so maintain'd
> Upon the instant that she was accus'd
> Shall be lamented, pitied, and excus'd
> Of every hearer; for it so falls out
> That what we have we prize not the worth

> Whiles we enjoy it, but being lack'd and lost,
> Why then we rack the value; then we find
> The virtue that possession would now show us
> Whiles it was ours.

As noted previously, an early draft of *Much Ado* may have been written and performed at court in 1583. But the hammer blow of Anne's death–and the rebuke it delivered to her wayward husband–probably caused de Vere to revisit the play sometime soon after June of 1588.

Cymbeline considers Anne Cecil more deeply. Taking her fate into her own hands, IMOGEN fakes death to bring her husband to his senses. But this time no acts of theatrical resuscitation can bring her back. As IMOGEN observes:

> The dream's here still. Even when I wake it is
> Without me, as within me; not imagin'd, felt.

Whether or not de Vere was ever in love with the flesh-and-blood Griselda he married, it appears he fell in love with his dramatic portrayals of Anne onstage. He was becoming a Pygmalion–the mythic sculptor described by Ovid who became so transfixed by the statue of a woman he'd created that she came to life and married him–but a Pygmalion whose love had gone from flesh to statue.

Pygmalion is, indeed, the root story of the last play that ritually resurrects Anne Cecil. *The Winter's Tale* fixates on the slandered wife HERMIONE's death and then revels over her rebirth. The play's jealous husband, LEONTES, presents de Vere in a brutally honest self-portrait–a tyrannical egomaniac who accuses his wife of infidelity and stubbornly refuses to hear any contrary arguments, even when the infallible Oracle at Delphi pronounces HERMIONE chaste.

LEONTES's jealous rage kills his spouse, at which point she becomes transformed into a painted statue. Painted statues were a frequent feature of Elizabethan funerary art; de Vere may have been thinking of the one most personal to him, on the lavish tomb in Westminster Abbey that Burghley had constructed for his daughter. On the Westminster Abbey monument, the painted figure of Anne lies recumbent. As LEONTES observes about HERMIONE's statue:

> The fixture of her eye has motion in't
> As we are mock'd with art.

Perhaps this was ultimately how Anne Cecil de Vere exacted revenge on her husband, by colonizing his very imagination and tormenting him–via his own pen–from beyond the grave.

In the summer of 1588, able-bodied Englishmen had more to do than wrestle with the demons of their past. The imminent invasion of England by Spain was becoming, in the words of historian De Lamar Jensen, "the worst-kept secret in Europe." Sir Francis Drake had stopped the Spanish fleet during the summer of 1587 with a search-and-destroy mission to the Spanish base at Cádiz. But by April of 1588, Drake and the lord admiral Charles Howard knew that Spain was going to try its luck again during the coming summer.

The combined force of Spain and Portugal's navies set their courses north and readied their cannons. In the Lowlands, a Spanish invasion force of twenty-three thousand men awaited the Armada to ferry them across the Channel. If the invasion succeeded, Elizabeth could be deposed by midsummer and English subjects could be pledging their allegiance to a Spanish-appointed Catholic puppet regime.

De Vere had been pressing his father-in-law for opportunities to show Elizabeth his mettle. The reason he was not near at Anne's death (June 5) and funeral (June 25) may well be because he was at sea.

Sir Francis Drake was to lead the English naval forces against the Armada. Ever the buccaneer, Drake intended to lead an English fleet south and stop the Armada before it could even leave Spanish waters–as he'd done the summer before at Cádiz. Gale-force winds and unseasonably strong rainstorms during the spring of 1588 prevented any venture into the open sea. However, on May 30, the weather finally broke long enough for Drake's fleet to set sail, to ambush the Armada during its northbound transit.

An English propaganda poem, published the following winter, celebrates the many worthies who participated in the eventual military victory against Spain. De Vere is given prominent placement. The poem's author ("I.L."–thought to be either John Lyly or the Protestant apologist James Lea) writes:

> When from the Hesperian bounds [*western shores*],
> with warlike bands,
> The vowèd foemen of this happy isle
> With martial men, drawn forth from many lands,
> 'Gan set their sail, on whom the winds did smile,
> The rumors ran of conquest, war, and spoil
> And hapless sack of this renownèd soil. . . . .
>
> De Vere, whose fame and loyalty hath pierced
> The Tuscan clime, and through the Belgike [*Belgian*] lands
> By wingèd fame for valor is rehearsed,
> Like warlike Mars upon the hatches stands.
> His tuskèd boar, 'gan foam for inward ire,
> While Pallas filled his breast with warlike fire.

Later accounts of the Armada as written by the chroniclers Richard Hakluyt (1598–1600), John Stow (1615), and William Camden (1625) also list de Vere among the ranks of the "great and honorable personages" who took up arms against a sea of Spaniards.

If de Vere was part of Drake's first wave of naval forces, the voyage would probably have been the most stomach-turning encounter with the ocean in his life. The English fleet had on May 30 been lured out by a break in the weather only to find themselves blown around by the same tempests that were battering the Armada. "We endured a great storm (considering the time of year) with the wind southerly and at southwest for seven days," Drake would later write in a letter to Burghley. For a long week they fought the elements when they should have been preparing to fight the Spanish. The opening scene of *The Tempest* may have drawn its inspiration from the nautical adventure the English fleet experienced during the first few days of June 1588.

The Tempest begins onboard a ship in the midst of a rising gale. The ship's master, standing on the quarterdeck, calls out to the BOATSWAIN. "Fall to it yarely [*Step to it*] or we run ourselves aground!"

The BOATSWAIN orders the topsail hauled down–a move that experienced mariners know spells trouble, since that means the winds are becoming too stiff and changeable to be used for propulsion. As the topsail canvas comes thundering down, no one can hear a thing. Only the shipmaster's whistle can be made out over the rumbling din. "Tend to the master's whistle," the BOATSWAIN tells his crew.

The roar of the falling topsail and sudden change in the boat's inclination surprise the passengers belowdeck. One, ALONSO, emerges to ask what's going on.

The BOATSWAIN urges the inexperienced seaman back to his cabin before an unexpected surge sweeps him into the dark and foreboding ocean. Sensing more trouble ahead, the BOATSWAIN cries to his crew, "Down with the topmast! Yare! Lower, lower! Bring her to try with main-course!" Striking the topmast was an extreme measure practiced by Elizabethan mariners as a last-ditch attempt to reduce a ship's top-heaviness–especially when it was perilously close to shore. The BOATSWAIN then yells out, "Lower, lower!" Now with only the round-bellied mainsail driving the ship–and no hope of rehoisting the topsail anytime soon–the BOATSWAIN has his crew turn the ship into the wind ("bring her to try") and move the creaking and groaning vessel away from the driving spray of the rocks that grow ever closer.

Two more outraged passengers emerge from belowdeck, cursing in their mortal fright. The BOATSWAIN tells the passengers that if they will not stay belowdeck, they had better prepare to put their shoulder into the ropes and masts with the rest of the crew. As Sir Francis Drake famously told one of his well-heeled passengers, "I must have the gentlemen to hale and draw with the

mariner and the mariner with the gentlemen. What, let us show ourselves all to be of [one] company."

In the process of striking the topmast and coming about, however, the ship has been driven closer to the rocky shore. The BOATSWAIN shouts, "Lay her a-hold, a-hold!" He tries to put the ship on another tack, hoping the new direction may yield more sea room. A few tense moments pass as the mainsail flutters and cracks and then fills again. The ship lurches seaward. At last, a window of opportunity opens, if only briefly. The ship now needs as much forward power as quickly as can be tapped. The BOATSWAIN orders the foresail unfurled. "Set her two courses!" he commands.

The tension begins to dissipate as the shore's spray and spume grows fainter. "Off to sea again!" the BOATSWAIN exclaims. "Lay her off!" The BOATSWAIN, it would appear, has saved the ship from its near certain doom.

The pitch-perfect timing, virtuosic command of nautical vocabulary, and dramatic economy of *The Tempest*'s opening scene suggest that de Vere knew at first hand at least some of the seaborne danger he so masterfully dramatized.

Such scenes were to be the only catch of the English navy's May 30 fishing expedition. On June 6, the storm-beaten English fleet returned to Plymouth. As the landlubbing passengers recovered from their perilous journey, urgent news from London would have arrived informing de Vere that only the day before, his wife had suddenly died. This is the same situation HAMLET finds himself in, as he washes ashore from his nautical adventures to discover that OPHELIA has drowned. The Danish prince's manic response to his graveside discovery reminds one of de Vere's mercurial extremes. Suddenly, the cold embrace of death has made the bereaved lover discover how much he adored the deceased.

> HAMLET [to LAERTES] I lov'd OPHELIA. Forty thousand brothers
> Could not, with all their quantity of love,
> Make up my sum. What wilt thou do for her?
> ... Woo't weep, woo't fight, woo't fast, woo't tear thyself?
> Woo't drink up eisel [*vinegar*], eat a crocodile?
> I'll do it.

If de Vere had been part of Drake and Howard's first expedition, however, duty would have kept the earl close to fleet headquarters in Plymouth. There was still no sign of the Spanish Armada; the commanders knew they could still face the enemy at sea and prevent a Spanish invasion. During another break in the weather on June 19, they again sent the fleet out. This time, however, the headwinds were so strong that the ships returned to port only two days later.

Anne's funeral was fast approaching, but Drake and Howard wanted to make one last try. The day before the countess of Oxford's memorial service, on June 24, England's final hope of preemptively defeating the Spanish menace launched from Plymouth. Again, de Vere would have been a likely officer on this mission. The weather was more cooperative this time, but when no sign of Spanish galleons could be found by early July, the English commanders grew nervous that the Armada had somehow skirted around them and was heading toward an undefended English coastline. The risks of pressing any farther south were growing too great. Drake and Howard decided to turn the ships around and head back to port. They arrived at Plymouth on July 12. A week later, the Armada would be first sighted off the southernmost tip of Cornwall.

Here is where the conventional story of the Spanish Armada begins, but here is also where de Vere's role recedes into the background. The English fleet's three failed search-and-destroy expeditions were probably all of the naval warfare that the earl of Oxford saw during the Spanish Armada campaign. It is possible that de Vere took part in the first few days of engagement with the enemy, on July 20–22, when the Spanish fleet first plowed through the Channel in an ominous crescent-moon formation.

But that is all the calendar permits. For historical records reveal that de Vere had arrived at the English camp at Tilbury (east of London) on July 27 at the latest. And Tilbury was at least a four days' ride from Plymouth, where he would have disembarked.

On July 28, as the Armada was anchored off the coast of Calais, Leicester (at Tilbury) wrote to Walsingham (in London):

> Your other letter concerned my lord of Oxford who was with me as he went–and returned again yesterday by me with Captain Huntley in his company. He seemed only [that] his voyage was to have gone to my Lord Admiral [Howard]–and at his return, [de Vere] seemed also to return again hither to me this day from London, whither he went yesternight for his armor and furniture. If he come, I would know from you what I shall do. I trust he be free to go to the enemy [*to participate in close combat*], for he seems most willing to hazard his life in this quarrel.

Leicester's syntax is confusing, but it would appear that at some point de Vere had parted from Leicester's company to follow the command of Admiral Howard–during the aforementioned search-and-destroy missions, perhaps. Then, some time later, de Vere arrived at Tilbury. And from Tilbury, de Vere dispatched himself to London on the night of July 27 to fetch his armor and furniture. By being "free to go to the enemy," de Vere was evidently committed to lay down his life or be taken hostage if the situation merited.

On the night of July 28, English fireships dispersed the Spanish fleet, which

then sailed northeast from Calais. Through a fortuitous combination of bad weather and bad timing, the Armada had failed to rendezvous with the Spanish armies planning to invade England. The Armada was–incorrectly, it turns out–expected to make landfall in Essex. Elizabeth gave her temperamental earl the assignment of commanding two thousand men in the Essex deep-water port city of Harwich.

However, de Vere soon wanted no part of it. He yearned to be on a warship chasing Spaniards. By August 1, he had returned to London, where he angered Leicester. Leicester wrote to Walsingham:

> Deliver to my lord of Oxford Her [Majesty's] gracious consent of his willingness to serve her.... She was pleased that he should have the government of Harwich and all those that are appointed to attend that place, which should be 2,000 men. [He has] a place of trust and of great danger.
>
> My lord seemed at the first to like well of it. Afterward, he came to me and told me he thought that place of no service nor credit, and therefore he would to the court and understand Her Majesty's further pleasure....
>
> Also, make him know that it was of good grace to appoint that place to him, having no more [military] experience than he hath.... [I] for my own part being gladder to be rid of him than to have him but only to have him contented–which now I find will be harder than I took it. And [he] denieth all his former offers he made to serve rather than not to be seen to be employed at this time....
>
> [P.S.] I am glad I am rid of my lord Oxford, seeing he refuseth this, and I pray you let me not be pressed any more for him, what suit so ever he make.

Leicester could only wish good riddance to an insubordinate commander who wanted no part of any military assignment that wasn't center stage.

The story of the Armada, now enshrined in myth, ends happily for England. But for de Vere, the tale of Spain's naval assault in the summer of 1588 is one that begins with his wife's death, follows with an inglorious retreat from a naval mission gone awry, and ends onshore with a clash of egos and military authority.

A tale from the ancient world suggests itself. From his copy of Plutarch's *Lives,* de Vere would have read about a celebrated Roman who had gone from losing a wife to forfeiting a naval battle. This ignominious loss at sea, Plutarch notes, came about because the Roman worthy had retreated before his fleet could engage the enemy. The ancient Roman's name was Marc Antony, and to make the tale more attractive for de Vere's pen, Antony's infamous relationship

with an infamous queen provided ample opportunity to explore the two most complex and remarkable psyches at Queen Elizabeth's court.

Antony and Cleopatra represents Shake-speare at his most imaginative and adaptive. Whereas *Hamlet,* for instance, closely follows the contours of de Vere's life, *Antony and Cleopatra* represents a more evenhanded mixture of autobiography and ancient chronicle. It is opera before England had discovered the form. The escapism this play provided, one suspects, was what the author needed after losing the woman who was both his albatross and his emotional anchor: Anne Cecil de Vere.

ANTONY would be invested with all the taints and honors of the author who brought him to life. De Vere's willingness to "hazard his life in this quarrel," as reported by Leicester, suggests a man newly unmoored, giving himself over to the extremes of recklessness. De Vere's own mental disunity, even more disheveled than usual, translated into the erratic behavior of Shake-speare's tragic triumvir. CLEOPATRA would embody Elizabeth's own vain–and attractive–extremes.

Antony and Cleopatra begins with an introduction to the title characters. The first scene presents the bantering of the besotted ANTONY and the changeable CLEOPATRA. What appears in the play as idle chitchat no doubt represents a distillation of years of privy chamber encounters between de Vere and his queen. CLEOPATRA asks ANTONY about his inconvenient marriage (to the Roman Republican FULVIA).

> CLEOPATRA Excellent falsehood!
> Why did he [ANTONY] marry FULVIA and not love her?
> I'll seem the fool I am not....
> ANTONY Let's not confound the time with conference harsh:
> There's not a minute of our lives should stretch
> Without some pleasure now.

Soon thereafter, breaking from Plutarch's version of the story, ANTONY is informed of the death of FULVIA via messengers from abroad. ANTONY's detached reaction to the news about FULVIA stands in contrast to HAMLET's discovery of OPHELIA's death.

> THIRD MESSENGER FULVIA thy wife is dead....
> ANTONY There's a great spirit gone! Thus did I desire it:
> What our contempts doth often hurl from us,
> We wish it ours again. The present pleasure,
> By revolution lowering, does become
> The opposite of itself: She's good, being gone,
> The hand could pluck her back that shov'd her on.

What most husbands might look upon as a horrific message to receive, ANTONY takes as a liberation. "My idleness doth hatch," he says, freed from the hindrance of his troubled and annoying marriage.

Weaving through a web of conflicted alliances, ANTONY soon realizes he has offended his fellow triumvir OCTAVIUS CAESAR. ANTONY prepares himself for war. Shake-speare's portrayal of the naval conflict that ensues, the Battle of Actium, has been compared to the infamous events of 1588. "The political contrast is striking," notes literary scholar Keith Rinehart. "Elizabeth staked her throne on a decisive sea battle–the fight with the Spanish Armada–and won; CLEOPATRA staked hers on the decisive Battle of Actium and lost." Before battle could be waged, CLEOPATRA turned her ship around and fled. ANTONY, "like a doting mallard," followed her. The word *mallard* puns on the actual commander who turned the pre-Armada search-and-destroy mission around: Drake.

Ultimately, what becomes significant for the play is not the military defeat but rather the transformation in ANTONY that his shameful retreat brings about. After Actium, ANTONY recognizes that his delusions of political and military leadership are merely fancy. ANTONY is not a leader; he is the led. This revelation may help to explain de Vere's act of effrontery at Harwich. He had finally recognized his own failure to be the military leader he'd been raised to become. His lot in life was not to lead armies or to wield the sceptres and orbs of power. It was probably a shameful realization, but it was also square with cold reality. Replace the word *Egypt* with *Elizabeth* in ANTONY's third-act epiphany, and one may have reached the emotional core of de Vere's drama as the bedraggled Spanish Armada sailed into the North Sea.

ANTONY O, whither hast thou led me, Egypt? See
How I convey my shame out of thine eyes
By looking back what I have left behind
'Stroyed in dishonor....
Egypt, thou knewst too well
My heart was to thy rudder tied by th' strings,
And thou shouldst tow me after.

On November 24, de Vere joined a parade of nobles and military leaders through London in celebration of the defeat–or at least temporary setback–of Spanish forces. An anonymous ballad recounts the pomp and circumstance of the parade, including the earl of Oxford assuming his role as play master for the queen. After Her Majesty attended a sermon at Paul's Cross, de Vere opened the curtains ("windows") for the queen and presented his boy players from the old hospital at the Blackfriars Theatre. What interlude the troupe performed is not recorded.

[T]o lovely London fair our noble queen would go
And at Paul's Cross before her God her thankful heart would show;
Where prince and people did consent with joyful minds to meet
To glorify the God of heaven with psalms and voices sweet....

The lord marquess of Winchester bareheaded there was seen,
Who bare the sword in comely sort before our noble queen;
The noble earl of Oxford, then High Chamberlain of England,
Rode right before Her Majesty his bonnet in his hand....

And after by two noblemen along the church was led,
With a golden canopy carried o'er her head.
The clergy with procession brought Her Grace into the choir;
Whereas Her Majesty was set the service for to hear.

And afterwards unto Paul's Cross she did directly pass,
There by the bishop of Salisbury a sermon preachèd was.
The earl of Oxford opening then the windows for Her Grace
The children of the hospital she saw before her face.

During the amazing eight-year stretch from de Vere's affair with Anne Vavasour to the defeat of the Spanish Armada, he had maintained his bohemian retreat to the northeast of the old London city gates. Fisher's Folly remained de Vere's folly through the end of 1588. The literary gristmill continued to churn. In 1587, Burghley wrote to Walsingham that de Vere's "lewd friends... still rule him by flatteries." These lewd friends were a regular presence in de Vere's London life.

John Lyly's best-selling Euphues novels, widely imitated by other leading London writers, had come to symbolize the wild life at Fisher's Folly. Among the wags and scribblers de Vere kept under his roof, the character Euphues represented a kind of collective identity for the Euphuists and other hangers-on at the Folly. According to the fables the Euphuists began publishing after de Vere had purchased Fisher's Folly, Euphues could be found at the "bottom of the mount of Silexedra." (Fisher's Folly was sometimes also referred to as "Mount Fisher.") "Silexedra" came to be known, even to non-Euphuist writers such as Barnabe Riche, as a suburban place of study and a literary retreat.

One "Silexedra" regular was the hack writer Robert Greene, who in 1584 dedicated to de Vere a shameless piece of literary piracy called *Gwydonius*–a story cobbled together from one of Greene's earlier novels and the work of anthologist George Pettie. Greene's dedication praised de Vere as

> a worthy favorer and fosterer of learning [who] hath forced many through your excellent virtue to offer the first fruits of their study at the shrine of Your Lordship's courtesy.

Other Fisher's Folly frequenters were slightly less roguish than Greene. During the "Silexedra" years, de Vere's secretary, Anthony Munday, began translating an epic of French, Spanish, and Italian chivalric legends about a noble knight, Palmerin d'Olivia, and his son Primaleon. Munday trickled out publications of the Palmerin books into the first two decades of the seventeenth century. Some of Munday's translations were never published. As Munday wrote in his dedication of one of the Palmerin romances to de Vere:

> If *Palmerin* hath sustained any wrong by my bad translation, being so worthily set down in other languages, Your Honor having such special knowledge in them I hope will let slip any faults escaped.

Since de Vere was fluent in Italian, French, and–if the above quote is to be believed–Spanish as well, Munday was covering his rear.

A related romance Munday translated *(Amadis de Gaule)* told of a hero named Florisel whose lover is substituted with a statue; the sculpture is so lifelike that Florisel mistakes it for the lifeless body of his beloved. The deception is later revealed, and Florisel and his lover are reunited. Combine *Amadis*'s Florisel plot and the legend of Pygmalion and one has the makings for *The Winter's Tale.* Another of Munday's Englished romances became a source for *The Tempest.*

Then there was Angel Day. In 1586, Day dedicated a letter-writing guidebook to de Vere. In the preface to *The English Secretary,* Day notes he'd been working on this book for six years–from the first days of de Vere's Fisher's Folly tenancy. Day's preface also extols its patron, "whose infancy was from the beginning ever sacred to the muses."

The English Secretary celebrates the secretary in the Elizabethan sense of the word: a correspondent, a confidant, and a keeper of a powerful man's secrets. To illustrate his rhetorical points, Day printed sample letters. Some letters were real; others were clearly spoofs crafted by a razor wit.

In one of Day's obviously fictionalized letters, for instance, a reader can practically see the correspondent's bulging neck veins as the railing and abuse come pouring forth. It is the insult as raised to an art form–a peculiarly Shake-spearean art form:

> *An example of an epistle vituperatory, concerning also the person*
>
> SIR, the strangeness of an accident happening of late amongst us hath occasioned at this instant this discourse to come unto your hands. There

> was, if you remember, at your last being with me in the country, a man of great ability dwelling about a mile from me. His name was B., and if I fail not of memory therein, we had once at a dinner together. . . .
>
> You have not (I am sure) forgotten in so much as he was called the *hell* of the world, the *plague* of a common-weale, the *mischief* of men, and the *bondslave* of the devil. And no marvel, for what injury might be conceived that was not by him imagined? . . . I have wondered sithence with myself many times what soil it might be or what constellation so furious as affected their operations in production of so bad and vile a creature at the time when he was first put forward with living into the world. In the search whereof I have been the less astonished, insomuch as thereby I have grown in to some particular knowledge of his original and parents. His sire, I have understood, was a villain by birth, by nature, by soil, by descent, by education, by practice, by study, by experience; his dam the common sink of every rakehell's filthiness. [Emphasis in original.]

And on it goes, detailing in comic hyperbole the villainous villainy of this horrid man called "B." One can readily picture de Vere reciting these words as he's pacing back and forth one afternoon at the Folly, with one of his secretaries scratching out every word as it drops from de Vere's acid tongue–all to the great amusement of the rakehells who had gathered that day to soak up a few drops of the inspiration flowing as liberally as the ale.

As with the PRINCE HAL scenes in the *Henry IV* plays, the wild times and drunken escapades at the Folly were bound to last only so long. Euphues's Silexedra retreat was soon to be closed down for good.

In December of 1588, de Vere sold Fisher's Folly. Perhaps to make a clean break from his life under the House of Cecil, de Vere closed the shutters on his London pleasure palace and transferred the deed to a friend of the family, William Cornwallis.

The following year, Thomas Lodge published a book bemoaning the loss of Silexedra, *Rosalynde: Euphues's Golden Legacy, Found After His Death in His Cell at Silexedra.* The year after *Rosalynde,* Robert Greene followed suit with his novel *Menaphon: Camilla's Alarm to Slumbering Euphues in His Melancholy Cell at Silexedra.* As far as the former Euphuists were concerned, Euphues was by the end of the '80s either asleep or dead–and in any event, Silexedra was the site of his terminal torpor. Lodge would later reminisce about the Silexedra years in his novel *Euphues's Shadow.* In a prefatory epistle to the book, Lodge noted how "Euphues repent[ed] the prime of his youth misspent in folly and virtuously end[ed] the winter of his age in Silexedra."

Silexedra was no more. It was also no great joy for the new owners to move into. Cornwallis soon found himself in hot water. Burghley had been keeping close watch over de Vere's finances, since de Vere was anything but

forthcoming with child support. And now that Anne was no longer part of the equation, Burghley had no further cause to remain on congenial terms with his former son-in-law. The Lord Treasurer would soon be suing de Vere for back debts, winning court orders to seize some of the earl's properties.

De Vere's sale of Fisher's Folly, however, had been a backroom deal over which Burghley had had no say. Burghley was angry, because he wanted more control over de Vere's finances. De Vere was undoubtedly upset, because he felt his money and portfolio were his business. Cornwallis was caught in the middle.

But Cornwallis and his wife persevered, and eventually the literary mecca of Silexedra was converted to their suburban home. One of de Vere's literary colleagues, the poet Thomas Watson, opted to stay on at the Folly and tutor the young Cornwallis daughter, Anne. It was to be an auspicious pairing.

Anne Cornwallis is known to posterity as the creator of a precious manuscript: She kept a commonplace book of contemporary poetry, probably as part of her schooling in literature and penmanship. Cornwallis's manuscript contains poems by such noted versifiers of the day as Sir Philip Sidney, Sir Walter Raleigh, and Sir Edward Dyer. The book includes four youthful verses written by de Vere, including two that are also associated with Anne Vavasour.

One handwritten transcription is an anonymous poem that begins:

> When that thine eye hath chose the dame,
> And stalled the deer that thou wouldst strike,
> Let reason rule things worthy blame,
> As well as fancy, partial like
> Ask counsel of some other head
> Neither unwise nor yet unwed.
>
> And when thou com'st thy tale to tell,
> Whet not thy tongue with filèd talk,
> Lest she some subtle practice smell–
> A cripple soon can spy a halt–
> But plainly say thou lovs't her well,
> And set thy person forth to sell.

The poem goes on for another seven stanzas of collegial advice in the fine art of wooing.

The verse Anne Cornwallis–or her tutor–wrote down later appeared in a 1599 poetic anthology titled *The Passionate Pilgrime By W. Shakespeare.* The ditty "When that thine eye hath chose the dame" in Cornwallis's commonplace book can be found today in any edition of the collected works of Shake-speare.

The commonplace book's transcription of "When that thine eye..." is the only extant sixteenth-century manuscript copy in the world of any Shake-speare work. The manuscript is now stored in the vaults of the Folger Shakespeare Library in Washington, D.C. The gold lettering on the spine of the book today reads "MSS. POEMS BY VERE EARL OF OXFORD &C."

De Vere's sale of Fisher's Folly represents the beginning of a new period in the earl's life. With the closing of Silexedra, de Vere built a new house near the town of Earls Colne in Essex. (He had already sold the manor at Earls Colne and the nearby estate at Wivenhoe.) Records reveal that de Vere hired a team of joiners to work on Plaistow House in Plaistow (or Plaiston) from 1588 to '96–a time when de Vere had little cash to spare. Presumably the earl was fixing up Plaistow in order to accommodate a single man and his servants and secretaries.

Like LEONTES in *The Winter's Tale* and CLAUDIO in *Much Ado About Nothing,* de Vere probably wanted time to think about his marriage, his irrational jealousies, and his ruinous treatment of his wife. In 1589 Thomas Lodge published an epic poem titled *Scilla's Metamorphosis.* Appended to this work were shorter verses, one of which sounds suspiciously like the godfather of the Euphuists as he decamped from the city:

> I will become a hermit now
> And do my penance straight
> For all the errors of mine eyes
> With foolish rashness filled.
>
> My hermitage shall placèd be
> Where melancholy's weight
> And none but love alone shall know
> The bower I mean to build....
>
> Of faintful hope shall be my staff
> And daily when I pray
> My mistress's picture placed by love
> Shall witness what I say.

A second de Vere estate, in the Avon River Valley in Warwickshire, makes an equally likely retreat for a widower looking to get away from his former cosmopolitan life. This second country house was called Bilton and by all accounts was a gorgeous piece of property. In the *History of the County of Warwick,* the nineteenth-century chronicler William Smith records his reflections on Bilton:

> The situation is desirably retired, and the windows of the principal rooms command a fair respect... on the north side of the grounds is a long walk.... In its original state, no spot could be better adapted to meditation, or more genial to his temper; the scenery round is bounded by soft ranges of hills, and the comely spire and Gothic ornaments of the adjacent village church impart a soothing air of pensiveness to the neighborhood.

In early 1589, the duties of earldom brought de Vere to London and Westminster at least briefly. The queen called a new session of Parliament on February 4, and as a member of the House of Lords, de Vere attended five days of the thirty-five-day session, including the opening ceremony. In a rare image from his later years, the earl of Oxford is pictured as part of a seventeenth-century engraving memorializing Queen Elizabeth's 1589 Parliament. Sir Christopher Hatton, the new Lord Chancellor of England, delivered the opening oration. Noteworthy in his absence was the earl of Leicester, who had died the previous September.

In April, after Parliament had adjourned, de Vere again became involved in the lives of the sons of his cousin, the late duke of Norfolk. The duke's eldest son, Philip Howard, earl of Arundel, had been held in the Tower of London since 1585 on charges of Catholicism and attempting to flee the country without the queen's permission. During the heat of the Spanish Armada battles in the English Channel, Arundel had been caught holding Mass. In an age of superstition, this was effectively conspiring with God and therefore an act of treason.

Now that the Spanish menace was safely gone, the queen wanted to clean house. Arundel's trial was set for April 4 in the Court of the Lord High Steward. De Vere joined twenty-two of his peers in Westminster Hall to witness the ruination of another Elizabethan Catholic noble–the same young man with whom de Vere had shared top honors at the Accession Day Tournament of 1584.

As in the trials of Mary, Queen of Scots, and his own father, Arundel's verdict was practically preordained. De Vere and his fellow peers watched the pro forma display of evidence. Attorney General Sir John Popham presented the jury with a curious "painted prophecy," a pictorial allegory that the state claimed was further proof of the earl of Arundel's papist and treasonous designs. It was described as "an emblem... wherein was painted on one side a hand shaking a serpent into the fire with this inscription, *If God be with us, who shall be against us?* and on the other side a lion rampant, his claws cut off, with this motto: *Yet a lion.*"

The treason verdict came in as expected, and a death sentence soon followed. However, Elizabeth never gave the execution orders. The eldest son of the executed duke of Norfolk was granted clemency, albeit the worst kind–clemency by royal inaction. Elizabeth simply never felt enough political

pressure to do anything more about Philip Howard, who would remain in the Tower until his death in 1595.

As You Like It, portraying the travails of inheritance of the youngest Howard brother, William (ORLANDO DE BOYS), also gives voice to the eldest brother (OLIVER DE BOYS) as he faces his own fate. As dramatized in the play, OLIVER is nearly killed by a living embodiment of the very emblem entered into evidence in the Arundel trial–a serpent and a lion. However, ORLANDO rescues his eldest brother from the jaws of death.

De Vere watched the travails of the duke of Norfolk's boys with the interest of a cousin–and now of a juror too. If he hadn't been inspired before to dramatize the twisted story of Norfolk's three sons, the 1589 trial may have provided the impetus. Much of *As You Like It* takes place in the forest of Arden, near de Vere's estate of Bilton. Local oral tradition holds that *As You Like It* was actually written at Billesley, an estate just outside Stratford-upon-Avon owned by the family of de Vere's grandmother, Elizabeth Trussell. Perhaps on a journey from Bilton, visiting his relatives' extensive library at Billesley Manor, the lonely widower spent a few days and nights at a family estate among the books and histories that were his first love.

The year 1589 marks an important milestone not just in de Vere's life but also in the chronicles of the Elizabethan literary world. The anonymous 1589 book *The Art of English Poesie* was a guidebook to courtly writing and courtly writers that became the gold standard upon which literary criticism of the age was based.

In the midst of a lengthy discourse on the finer points of writing and surviving at court, *The Art* notes that a few highborn authors in Elizabeth's day have begun publishing their works, but not under their own names. The anonymous author of *The Art* explains:

> 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.

Who these "very many notable gentlemen" were *The Art* does not state.

In 1589, a new voice on the scene mocked *The Art of English Poesie* for being such a tease about anonymous and pseudonymous courtly authors whom it refuses to name. In his print debut, the satirist Thomas Nashe wrote:

> Sundry other sweet gentlemen I know that have vaunted their pens in private devices and tricked up a company of taffeta fools with their feathers....

Nashe also made fun of the leading named dramatist of the day, Christopher Marlowe, whom he nicknames "English Seneca":

> English Seneca read by candlelight yields many good sentences.... If you entreat him fair in a frosty morning, he will afford you whole *Hamlets*–I should say, handfuls–of tragical speeches. But O grief!... The sea exhaled by drops will in continuance be dry, and Seneca let blood line by line and page by page at length must needs die to our stage.

In other words, Nashe cautioned Marlowe that filching plots from Seneca might allow him to create a *Hamlet* or two–Nashe here probably had Marlowe's tragedy *Tamburlaine* in mind. More important, Nashe's analogy shows that what would eventually become known as "Shakespeare's" *Hamlet* was already on the minds and pens of the London literati by the end of the 1580s.

Yet de Vere's writings were not slipping by in complete anonymity. *The Art of English Poesie,* in a separate chapter from the coy "I know very many notable gentlemen..." passage, notes:

> And in Her Majesty's time that now is are sprung 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....
>
> Th'earl of Oxford and Master [Richard] Edwards of Her Majesty's Chapel [are the best] for comedy and interlude.

Just three years before de Vere received this praise, the critic William Webbe had written:

> I may not omit the deserved commendations of many honorable and noble lords and gentlemen of Her Majesty's court, which in the rare devices of poetry have been and yet are most excellent skillful–among whom the right honorable earl of Oxford may challenge to himself the title of most excellent among the rest.

De Vere's work was indeed beginning to be found out and made public with the rest.

Yet this was nothing any self-respecting "courtly maker" should aspire to–as Castiglione himself had asserted. And it was time for de Vere to be discreet and courtly. By 1589, Burghley had already begun to look around for a husband for de Vere's eldest daughter, Elizabeth, now age fourteen. Would the earl ruin his daughter's life by dragging her family's name through even more mud?

Would Elizabeth de Vere face the brutal marriage market as the daughter of a lowly and vulgar playwright–whose plays frankly discussed her mother and father's appalling marital history? Her father had once been one of the most esteemed and admired peers in all of England. The least he could do now was not make life for his children and their heirs any worse than it already was.

A few contemporary critics might have valued de Vere as "most excellent among the rest," but henceforth Hamlet's final words would be the earl's guiding philosophy about publishing under his own name: The rest is silence.

CHAPTER 9

GENTLE MASTER WILLIAM

[1589–1593]

In 1589, England could at last take a respite from the dynastic ambitions of King Philip II and his expansionist house of Hapsburg. Sometime during this year, scholars now suspect that the Queen's Men staged the triumphal *True Tragedy of Richard the Third.* De Vere probably created the play in collaboration with Munday, Greene, or other former Fisher's Folly-ites. *The True Tragedy* includes a bit of special pleading for the earl of Oxford. ("Oxford . . . will not wink at murders secretly put up, nor suffer upstarts to enjoy our rights. . . . Content thee, good Oxford, and tho I confess myself bound to thee for thy especiall care, yet at this time I pray thee hold me excused.") But its principal goal was to legitimize Queen Elizabeth and her house of Tudor by celebrating the Tudor regime's first victory–the deposition of Richard III by Henry Tudor in 1485.

In the play's concluding speech, "Worthy Elizabeth" is celebrated as

> . . . the lamp that keeps fair England's light,
> And through her faith her country lives in peace:
> And she hath put proud Antichrist [*Catholic Spain*] to flight,
> And been the means that civil wars did cease.

The speech is classic Elizabethan propaganda. The line about "civil wars," however, was overhasty. Although the defeat of the Spanish Armada represented a serious setback for those hoping for a Catholic overthrow of Elizabeth, there were other troubles brewing elsewhere. Watchful English eyes had by 1589 already turned to France.

The 1584 death of Elizabeth's longtime suitor, the French heir presumptive duke of Alençon had left the French crown with a contested line of

succession. Two other leaders had emerged to assume the mantle of French king-in-waiting, and by 1588, they had grown impatient with the wait. Henri, king of Navarre, was the Protestant (Huguenot) favorite; Henri, duke of Guise, the leading Catholic contender for the throne. Disillusioned with Henri III's ineffective and irresolute government, both factions were fighting against the king; even as England celebrated its victory against the Armada, just across the Channel the "War of the Three Henries" was raging.

The duke of Guise had come to prominence in 1576 when the Catholic faction in France blanched at the king's concessions to the Huguenots–the same uneasy peace de Vere had participated in brokering on his way home from Italy. Religion aside, Guise was an old-fashioned feudalist who despised Henri III's consolidation of power at the expense of the French nobility. During de Vere's years of flirtation with Catholicism, Guise had been able to count on his support. De Vere had in 1577 sent servants to France to fight on Guise's behalf, and according to the Arundell Libels, de Vere had proclaimed Guise "a rare and gallant gentleman [who] should be the man to come into Scotland, who would breech Her Majesty [Elizabeth] for all her wantonness."

So the news from France in December 1588 was doubly shocking. On December 23, by the king's orders, Guise was lured into a private antechamber at the royal château of Blois, where a squad of nobles surrounded him and stabbed him dozens of times. As a collective act of aristocratic assassination, the murder of Guise, like that of Julius Caesar, could conveniently not be pinned on any single individual. King Henri reportedly arrived on the crime scene soon afterward and protested the death with crocodile tears: "I no longer have any boon companion, now that the duke of Guise is dead."

Catholic France was outraged by Guise's murder. At his funeral, at Notre Dame on January 30, 1589, one observer noted that no king of France had ever been buried with so much honor. Revisionist histories of Guise's assassination soon began appearing in the French press, reporting "marvelous signs" and ominous apparitions on the eve of the assassination, portending the bloody mischief to come–again like the histories of Julius Caesar.

Now that one Henri had been eliminated, the "coxcomb" French king–as de Vere had once described Sa Majesté–allied with Henri of Navarre to crush what remained of the late Guise's Catholic League. But retribution awaited Henri III. In August of 1589, a fanatical monk stabbed the king. The man who'd ordered Guise's assassination had seen the dagger of tyrannicide turn on him. As Julius Caesar's assassin Brutus foresees his own death:

> Brutus O, Julius Caesar, thou art mighty yet!
> Thy spirit walks abroad, and turns our swords
> In our own proper entrails.

The comparison between Guise and CAESAR is no happenstance. As the literary historian John Bakeless notes, "the [French] Catholic party habitually referred to their champion, the duke of Guise, as 'Caesar,' and one of their partisans even drew up a laborious comparison between the two heroes which occupies four printed pages." Shake-speare's *Julius Caesar* immortalizes the martyred would-be king of France in a tragedy that begins where the French Catholic League's apologists leave off.

The Bard's Roman tragedy emphasizes the points of similarity between Guise and the historical Caesar, while downplaying the differences. Although the actual Julius Caesar led a long and extraordinary military and political career, the Shake-spearean version of his life concentrates only on the circumstances surrounding his assassination–the point where the parallels with Guise are strongest. As with the French murder, the party of assassins in Shake-speare's *Caesar* set their plans in motion in the early hours of the morning. ("O conspiracy,/ Sham'st thou to show thy dangerous brow by night/ When evils are most free?") Shake-speare's plotters pun on Guise's rank. ("I know no personal cause to spurn at him [*CAESAR*]/ But for the general. He would be crown'd.") And all parties observe the omens around them foretelling the regal death to come.

Julius Caesar triangulates between history, contemporary allegory, and imaginative fiction. An early draft of the Roman tragedy was likely completed in the wake of Guise's assassination: At least four English plays from as early as 1589 use distinctive lines (such as *"Et tu, Brute?"*) suggesting a borrowing from the Shake-spearean original.

Julius Caesar–probably reworked sometime during the 1590s–represents a maturation in de Vere's craftsmanship. No clear winners emerge from *Julius Caesar*'s bloody regicide. CAESAR has the familiar Shake-spearean (and de Verean) shortcomings of excessive pride and gullibility, while BRUTUS and his conspirators are about as sympathetic a set of villains as one can find in the canon. Perhaps it was de Vere's mixed religious, sentimental, and political alliances that prompted him to see the cases for all three points of view in the "War of the Henries." Or perhaps it took his liberation from the Manichaean life under the Cecils for de Vere to begin to appreciate the scales of gray in the world around him.

Immediately after Guise's death, French pamphleteers conducted a propaganda campaign that in part had led to the assassination of Henri III. Similarly in London, a pamphleteering campaign was emerging to challenge Elizabeth's legitimacy.

A pseudonymous Puritan zealot styling himself "Martin Mar-prelate" began in 1588 to publish pamphlets leveled at the prelates in the Anglican Church. Marprelate expressed growing distaste for the idea that the hierarchy

of state-appointed bishops should control all aspects of the Church of England's religious service. It smacked too much of papism. Martin and his cohorts wanted, for starters, to eliminate the upper rung of Anglican bishops.

As in the civil strife across the English Channel, there were three factions in the Martin Marprelate war: Martinists, who hated Anglicans and the more moderate Protestants who put up with the Church of England's pseudo-Catholic rites; Anglicans and English patriots, content with the state church as it was, who just wanted the Puritans and Martinists to shut up; and Catholics, who thought all Protestants were heretics.

Martin Marprelate was an annoying and effective gadfly. He saw Anglicanism as the new church tyranny and himself the new iconoclast. It was not for nothing that he picked the name Martin. Like Martin Luther, Marprelate intended to destroy the authority structures of his state religion.

In the fall of 1588, Martin fired his first shot, a witty riposte to a recent fourteen-hundred-page book defending the doctrine of the Anglican Church:

> There [has] not been since the Apostles' time such a flourishing estate of a Church as we have now in England. Is it any marvel that we have so many swine, dumb dogs, nonresidents with their journeymen the hedge priests, so many lewd livers, as thieves, murderers, adulterers, drunkards, cormorants, rascals, so many ignorant and atheistical dolts, so many covetous popish bishops in our ministry, and so many and so monstrous corruptions in our Church and yet likely to have no redress?

Martin's tract was unlicensed, and Church authorities and state officials, such as Lord Burghley, were incensed that it could sneak its way into London bookstalls. No one knew who this rascally "Martin" was. (The author's identity, in fact, remained a mystery until well into the twentieth century, when a strong case was made that Martin Marprelate was a Puritan member of the House of Commons named Job Throkmorton.) Between October 1588 and the following September, the pseudonymous Martin and his coconspirators published seven devastating tracts.

When Thomas Cooper, bishop of Winchester, wrote a stern and humorless book in response to them, Martin took it as a demand for even more Marprelate pamphlets:

> Oh, brethren. There is such a deal of love grown of late I perceive between you and me that although I would be negligent in sending my 'pistles unto you, yet I see you cannot forget me.

The Elizabethan state clearly needed a more capable writer to reply to Martin.

Enter the pseudonymous pamphleteer "Pasquill Caviliero," one of at least a dozen writers who rose to the challenge of giving, as Pasquill called it, a

"countercuff . . . to Martin." In his first pamphlet, published in August 1589, Pasquill replies:

> It is impossible for thee [Martin] to cast the religion of this land into a new mold every new moon. The whole state of the land perceives it well enough that to deliver up the prelacy to Martin is a canker more dangerous than . . . it is for the sheep to betray their shepherds to the wolf. . . .
>
> Never brag in this quarrel of your five hundred brethren of credit and ability. Pasquill hath excellent ferrets to follow them in their own boroughs. And he can tell you that there is a common kind of affection which men of this age carry to such as you, whilst they have any service to put to you–like unto them that having somewhat to do with a confection of poison rejoice when they find it, yet they hate the malice of it and throw it out of the doors when their turn is served. Neither doubt I but that the same reckoning in the end will be made of you, which your favorers commonly make of their old shoes when they are past wearing: They barter them away for new brooms or carry them forth to the dunghill and leave them there.

Pasquill's rhetoric is clever; his pen is swift, and his voice is engaging and assured. Unlike his fellow hacks, he is also a man of high station. Pasquill writes about sitting as a justice in "divers of the courts, benches, sessions, that are held in this land in Her Majesty's name." He writes about hearing speeches in the queen's Star Chamber. He discusses the places he's visited in The Netherlands and Italy. And, most tellingly, Pasquill signs one of his pamphlets "from my castle and colors at London Stone."

London Stone, on Candlewick Street in the center of the city, was a famous landmark just outside the front door of Vere House. Edward de Vere had responded to the Martinist threat to queen and country by publishing literary works under the disguise of a pseudonym. Here was Shake-speare at war, in the final few years before the world would know him as Shake-speare.

Two months later, de Vere published a longer second pamphlet, *The Return of the Renowned Caviliero, Pasquill of England, from the Other Side of the Seas. The Return* presents a dialogue between Pasquill and his sidekick "Marforius" that reveals an ear tuned in to the nuances of character, vivid language, and dramatic pacing.

> MARFORIUS Speak softly, Caviliero! I perceive two or three [Martinists] lay their heads at one side, like a ship under sail, and begin to cast about you. I doubt [not but] they have overheard you. . . .
>
> PASQUILL All the better for me. When I lack matter to talk of, I may resort hither to take up a little news at interest.

> MARF. I marvel, Caviliero, that you press not the Martinists with much scripture. They are great quoters of commonplaces if you mark them.
>
> PASQ. Therein they are like to a stale courtesan, that finding herself to be worn out of credit, borroweth the gesture of a sober matron which makes her to everyone that knows her the more abominable. . . .

The Return of the Renowned Caviliero also shows the same elitist distrust of the commons that one finds in Shake-speare–as in the mob scenes in *Julius Caesar, 2 Henry VI,* and *Richard III.* Pasquill notes:

> The chronicles of England–and the daily enclosures of the commons in the land–teach us sufficiently how inclinable the simpler sort of the people are to routs, riots, commotions, insurrections, and plain rebellions when they grow brain sick, or any new toy taketh them in the head. They need no . . . Martin to increase their giddiness. . . . I would wish the whole realm to judge uprightly, who deserves best to be bolstered and upheld in these dangerous times, either they that have religiously and constantly preached obedience to Her Majesty's loving people, or they that with a mask of religion discharge them of their obedience?

Despite such appeals for obedience, Pasquill and his coterie won no new friends in the Privy Council or the archbishopric.

Puritans had been railing at players and playgoers for more than a decade. Now that Martin had made anti-Puritanism in vogue, the theaters struck back at Puritans and Martinists with a vengeance. Two anti-Martinist plays survive: Anthony Munday's *John a Kent and John a Cumber* and the anonymous *Knack to Know a Knave.* Many more are referred to by other writers of the period. Even troupes with a strong royal affiliation–the Queen's Men and Paul's Boys–propped up Martin only to whack him down and knock the stuffing out of him every afternoon.

The satirist Thomas Nashe–who was probably the model for Pasquill's sidekick Marforius–published his own anti-Martinist pamphlet, *An Almond for a Parrot,* which muses how much Martin lately has been "attired like an ape on the stage." De Vere's secretary John Lyly wrote in his anti-Martinist diatribe, *Pap With a Hatchet:*

> Will they [the Martinists] not be discouraged for the common players? Would those comedies might be allowed to be played that are penned, and then I am sure he would be deciphered and so perhaps discouraged. . . .
>
> A stage player, though he be but a cobbler by occupation, yet his chance may be to play the king's part. Martin, of what calling so ever he be, can play nothing but the knave's part.

Lyly goes on to describe how he envisions mock hangings of the Martinists onstage.

The anti-Martinists went too far. The Anglican authorities were grateful for the backing that London's hack writers and playwrights gave them, but they were incensed at the scurrilous tone that had been taken. Although Martin himself had gone silent, other Puritan pamphleteers continued their literary campaign of attrition.

Elizabeth had maintained domestic tranquility by being conservative and moderate in all matters of church and state, and she was not about to change her policy for the sake of a bunch of railing actors and scurrilous playwrights. By 1590, in response to their anti-Marprelatism, Paul's Boys had been disbanded and the Queen's Men had been sent away from the city, to tour Ireland and Scotland. In his final work as "Pasquill Caviliero," *The First* [and only] *Part of Pasquill's Apology*, dated July 2, 1590, de Vere showed that he was likewise taking flak from both sides in the Marprelate war.

Pasquill takes on the Puritan pamphleteer John Penry, a man so outgunned it's hardly even fair. *Pasquill's Apology* is a forty-year-old de Vere at his most expressive, clever, deft, and spirited. More reflective than in his previous two pamphlets, Pasquill writes:

> Because that by the length of other men's frailties every man may take the measure of himself, I will carry my mouth in my heart and let them pass. And though there be a pad in the straw that must be roused, I have taken out this lesson from the wise: There is a time for speech and a time for silence.

The pseudonymous earl also notes that he's lately been spending more time in Warwickshire "than I mean to name." His Warwickshire estate at Bilton–and perhaps his grandmother's estate of Billesley, too–had no doubt been serving as his home away from home where he could collect his thoughts and reflect on his options for the years to come.

If de Vere wanted to continue with the literary and theatrical activities he'd practiced since returning from Italy, the strategies of the 1570s and '80s no longer applied. The 1590s was to be a new era in the history of the London theater. To adapt, de Vere would need a new approach.

By the end of 1590, the relationships, both good and bad, that had shaped de Vere's courtly world had practically vanished. The bodies were piling up as in the final act of a revenge tragedy. His parent figures and mentors–such as the earl of Sussex and Sir Thomas Smith–were dead; his wife: dead; his rivals Sir Philip Sidney and the earl of Leicester: dead; the shadowy spymaster of the Queen's Men Sir Francis Walsingham–a man nearly devious enough to cheat

the grim reaper himself–dead. The only representative from the cabal of courtiers whom de Vere had once so loved to hate, Sir Christopher Hatton, would have less than a year to live.

The familiar power struggle that had rendered de Vere's marriage unbearable was now shifting with the advancing age of the seventy-year-old Lord Treasurer. Burghley's son, the twenty-seven-year-old Robert Cecil, was redefining the role of the house of Cecil. Stunted and round shouldered from a fall as an infant, the younger Cecil was a brilliant Machiavel who was beginning to eclipse his more nuanced and principled father. De Vere would soon pine for the days when the Lord Treasurer was the worst of his worries.

With so much of the court's old wood now cleared away, a new generation of saplings was emerging. Two of the leading figures among the new Elizabethan courtiers were the twenty-five-year-old Robert Devereux, earl of Essex, and a strapping sixteen-year-old, Henry Wriothesley, earl of Southampton. De Vere had watched both young lords as they were raised from childhood as royal wards in Burghley's household. Essex and Southampton had both come to know de Vere's three daughters Elizabeth (15), Bridget (6), and Susan (3)–probably better than their father knew them. Burghley was grooming Southampton as a marriage match for the fifteen-year-old Elizabeth.

In September 1590, Burghley met with Southampton's grandfather (Anthony Browne, Lord Montague) at Oatlands, a royal seat in Surrey. Southampton, more interested in spending time with his fellow ward Essex, had already told his guardian that he didn't want to concern himself with marriage until he was older. But nobody told Burghley what he could or could not do, and Burghley had the legal right to determine whom his ward would marry. The grandfathers of the prospective bride and groom met to discuss their strategy to sway the headstrong young buck.

While at Oatlands, Burghley received messengers informing him of yet another of de Vere's financial troubles. De Vere, still some £11,000 in debt (upwards of $2.5 million today), had already sold most of the estates his father had left behind in 1562.

De Vere's life was also being complicated at the time by a fiasco involving the soldier and poet Thomas Churchyard. Churchyard had been in de Vere's service on and off since the 1560s–de Vere had once sent him to the Lowlands to fight on his behalf. Now the septuagenarian poet had entered into a pricey lease with a London landlady named Julia Penn, who had apartments near St. Paul's Cathedral. De Vere had made a verbal agreement to cover Churchyard's rent, £100 per year (approximately $2,200 per month today). Churchyard moved in, and the first quarter's payment came due on March 25.

It soon became clear that de Vere would not meet the debt. In desperation, Churchyard sought refuge at a nearby house of worship. De Vere could now add "deadbeat tenant" to his list of vices. His rent problems with Julia Penn would be preserved in *Twelfth Night*. A few doors down from Churchyard's

apartment was the Church of St. Benet's of Paul's Wharf. De Vere would, in his literary creation, make an unlikely association between coins due to servants and the clanging of St. Benet's church bells. In the first scene of *Twelfth Night*'s Act 5, FESTE begs for three gold pieces. "The old saying is the third pays for all," FESTE says. "The triplex, sir, is a good tripping measure. Or the bells of St. Benet, sir, may put you in mind–one, two, three."

FESTE ultimately gets his cash; Churchyard did not. De Vere had other things on his mind.

In 1590, Edmund Spenser published a dedicatory sonnet "To the right honorable the earle of Oxenford, Lord High Chamberlain of England &c." in the first edition of his epic allegory *The Faerie Queene.* Spenser notes that

> ... [t]h' antique glory of thine ancestry
> Under a shady veil is therein writ,
> And eke [*moreover*], thine own long living memory
> Succeeding them [*de Vere's ancestors*] in true nobility;
> And also for the love which thou dost bear
> To th' Heliconian imps [*Muses*]–and they to thee–
> They unto thee and thou to them most dear:
> Dear as thou art unto thyself.

Spenser had mastered the art of fine-tuned flattery. Spenser's friendship with de Vere's rivals Sir Philip Sidney and the earl of Leicester gave the poet a distinctly one-sided view of the earl of Oxford. Spenser's dedication both praises and underhandedly criticizes de Vere. The sonnet begins by recognizing how the historical earls of Oxfords' heroics had been written "under a shady veil"–alluding, one suspects, to the glaringly ahistorical glorifications of de Veres appearing in Queen's Men's plays. Spenser then recognizes de Vere's blossoming poetic brilliance, while still sneaking a jab in at de Vere's notorious narcissism.

The enigmatic figure de Vere presented evidently engaged Spenser's muse. In another poem from 1591, *The Tears of the Muses,* Spenser writes of

> [T]hat same gentle spirit from whose pen
> Large streams of honey and sweet nectar flow,
> Scorning the boldness of such base-born men
> Which dare their follies forth so rashly show;
> Doth rather choose to sit in idle cell
> Than so himself to mockery to sell.

Spenser criticizes a vainglorious poet who sits quietly alone, pouring forth honey from his pen but choosing to withhold it from public scrutiny and mockery.

The year 1591 was the beginning of a strange and brutal decade for de Vere. Still under pressure to pay off his outstanding debts, the seventeenth earl of Oxford continued selling properties inherited from the sixteen distinguished lords who had come before him. By the end of 1592, de Vere would alienate every estate he'd inherited, as well as the properties he'd been granted over the years by the queen.

In May 1591, de Vere wrote to Burghley a long letter concerning his continued problems with money and untrustworthy servants. The queen had put the Welsh manor of Denbigh up for sale for £8,000. De Vere said he wanted to buy it. Denbigh would, he notes, generate £230 in annual rents. But as the Churchyard-Penn fiasco demonstrated, de Vere had no cash on hand. So he came up with a payment plan. De Vere rashly proposed to give up his annuity in exchange for a £5,000 one-time payment and an interest-free loan of £3,000. If de Vere's estimate of Denbigh's rental value is to be taken at face value–which would mean buyer's lust had clouded his vision–then if the deal went through, de Vere would have faced an annual revenue loss of £1000–£230=£760. Yet, de Vere was probably underestimating Denbigh's value as much as he could in order to make the best case possible for an easy sale. Considering the additional bargaining chip de Vere tossed in, he must have thought Denbigh was worth far more than he was letting on.

To his Denbigh proposal, de Vere offered up Castle Hedingham. Feeling remorse for not doing enough for his three daughters, de Vere wrote to Burghley that if the old man helped him acquire Denbigh, de Vere would sign over his Essex properties (worth £500–£600 in annual rents) to defray the cost of their upbringing. In this letter to Burghley, dated May 18, de Vere wrote:

> The effect hereof is I would be glad to have an equal care with Your Lordship over my children, and if I may obtain this reasonable suit of Her Majesty [*to buy Denbigh*], granting me nothing but what she hath done to others and mean persons–and nothing but that I shall pay for it–then those lands which are in Essex, as Hedingham, Brets, and the rest whatsoever, which will come to some £500 or £600 by year, upon Your Lordship's friendly help towards my purchases in Denbigh, shall be presently delivered in possession to you, for their use. And so much I am sure to make of these demesnes for myself.
>
> So shall my children be provided for, myself at length settled in quiet–and I hope Your Lordship contented, remaining no cause for you to think me an evil father, nor any doubt in me, but that I may enjoy that friendship from Your Lordship–that so near a match, and not fruitless, may lawfully expect.

De Vere apparently had his heart set on retiring to an ancient Welsh castle, never to darken any English courtier's doorstep again. Elizabeth, however,

would hear none of it. De Vere was to remain in London; Denbigh would not become another financial mess under the earl of Oxford's reckless hand.

What should have been a trade became a gift: De Vere gave away Hedingham; Burghley did nothing in return. On December 2, de Vere signed over Castle Hedingham to Burghley in trust for the three de Vere girls. The original purpose of the bequest may have been to prove what a good father he could be. Its effect was that de Vere made a final surrender of his ancient family seat and had little left to support himself. The earl of Oxford had, through his own rashness and bad fortune, become a landless lord, a king sans castle. In a fit of desperate rage, de Vere razed and liquidated whatever he could from the Hedingham grounds. And he prepared himself for a humbling future wherein he would be beholden to his three daughters for a kingdom that had once been his.

Three years later, the Queen's Men would bring this story to the stage. *The True Chronicle History of King Leir* [*sic*] would present de Vere in his motley as a fond and foolish old man who had squandered his inheritance and independence. The Queen's Men's *Leir* describes the conflict de Vere must have felt between filial devotion and self-preservation.

> LEIR Oh, what a combat feels my panting heart
> 'Twixt children's love and care of common weal!
> How dear my daughters are unto my soul
> None knows but He that knows my thoughts and secret deeds.
> Ah, little do they know the dear regard
> Wherein I hold their future state to come,
> When they securely sleep on beds of down.

Just as in de Vere's life, in the Queen's Men's version of the story, Leir is a recent widower, still bemoaning his loss. ("Wanting now their mother's good advice/Under whose government they have receiv'd/A perfect pattern of a virtuous life.") And the king's three daughters are all unmarried.

Published anonymously more than a decade later, *King Leir* is another early 1590s Queen's Men's text that is proto–Shake-speare in form and substance. The Queen's Men's *Leir* and Shake-speare's tragedy of *King Lear* contain characters and scenes found in no other sources, including KENT and OSWALD, the KING's wanderings, and the thunderstorm scene. The most noteworthy difference between *Leir* and *Lear* is that the former ends happily, with Leir and his daughter "Cordella" reconciling and Leir being returned to the throne. Chalk it up to wishful thinking that in the early 1590s, de Vere hoped he could still make amends with his alienated daughters and see some of his ancestral lands returned to his estate.

This does not necessarily mean, however, that the whole of *King Leir* had come from de Vere's pen. The authorship of *Leir*–like the authorship of *The True Tragedy of Richard III, The Famous Victories of Henry V,* and *The Troublesome Reign of King John*–is not easily arrived at. De Vere is arguably the master craftsman behind these Queen's Men's texts, but, as many paintings "by" Titian were actually executed in his Venetian shop by other artisans, de Vere may have supplied an outline, character sketches, and assorted speeches and lines, and left one or more of his "lewd friends" to fill in the blanks.

His contribution may well have varied from play to play. Several more years would remain before de Vere would be shunning his followers and secretaries and taking up the solitary task of rewriting his courtly and Queen's Men's entertainments for posterity.

De Vere needed someone who could manage a life that he could not, someone with enough intelligence to keep him away from his own account books, and with enough backbone to stand up to him. Moreover, the seventeenth earl needed a future eighteenth earl. He must have been terribly lonely, too. The prospect of a smart helpmeet–this time, a woman without such a powerful, nosy, and compromising father–was looking ever more attractive.

When Julia Penn pleaded with the earl of Oxford about the overdue rent, in March of 1591, the landlady indicated that she'd considered contacting a certain "virtuous gentlewoman" to settle the matter. In Penn's words:

> [G]ood my lord, deal with me in courtesy, for that you and I shall come at that dreadful day and give account for all your doing. My lord, I thought to have been a suitor to that virtuous gentlewoman, mistress Trentham, but I thought it not good (to do so) because I know not Your Lordship's pleasure. I would be loath to offend your honor in anything.

The "mistress Trentham" was Elizabeth Trentham, the eldest daughter of a wealthy Staffordshire landowner. Trentham, in her early thirties at the time, had been a maid of honor to the queen for at least ten years. She was known both for her beauty and her savvy.

De Vere must have been openly courting Trentham in March 1591, at the time of the Penn–Churchyard fiasco. By May, a touching and witty lyric to the earl's paramour was published in a pirated edition of love poetry called *Brittons Bowre of Delights.*

> Time made a stay when highest powers wrought
> Regard of love where virtue had her grace,
> Excellence rare of every beauty sought
> Notes of the heart where honor had her place;
> Tried by the touch of most approved truth,
> A worthy saint to serve a heavenly queen,

More fair than she that was the fame of youth,
Except but one, the like was never seen.

The first letter of each line spells out "Trentame," an Elizabethan alternate spelling of Trentham. Curtsying to Her Majesty in the final three lines, the author clearly understood how to flatter a courtly lady while still avoiding any disrespect to his queen. Since *Brittons Bowre* contained at least two other canonical poems by de Vere, scholars are inclined to give him this one as well.

Romantic notions a reader might have of passionate, heart-aflutter courtships, however, had little to do with the realities of the forty-one-year-old de Vere's life when he wooed "Trentame." Shake-speare in love was also Shake-speare deep in debt. De Vere would soon be applying unsuccessfully to Queen Elizabeth for a monopoly in wools, fruits, and oils.

De Vere was, at the time, failing to meet basic household expenses, such as paying servants. One retainer of de Vere's named Henry Lok had written to Burghley the previous year to complain that he had worked for de Vere "amost twenty years" but was still owed £80 ($20,000). Lok explains to the Lord Treasurer that he'd taken out loans and pawned items from his household ("chains and nails") to keep his head above water.

> I have bent myself wholly to follow the service of the honorable earl of Oxford, whose favor shown sometimes so graciously upon me that my young years were easily drawn thereby to account it....
>
> I of late, indeed too late, resolved to stop the opinion of many, which thought me among the number of overmany greedy horse-leaches which had sucked too ravenously on his [de Vere's] sweet liberality....

Lok was not, he claimed, one of those "horse-leaches" who were sucking de Vere's bank accounts dry.

But other servants were stealing. A Thomas Hampton had been caught skimming off the earl's rents, while another servant, Israel Amyce, had allegedly continued to hold properties that de Vere had already leased out to others. De Vere wrote Burghley on May 18, 1591, to thank him for exacting some discipline when he apparently could not:

> My lord, I do thank Your Lordship for the punishment of Hampton, whose evil doings towards me, being put in trust with my causes in law, I hope Your Lordship will think them sufficient to deserve your disgrace.

"Mistress Trentame" would change this. In July of 1591, Trentham's brother Francis and a partner (John Wooley) bought out the remainder of the property that was once Fisher's Folly "to be disposed of for the advantage of

Elizabeth, sister of the said Francis Trentham." The wedding vows hadn't even been uttered, and Trentham was already taking charge. She'd grown up in a household with at least three brothers–and even so, Elizabeth had still become the executor for her father's estate after his 1587 death. Extant letters of hers written years later, one to Robert Cecil and another to a judge named Sir Julius Caesar, reveal a sharp-minded, independent woman at ease with legal and business matters and not afraid to flex her muscles.

For once in his life, de Vere let good sense guide his heart. De Vere and Trentham wed sometime in November or December of 1591. Queen Elizabeth, who often objected to her courtiers spiriting away her maids of honor, offered no objections to this match. Her Majesty, too, probably recognized what a boon to her problematic and headstrong Lord Great Chamberlain this marriage would be. The queen gave wedding gifts to de Vere and the new countess of Oxford on December 27, 1591 (unspecified), and November 23, 1592 (a gilt bowl with a cover).

Trentham had remained single for a surprisingly long time; it was rare for an Elizabethan woman to wait until her thirties to marry. Yet this fact, too, reveals something of the bride's indomitable character. *The Merchant of Venice*'s brilliant, discriminating, and cagey PORTIA was probably modeled on the crafty woman with whom de Vere had fallen in love in 1591. BASSANIO, after all, courts PORTIA in part to climb his way out of debt.

BASSANIO Gentle lady,
When I did first impart my love to you,
I freely told you all the wealth I had
Ran in my veins–I was a gentleman–
And then I told you true; and yet, dear lady,
Rating myself at nothing, you shall see
How much I was a braggart. When I told you
My state was nothing, I should then have told you
That I was worse than nothing.

Perhaps the most candid portrait of de Vere's second wife appears in an anonymously printed satirical 1594 poem called *Willobie His Avisa*. The identity of "Avisa," a young woman described as a "chaste and constant wife," has long been debated by scholars. But closer examination reveals that *Willobie*'s description of Avisa fits Elizabeth Trentham with stunning precision.

According to the poem, "Diana took the maid" Avisa into her service around the age of "full twenty year." Then, "ten years... tried this constant dame." Finally "Diana" gave her leave for Avisa to be wed. Elizabeth Trentham became a maid of honor to Queen Elizabeth at approximately the age of twenty, served Her Majesty in this capacity for ten years, and left to marry de Vere. *Willobie* notes that Avisa was born in western England, "where

Austin pitched his monkish tent." Trentham was born and grew up in the Austin (Augustinian) priory of Rocester in Staffordshire–to the northwest of London.

Finally, the book states that after her marriage, Avisa and her husband lived nearby to a noteworthy well and a castle or priory that had recently been "by brothers bought and sold." By the time of the poem's publication, the earl and countess of Oxford were living in the north London suburb of Stoke–Newington–nearby the Well of St. Agnes and The Theatre and the Curtain, on the site of a former priory that had been bought and resold by the actor James Burbage and his brother-in-law John Brayne.

Identifying Trentham as Avisa fills in a few sorely lacking biographical details about the woman who would stand by Shake-speare's side unto his dying day. *Willobie* notes that when Avisa was still single, she had been propositioned by a wealthy nobleman. But Avisa turned this suitor down, even after relentless courting. Avisa explains:

> Although I [will] be a poor man's wife,
> Yet then I'll laugh as well as you.
> Then laugh as long as you think best
> My fact shall frame you no such jest.

After marrying her unidentified husband, Avisa shuns the city life in modest country retirement. However, she is also frequently seen at The Theatre and the Curtain (the place nearby her house where the "Muses sing . . . [and] satyrs play") and at the nearby pub of St. George's Inn in Shoreditch. Avisa is quite an attractive woman, too; young men make frequent passes at her. But she is a constant wife who unswervingly resists temptation.

> And there she dwells in public eye,
> Shut up from none that list to see.
> She answers all that list to try,
> Both high and low of each degree:
> But few that come but feel her dart
> And try her well ere they depart.

One of Avisa's suitors is a man styled "Didymus Harco," which is probably a macaronic disguise for Thomas Howard, second son of the late duke of Norfolk. "Harco" tries to win Avisa's love with gold and trinkets, and he speaks in the legal language of jury trials. (De Vere had been one of the peers who had voted Howard's elder brother Philip guilty of treason. "Harco" may have wanted both the countess and the earl of Oxford to help press the queen to forgive Philip Howard.) "Harco" says to Avisa:

> And though I be by jury cast
> Yet let me live a while in hope,
> And though I be condemned at last,
> Yet let my fancy have some scope.

At one point, Harco shows up at Avisa's doorstep when her husband is not at home. The suitor leaves her with a letter pleading for her attentions and affections. Avisa will have none of it, or him. In her reply to Harco, Avisa explains that her husband is a homebody these days–in language suggesting that de Vere was at the time revisiting the play that would someday become Shake-speare's *Troilus and Cressida.*

> No Helen's rape nor Trojan war
> My loving mate hath forc'd away,
> No Juno's wrath to wander far
> From loving bed can make him stray
> Nor stay at all in foreign land
> But here I have him still at hand.
>
> My sweet Ulysses never stays
> From his desired home so long
> That I should need such rare delays
> To shield me from intended wrong.
> My chief delights are always nigh
> And in my bosom sweetly lie.
>
> My heart is fixed, since I did give
> My wedlock faith to chosen friend.

De Vere had found an enviable match–a woman in whom he could place his brittle faith and a lover whose affections were deep and mutually felt. Both tortured and torturer in his first marriage, de Vere had been blessed in 1591 with a rewarding second marriage that must have felt like a warm and sturdy shelter for his storm-tossed soul.

Another of Avisa's suitors is an Italian named "Cavaliero"–who has been taken to represent the bombastic Italian pedant Giovanni Florio. This colorful figure, tutor to the earl of Southampton, was at the time on the hunt for a patron. Florio likely sought out the infamous erstwhile Italianate earl–perhaps during one of Avisa's afternoons at St. George's Inn and the theaters–to muster support for an Italian dictionary Florio was then preparing.

De Vere had little to offer any writer financially. However, prefaced to

Florio's 1591 book *Second Fruits* is a pseudonymous sonnet credited to one "Phaeton," who sounds much like the poet who honored "Trentame."

Phaeton to his friend Florio

Sweet friend, whose name agrees with thy increase,
How fit a rival art thou of the Spring!
For when each branch hath left his flourishing,
And green-locked Summer's shady pleasures cease,
She makes the Winter's storms repose in peace
And spends her franchise on each living thing:
The daisies sprout, the little birds do sing;
Herbs, gums, and plants do vaunt of their release.
So that when all our English wits lie dead
(Except the laurel that is evergreen)
Thou with thy fruits our barrenness o'erspread
And set thy flowery pleasance to be seen.
Such fruits, such flow'rets of morality,
Were ne'er before brought out of Italy.

De Vere was sometimes personified by Elizabethan wits as "the Spring" or its Latin form *Ver*. The unidentified Elizabethan who assumed the pen name Phaeton had clearly mastered the courtier's fine art of flattery. ("How fit a rival art thou of the Spring!") The Phaeton sonnet would be the last noncanonical published work by the man who would soon assume the most famous pseudonym the world would ever know.

By the time de Vere and his new wife had settled into their suburban home north of London in early 1592, the nearby Theatre and Curtain were no longer the only theaters in town. On the south bank of the Thames, a performance venue called the Rose was flourishing under the tenancy of two troupes, Lord Strange's Men–also called the Earl of Derby's Men–and the Lord Admiral's Men. A brilliant young playwright named Christopher Marlowe had transformed the Rose into the crown jewel of London literary society, presenting sensational blank-verse tragedies like *Tamburlaine, The Tragical History of Doctor Faustus,* and *The Jew of Malta.* Marlowe's dramas were direct and visceral, staging exciting plots of world conquest and bargains with the devil. The Cambridge-educated playwright's broad appeal owed both to his talent as a captivating plot-weaver and his innovation of casting aside the stilted format of rhyming verse that had distinguished the Queen's Men's style.

Yet, for all his iconoclasm, Marlowe was only building on the foundation

his predecessors had laid. The Euphuist salon that Fisher's Folly had been from 1580–88 had helped to spawn a literary revolution. De Vere's associates and employees John Lyly, George Peele, and Robert Greene–now between the ages of thirty-two and thirty-eight–had become the elder statesmen of a clique of young and eager writers in their twenties. John Day, Michael Drayton, and Thomas Dekker had been or would soon be turning out plays, poems, and pamphlets that fueled a literary renaissance that would continue into the next century.

Only four years had passed between the closure of Fisher's Folly and de Vere and his wife's move to Stoke Newington, near his old neighborhood in the theater district. Yet those four years were a time of great change for the Elizabethan stage. With Oxford unable to fund them, the Earl of Oxford's Men and the Earl of Oxford's Boys would become a practical nonentity during the 1590s. (Only one record survives of "thearle of Oxfords players"–putting on a show in Kent in 1594–during this most revolutionary decade in the history of the English stage.) On the other hand, new troupes had formed. Companies of actors under de Vere's peers the Lord Admiral, the earl of Pembroke, the new earl of Sussex (brother of de Vere's mentor, who had died in 1583) and the Lord Strange/earl of Derby were enjoying great success both on the public and courtly stages. These companies–Strange's and the Admiral's Men in particular–had the best actors in England working for them. Players like Edward Alleyn (Admiral's), Will Kemp (Strange's) and Richard Burbage (Strange's) were transforming the public face of the theater.

With the continued commercial boom that the theaters were enjoying, a new form of celebrity was being forged. Like their thespian predecessors in ancient Rome and Greece and Renaissance France and Italy, English actors were beginning to eclipse the fame of celebrities in practically all other walks of life save for royalty and nobility. To spot an Alleyn or Burbage on the London streets was becoming an event worthy of a maiden's best swoon or a wag's best gawk.

Some writers took this emerging fact of life better than others. Robert Greene was the jealous sort. Actors, especially those who tried to improvise their own lines in the middle of his scripts, had been getting on his nerves. Greene had his own special reason to be bitter. He'd recently been caught red-handed trying to sell the same playscript to two different companies–the Lord Admiral's Men and the Queen's Men. So, during the plague-ridden summer of 1592, when the theaters were all closed, Greene brooded.

Sometime in early August, the satirist Thomas Nashe visited the city to meet Greene for an afternoon of drinking. Nashe would later publish his recollections of this day of roistering. In addition to Nashe and Greene, a third party joined these two scribblers for a steady diet of Rhenish wine and pickled herring. In a pamphlet that appeared the following year, Nashe notes, "I

and one of my fellows, Will. [*sic*] Monox (hast thou never heard of him and his great dagger?) were in company with [Greene]."

Scholars have searched the documentary record for centuries for the identity of "Will. Monox." Nashe, it appears, was making up one more playful Euphuistic pseudonym. Monox, the pidgin-French "My Ox," in his role as the Lord Great Chamberlain of England, had as one of his ceremonial duties to bear the sword of state–a.k.a. "his great dagger."

The "Will." part will become clear presently.

On that August afternoon, drinking with de Vere and Greene, Nashe might have wanted to tell the man who had been "Pasquill" about the play Nashe had been working on. It was a comedy called *Summer's Last Will and Testament* that prominently featured a character named Ver or "the Spring." Ver is a monstrously prodigal character. "I tell you, none but asses live within their bounds!" Ver exclaims. Nashe was never one to play light or easy with his caricatures.

According to Nashe's account, Greene, Nashe, and "Monox" met at a London establishment called the Steelyard. Destitute though he may have been, Greene showed up at the bar wearing a lavish doublet and cloak worth a couple of pounds at least–hundreds of dollars in today's money. Nashe later joked that his friend's getup was "fair . . . with sleeves of a grave goose-turd green."

If FALSTAFF, BARDOLPH, and POINS could have picked an Elizabethan den for their iniquity, the Steelyard would have been an appropriate choice. The Steelyard was home to the medieval German trading company the Hanseatic League. Dealers could often be found haggling over the price of everything from Norwegian falcons to Flemish linen. The bar's low-vaulted ceilings reverberated with their polyglot chatter. Specialties of the house included German ("Rhenish") wine and Northern European delicacies such as smoked ox-tongue, salmon, caviar, and pickled herring. One seventeenth-century visitor called the Steelyard the "Dutch magazine of sauce." The Steelyard was also as caste-free an atmosphere as one could find in Elizabethan London. Bishops and privy-chamber counselors mingled with the mercantile classes and cosmopolitan set.

Nashe and "Monox" returned to their domiciles after the day's drinking, dining, and bantering was done. But whether from food poisoning or just a life of overindulgence, Greene fell ill. He would die a month later, on September 3. Prolific to the end, the thirty-four-year-old pamphleteer apparently spent his final weeks composing two repentant pamphlets. "Many things I have wrote to get money, which I would otherwise wish to be suppressed," Greene wrote. "Poverty is the father of innumerable infirmities. In seeking to salve private wants, I have made myself a public laughingstock." A literary colleague, Henry Chettle, claimed to have collected some of Greene's deathbed papers, and *Greene's Groatsworth of Wit* appeared in London bookstalls in late September or early October of 1592.

Greene's Groatsworth of Wit is an important and controversial document in the history of English literature, because *Groatsworth* introduces the world to Will Shakspere of Stratford-upon-Avon.

Groatsworth begins with the tale of a transparently autobiographical character named Roberto, who is both a scholar and an author. Roberto, the reader learns, has inherited from his father only a worthless coin, a groat. Wallowing in self-pity, Roberto happens upon a garrulous country bumpkin. This unnamed traveler, Greene says, was once a puppet master and "country author" who put together morality plays in traveling carnival shows. But now, seven years after first entering show business, the puppet master has made the big time. He lives in the city; he hires others to write plays that he produces; he's a "gentleman player"; his wardrobe alone he estimates to be worth £200 (more than $50,000 today). He speaks of this wardrobe as his "share," implying that the garments are used for the theater. The player salts his speech with Latin phrases that he doesn't understand and bludgeons out a few lines of doggerel, of which he is overfond.

Greene then shifts the focus of *Groatsworth* from his "Roberto" parable to a rant. But it is clear that the country player is still on the pamphleteer's mind. In *Groatsworth*'s closing jeremiad, Greene doles out unsolicited advice to Nashe, Marlowe, and another playwright, George Peele, lines quoted in practically every "Shakespeare" textbook ever printed:

> Base-minded men, all three of you, if by my misery you be not warned: . . . There is an upstart crow, beautified with our feathers, that with his tiger's heart wrapped in a player's hide supposes he is as well able to bombast out a blank verse as the rest of you. And being an absolute *Johannes factotum* [*braggart and vainglorious dilettante*] is in his own conceit the only shake-scene in the country.

The line "Tiger's heart wrapped in a player's hide" is a spoof on a catchphrase ("Oh, tiger's heart wrapped in woman's hide!") from an anonymous play that the Earl of Pembroke's Men were performing in 1592, *The True Tragedy of Richard, Duke of York*. This play was eventually revised and published as Shake-speare's *Henry VI, Part 3*.

Take the "Roberto" parable together with the above quote, and the message is as clear as Greene's convoluted rhetoric can make it: There is a country player, who's been in the business now for seven years, who buys up plays and puts them on London stages. This player, whom Greene nicknames "Shake-scene," also owns a substantial wardrobe used in the plays he produces. He "supposes" he can crank out blank verse like the professional playwrights. However, in Elizabethan usage, the word *supposes* often meant "feigns" or "pretends." The great pretender, Greene says, is an "upstart crow"–probably referring to the crow from Aesop's fables, a bird that dressed itself up in other

birds' feathers. In short, "Shake-scene" talks a good game, but according to Greene, he's a big phony. He'll hire a working writer, like Greene, to write a play–and then "Shake-scene" will smash it together with another script or just present it as his own. For scripts that advertised no owner or original author, such as those that came from de Vere's shop, it was all the more easy for "Shake-scene" to parade around dressed up in borrowed plumage.

So far as the documentary evidence reveals, William Shakspere of Stratford-upon-Avon was baptized in 1564, married in 1582, and sired a daughter, born in 1583, and twins born in 1585. After that, he disappeared from the historical record until 1592, when a "Willielmus Shackspere" loaned £7 to one John Clayton in London. The span between Shakspere's disappearance from Stratford records and the publication of *Greene's Groatsworth of Wit* is seven years–the same amount of time that Greene's proverbial "gentleman player" had been in show business.

If Greene is to be taken at his word, Will Shakspere had been touring around the provinces as a player and puppet master. Shakspere had cobbled together a few morality tales and had ultimately made his way to London. Considering Greene tags "Shake-scene" with a quote from a Pembroke's Men play, it stands to reason that Shakspere was in 1592 working as a producer-player-factotum for the Earl of Pembroke's Men.

During the winter and spring of 1592, Philip Henslowe, manager of the Rose Theatre, recorded the first known performances of anonymous plays he calls *Harey the VI* and *Harey of Cornwall. Harey the VI* is widely accepted to be Shake-speare's *Henry VI, Part 1. Harey of Cornwall* is probably Henslowe's shorthand for Shake-speare's *Henry V*–alluding to the popular scene in which the king interviews his troops on the eve of Agincourt under the assumed name of "Harry le Roy" of Cornwall. Subsequent entries in Henslowe's journals in 1593 mention the performance of a play called *Titus & Ondronicus*. Henslowe never noted who wrote these texts.

According to the title page of the first printed edition of *Titus Andronicus* (published anonymously in 1594), this early Shake-speare tragedy had been performed by Pembroke's Men in addition to Strange's/Derby's Men and Sussex's Men. De Vere, on familiar terms with each of these patrons, was apparently not particular about which companies produced his first few plays after he'd moved back into the theatrical district. De Vere would have had little control over a loudmouthed actor who might have enjoyed backstage boasts about how he'd written plays that, in truth, had come from a nobleman's shop.

❧

Tom Nashe knew a good joke when he saw it. The idea that an uneducated and inexperienced provincial actor might claim he wrote an urbane, complex Roman historical tragedy like *Titus Andronicus* or a blatant aristocratic apologia like Shake-speare's *Henry VI*–material like this was a satirist's manna.

Styling de Vere as "Will. Monox" in 1592 may be the earliest published hint that the player William Shakspere had already paraded around in de Vere's feathers on the public stage. What ended years later in an avalanche that buried nearly every trace of Edward de Vere evidently began in 1592 with the trickle of a few pebbles. The Shake-speare canon, as it is known today, most likely existed in 1592 as an assortment of de Vere's courtly scripts and scenarios from the 1570s and '80s that called out to their creator for revision. And Will Shakspere had, as suggested by Robert Greene's deathbed diatribe, probably not done anything more extreme than brag to a few acquaintances or audience members about his handiwork on the likes of *Titus* or *Harey the VI*.

No one could have then known the curious course of events that would lead, in 1598 or early 1599, to the first publication of a de Vere play under the byline "William Shakespeare."

Before 1598, what are now recognized as Shake-speare's plays were all published anonymously. There was nothing in 1592 to indicate that de Vere's forthcoming literary output would be treated any differently than the scripts that had already been turned out for the Queen's Men: public performances and, eventually, anonymous publications.

Still, a joke is a joke. And Nashe was not one to turn down the temptation of his muse. The same pamphlet that contains the "Will. Monox" anecdote (*Strange News,* published in January 1593) is dedicated to a prolific poet whom Nashe nicknames: "Gentle Master William *Apis Lapis*."

Nashe's "Gentle Master William *Apis Lapis*" is the same person as "Will. Monox." And, although it is rarely studied today, Nashe's *Strange News* is every bit as important to the biographical evidence of Shake-speare as is Robert Greene's "upstart crow" diatribe.

Whereas Greene introduces the world to the country player Will Shakspere, Nashe presents de Vere tricked up for the first time in the guise of a writer and wit named "William."

Apis is the name of a legendary ox from antiquity that the Egyptians worshiped. *Lapis* is a Latin adjective meaning "insensate" or "lacking empathy." To Tom Nashe, de Vere was a "stubborn old ox."

Nashe roasts "Gentle Master William" while he worships "William's" literary talents. De Vere is, Nashe says, "the most copious carminist [*poet*] of our time" but a "famous pottle-pot [*drunkard*] patron" who has spent "many pounds . . . upon the dirt of wisdom."

> Gentle Master William: . . . [I]f your worship–according to your wonted Chaucerism–shall accept in good part, I'll be your daily orator to pray that that pure sanguine complexion of yours may never be famished with potluck, that you may taste till your last gasp and live to see the confusion of both your special enemies: small beer and grammar rules.

(Nashe loved to poke fun at things like "grammar rules," since his pamphleteering opponent Gabriel Harvey was a notorious pedant.)

Since de Vere doesn't have money, Nashe doesn't expect money for his dedication. Instead Nashe asks de Vere to use his influence to ensure that *Strange News* survives the journey from manuscript to printed book.

> I conjure thee to draw out thy purse and give me nothing for the dedication of my pamphlet.
>
> Thou art a good fellow, I know, and hadst rather spend jests than money. Let it be the task of thy best terms to safe-conduct this book through the enemy's country.
>
> Proceed to cherish thy surpassing Carminical [*poetic*] art of memory with full cups (as thou dost).... However I write merrily, I love and admire thy pleasant witty humor, which no care or cross can make unconversable. Still, be constant to thy content. Love poetry, hate pedantism.
>
> Thine entirely,
> THO. NASHE

The content of *Strange News* is mostly an arcane and, at times, hilarious rejoinder to Gabriel Harvey's pamphlets written against Nashe. In the midst of railing against Harvey, Nashe notes that the Cambridge pedant has angered de Vere. This, Nashe warns, is not something anyone in his right mind should do.

> Mark him [*de Vere*] well. He is but a little fellow, but he hath one of the best wits in England. Should he take thee in hand again–as he flieth from such inferior concertation–I prophesy that there would be more gentle readers die of a merry mortality, engendered by the eternal jests he would maul thee with, than there have done of this last infection [*plague*]. I myself ... enjoy but a mite of wit in comparison of his talent.

De Vere memorializes his friendship with Tom Nashe in *Love's Labor's Lost*–a comedy that also offers up a caricature of Will Shakspere.

As noted in previous chapters, this French court comedy is in part about the women who got away: Anne Vavasour (ROSALINE), Mary Hastings (MARIA), and even Queen Elizabeth herself (the PRINCESS OF FRANCE). But the final, Shake-spearean version of this multilayered comedy contains added touches that most scholars agree date to the period 1592–94.

It is the circa-1593 layer of *Love's Labor's Lost* that presents de Vere, Nashe, Harvey, and Shakspere of Stratford-upon-Avon–in fact, it is the most intimate account yet found of the relationship between the seventeenth earl of Oxford and Stratford Will. The interrelations among these four figures onstage are a doorway through which one can look into the public and literary life of de Vere and Will Shakspere at the very dawn of the Shake-spearean Age.

In addition to de Vere's courtly persona in *Love's Labor's Lost* (the noble wooer BEROWNE), de Vere also presents a clownish version of himself in the play: the failed, down-at-the-heels swashbuckler, the Spanish soldier DON ADRIANO DE ARMADO. This self-characterization probably served as a jesting allusion to the scandalous rumors that circulated in 1593 that "the erle of Oxford" had become so dissatisfied with the English government that he "wold easelye be movyd to folow the Spanish king" if only given the opportunity.

ARMADO is introduced to the audience of *Love's Labor's Lost* as

> ... [A] refined traveler of Spain,
> A man in all the world's new fashion planted
> That hath a mint of phrases in his brain,
> One who the music of his own vain tongue
> Doth ravish like enchanting harmony.

But, ARMADO soon confesses, he is "in love with a base wench." The dame, named JAQUENETTA, is his literary muse:

> I do affect the very ground, which is base, where her shoe, which is baser, guided by her foot, which is basest, doth tread.... Assist me, some extemporal god of rhyme, for I am sure I shall turn sonnet. Devise, wit; write, pen! For I am for whole volumes in folio!

ARMADO's page is MOTH, Tom Nashe writ in boldface. ARMADO calls MOTH a "most acute Juvenal"–the same Roman satirist to whom Nashe was most frequently compared. MOTH's lines spoof Nashe's writings: MOTH and his master trade rhymes about "the fox, the ape, and the humblebee"; Nashe's *Pierce Penniless* goes into an extended parable that uses the figures of a fox, an ape, and honeybees.

Love's Labor's Lost also pricks the pretensions of Nashe's nemesis Gabriel Harvey. The play's verbose pedant HOLOFERNES becomes Harvey hoist with his own petard. In their pamphlet war, Harvey and Nashe traded jabs over an obscure piece of Latin verse by the Mantuan poet Battista Spagnuoli. In Act 4, HOLOFERNES quotes precisely this verse.

Although Nashe could be devastatingly scurrilous and acid at times, de

Vere must have valued their unlikely friendship for the young man's outstanding wit. The destitute Spaniard ARMADO and his satirical page, MOTH, are almost always together, quipping and punning at each other all the while.

ARMADO Boy, what sign is it when a man of great spirit grows melancholy?
MOTH A great sign, sir, that he will look sad.
ARM. Why! Sadness is one and the selfsame thing, dear imp.
MOTH No, no; O Lord, sir, no.
ARM. How canst thou part sadness and melancholy, my tender Juvenal?
MOTH By a familiar demonstration of the working, my tough signor.
ARM. Why tough signor? Why tough signor?
MOTH Why tender Juvenal? Why tender Juvenal?

MOTH and HOLOFERNES, on the other hand, quibble with each other–a polite encapsulation of the pamphlet battles Harvey and Nashe would fight during the 1590s. ARMADO (de Vere) and HOLOFERNES (Harvey) are not friends, although they exchange erudite pleasantries with each other. Tellingly, ARMADO eggs both MOTH and HOLOFERNES on.

ARMADO [*to* HOLOFERNES] Monsieur, are you not lettered?
MOTH Yes, yes. He teaches boys the hornbook. . . . Ba! Most silly sheep with a horn. You hear his learning?
HOLOFERNES *Quis, quis,* thou consonant! . . .
ARMADO Snip, snap, quick and home! It rejoiceth my intellect: True wit!
MOTH Offered by a child to an old man, which is wit-old. [*pun on wittol* or *cuckold*]
HOL. What is the figure? What is the figure?
MOTH Horns.
HOL. Thou disputest like an infant. Go, whip thy gig.

Love's Labor's Lost also talks about Shakspere and the emerging Shakespeare ruse in the character of an ambitious country gentleman named COSTARD. In the play's first scene, the audience is told that COSTARD had once loved ARMADO's love object, JAQUENETTA–the author's muse. ARMADO is given custody of COSTARD, at which point the downtrodden Spaniard decides to set COSTARD free on the condition that he serve as a messenger to carry ARMADO's written epistles of love to the woman they have in common. Symbolically, this is nearly the whole story: De Vere uses his country clown as an envoy to satisfy the author's longing for the literary delights and public fame that he cannot himself taste.

ARMADO Fetch hither the swain. He must carry me a letter.
MOTH A message well sympathized: A horse to be ambassador for an ass. . . .
[*exit* MOTH; *reenters with* COSTARD]
ARM. Sirrah COSTARD, I will enfranchise thee.
COSTARD O! Marry me to one Frances! [*a proverbial prostitute*] . . .
ARM. By my sweet soul, I mean setting thee at liberty, enfreedoming thy person: Thou wert immured, restrained, captivated, bound.
COST. True, true, and now you will be my purgation and let me loose.
ARM. I give thee thy liberty, set thee from durance; and in lieu thereof, impose on thee nothing but this: Bear this significant to the country maid JAQUENETTA.
There is remuneration. For the best ward of mine honor is rewarding my dependents. MOTH, follow.
[*exit* MOTH]
COST. [*to himself*] Remuneration! O, that's the Latin word for three farthings.

There is no documentary record of de Vere and Shakspere ever meeting. COSTARD's banter with de Vere's personification in *Love's Labor's Lost* is the closest to such a record that has yet been found.

Love's Labor's Lost ends with a masque ("The Nine Worthies") that ARMADO is asked to write for the court. COSTARD assumes the starring role in the skit. As COSTARD says of the character he plays in DON ARMADO's masque, so might it be said for Will Shakspere himself:

For mine own part, I know not the degree of the worthy. But I am prepared to stand for him.

The players of ARMADO's skit–including MOTH, HOLOFERNES, ARMADO, and COSTARD–are relentlessly heckled by the courtly audience. De Vere plays fair, throwing as many rhetorical rotten tomatoes at his own caricature, ARMADO, as at the rest of his fellow thespians. The character who handles the tough crowd best, though, is COSTARD. He plays the audience like a pro; ARMADO's skit is the one moment in *Love's Labor's Lost* where COSTARD really shines. When the actor playing Alexander the Great leaves the stage in tears, COSTARD jumps in to keep the show rolling.

COSTARD There, an't shall please you: a foolish mild man; an honest man, look you, and soon dashed! He is a marvelous good neighbor, faith, and a very good bowler. But, for Alexander–alas! you see how 'tis–a little o'erparted. But there are worthies a-coming will speak their mind in some other sort.

ARMADO and COSTARD compete for the same lowborn muse; COSTARD practically rings the curtain down with the revelation that ARMADO has gotten JAQUENETTA pregnant. ARMADO says that he will "right himself like a soldier" and "hold the plough for her sweet love": ARMADO will marry JAQUENETTA. But the public revelation of ARMADO's consorting with his muse still leaves the Spaniard embarrassed, so the hot-tempered ARMADO challenges COSTARD to a fight. COSTARD begins to roll up his sleeves. But MOTH steps in to break it up.

> MOTH [to ARMADO] Master, let me take you a buttonhole lower. Do you not see [COSTARD] is uncasing for the combat? What mean you? You will lose your reputation!

That the scrappy Tom Nashe would urge his ox not to scrap with Will Shakspere suggests a colorful scene. De Vere would grow angrier at Shakspere over the coming years. But, Nashe's doppelgänger suggests, a lord who started a fight with a COSTARD would lose his "reputation."

Perhaps the greatest irony in the entire Shake-speare fable in *Love's Labor's Lost* is that de Vere's reputation was already lost. It was Will Shakspere, COSTARD, who would restore it.

❧

On February 24, 1593, Elizabeth Trentham gave birth to a baby boy. The earldom of Oxford now had an heir apparent, styled Lord Bolbec. Edward and Elizabeth named their son Henry.

Queen Elizabeth had called a new Parliament on February 19, and de Vere took his place in the House of Lords on opening day as well as on February 20 and 24. After his son was born, though, the boy's father would be missing in action until Parliament's closing day on April 10.

For a man in his forties, to sire a first legitimate son is a rite of passage and a reflection on mortality. In September of 1590, de Vere–staring down his fortieth winter–had written to Burghley that he was chronically ill. Now, three years later, his impoverished household was home to the next earl of Oxford. The boy's father must have felt pangs of shame as he rehearsed in his mind what he would say to his son once the child grew old enough to understand what an enormous inheritance, of money and good name, his father had squandered.

De Vere had another source of generational strain as well. His eldest daughter, Elizabeth de Vere (eighteen years old in 1593), had been matched with a boy she'd known since she was seven, a ward of state as Edward de Vere had once been. And in Henry Wriothesley's proposed marriage with de Vere's daughter–Burghley's granddaughter–de Vere saw his youth and disastrous first marriage alive again.

Henry Wriothesley, third earl of Southampton, was a charming and courtly lad, two years older than Elizabeth de Vere. As a young man under the watchful eye of Lord Burghley, he was well educated in all the trappings of nobility–from hawking and hunting to music and poetry. Burghley had been pushing for Southampton's marriage to Elizabeth de Vere as far back as 1590. But Southampton was uninterested in taking his foster sister as a wife.

In 1591, Burghley's secretary John Clapham had dedicated a Latin poem to Southampton titled *Narcissus*. Taking as its subject the cautionary Roman fable of self-love, Clapham's poem was a thinly veiled warning to the headstrong youth not to grow so fond of himself that he might offend Lord Burghley. Clapham's dedication to Southampton, also written in Latin, used the language of procreation to bring his point home. Translated into English, Clapham wrote:

> Whatever will be other people's opinion of me, all will be well with me, I hope, if you think this tender offspring–reborn, as it were, from the grave, although to many it could seem premature–deserving the patronage of your honor.

Clapham urged Southampton to marry Elizabeth de Vere and have a child.

In so many words, this is the essential argument of the first seventeen of Shake-speare's *Sonnets*. Since the early nineteenth century, many scholars have suspected that Southampton was the *Sonnets'* primary addressee–the "fair youth," as critics have dubbed the elusive creature. De Vere, as Shake-speare's *Sonnets* suggest, had more than a passing interest in Southampton.

2

When forty winters shall besiege thy brow
And dig deep trenches in thy beauty's field,
Thy youth's proud livery, so gazed on now,
Will be a tottered weed of small worth held.
Then being asked where all thy beauty lies–
Where all the treasure of thy lusty days–
To say within thine own deep-sunken eyes
Were an all-eating shame and thriftless praise.
How much more praise deserved thy beauty's use,
If thou couldst answer, "This fair child of mine
Shall sum my count and make my old excuse"–
Proving his beauty by succession thine.
This were to be new made when thou art old,
And see thy blood warm when thou feel'st it cold.

De Vere had squandered his own youth in jealous malcontent and bootless obstinacy. But he could at least pass along a legacy of lessons learned to

a young man beginning to navigate the swift and changing waters in Elizabeth's court. De Vere must have thought that Southampton would make a fine husband for his daughter–and, someday, a fine father for their children too.

13

O! that you were yourself; but, love, you are
No longer yours than you yourself here live.
Against this coming end you should prepare,
And your sweet semblance to some other give.
So should that beauty which you hold in lease
Find no determination–then you were
Yourself again after your self 's decease,
When your sweet issue your sweet form should bear.
Who lets so fair a house fall to decay,
Which husbandry in honor might uphold
Against the stormy gusts of winter's day
And barren rage of death's eternal cold?
O! none but unthrifts. Dear my love you know,
You had a father, let your son say so.

But as Shake-speare's "marriage sonnets" testify, de Vere had grown fond of this young Henry, not just as a potential son-in-law. The name de Vere and his countess chose for their own son, for his March 31, 1593, christening, was a first for the house of de Vere. Aubrey, Aubrey, Robert, Hugh, Robert, Robert, John, Thomas, Robert, Aubrey, Richard, John, John, John, John, John, Edward: The Christian names of the seventeen earls of Oxford had sometimes celebrated the reigning monarch, sometimes a family tradition. But the name Henry was a first. It could have been an homage to a king whom de Vere had never met, Henry VIII. It might also, however, have been a tribute to the young man whom Edward de Vere was courting on behalf of his daughter.

When de Vere was Southampton's age, a forty-two-year-old earl of Sussex had taken the wild-eyed de Vere under his wing, providing the lonely and orphaned youth with a father figure. It had been a stabilizing relationship that had changed and perhaps even saved de Vere's life. De Vere's deteriorating health in 1593 must have led him to suspect that he would not live long enough to guide his own son through the gauntlets of a courtier's life. But de Vere could pay back the debt he owed Sussex by playing father figure to another wayward ward under the Cecils' officious gaze–perhaps in hopes (hopes that would ultimately come true) that Southampton could in turn be there for the eighteenth earl of Oxford when the next generation of de Veres needed guidance and a strong ally at court.

The word *lover* is used in Shake-speare to connote both eros between a man and woman and to represent the love of a deep and profound platonic same-sex friendship, of a sort not uncommon in the Renaissance but lost to the modern age. Some such love seems to have existed from de Vere toward Wriothesley. This is not to say that there were no erotic or sexual feelings between the men. But any eros between the earls of Oxford and Southampton would have been only part of the emotion being felt and expressed. The *Sonnets* testify to the strength of that emotion; about its exact nature they are open to multiple interpretations.

De Vere's love for the youth who was still being groomed as his possible son-in-law could hardly be broadcast to the public at large. The Arundell–Howard libels had accused de Vere of homosexuality and pederasty; no matter what the relationship was between the older man and the younger, the poems could lead to scandal. Shake-speare's sonnets would be circulated, according to the courtly observer Francis Meres, "among [the author's] private friends" and would not be published until the next decade.

As a road map to his own failings and muddled achievements, de Vere wrote another poem that could be dedicated openly to Southampton. It was an epic poem, based in part on the Titian painting de Vere had probably seen at the great master's studio in Venice in 1575 or 1576. The story this poem told was, on the surface at least, an Ovidian narrative not unlike Clapham's *Narcissus*. The dedication read much like Clapham's dedicatory epistle, too–using procreative language to raise the topics of marriage and offspring. It read:

To the Right Honorable Henry Wriothesley, Earl of Southampton and Baron of Titchfield

Right Honorable: I know not how I shall offend in dedicating my unpolished lines to your Lordship, nor how the world will censure me for choosing so strong a prop to support so weak a burden. Only if your Honor seem but pleased, I account myself highly praised and vow to take advantage of all idle hours, till I have honored you with some graver labor. But if the first heir of my invention prove deformed, I shall be sorry it had so noble a godfather–and never after ear [*plant*] so barren a land, for fear it yield still so bad a harvest.

This dedication prefaced a poem titled *Venus and Adonis,* which was submitted to the highest censor in the land (the archbishop of Canterbury) and approved for publication on April 18, 1593. The London bookseller John Harrison published *Venus and Adonis* between late April and early June of 1593.

The poem itself is nearly twelve hundred lines long, retelling the ancient myth of the legendary proud hunter and the goddess of love. As in Ovid's

original tale, the couple meet and fall in love, but Shake-speare's ADONIS prefers to spend his time in more manly pursuits. Despite VENUS's vehement protestations to the contrary, ADONIS runs off to hunt the wild boar. He is killed, and VENUS sequesters herself in mourning. As a piece of contemporary allegory, the poem portrays VENUS as the queen of England–as Spenser's recent epic poem *The Faerie Queene* portrayed his title character as Queen Elizabeth. ADONIS symbolically operates on two levels: one, with the author as ADONIS, as a fable of de Vere's own experiences with the terrestrial goddess on England's throne; the other as a cautionary story, with Southampton as ADONIS, of the mortal dangers of seeking and maintaining a place of favor in the fickle Elizabeth's eyes.

As a couple, VENUS and ADONIS are often compared to Shake-speare's ANTONY and CLEOPATRA. Both the goddess of love and the goddess of Egypt are shrewd, bullish, and changeable. And ANTONY, in the words of literary critic J. W. Lever, "is ADONIS . . . allowed to grow up." The same petulance and overweening pride can be seen in ADONIS as in the warrior who fled from the Battle at Actium. But in ADONIS, the egotism is more childish and pronounced. It is, in essence, the difference between de Vere at age twenty-three, when he was the queen's favorite, and de Vere at age thirty-eight, when the Spanish Armada sailed.

Venus and Adonis is voyeurism raised to a high art. As Samuel Taylor Coleridge once observed, "You seem to be told nothing, but to see and hear everything." One can almost hear the "shhhhh" of a fellow voyeur, as unbelieving eyes peer from behind the bushes to witness new secrets unfold. VENUS tries and tries to get ADONIS to kiss her, and as in Titian's *Venus and Adonis,* ADONIS couldn't care less. VENUS assures her young lover that the flowers on the riverbank will not give away their secrets. The queen of love tells ADONIS:

> Be bold to play, our sport is not in sight.
> Those blue-vein'd violets whereon we lean
> Never can blab, nor know not what we mean.

She smothers him with a thousand kisses–a metaphor for the £1,000 annuity.

> To sell myself I can be well contented,
> So thou wilt buy, and pay, and use good dealing. . . .
>
> A thousand kisses buys my heart from me,
> And pay them at thy leisure, one by one.

VENUS's kisses are also the queen of love's best tool for censorship: She shuts ADONIS up with the "seal manual [of her] wax-red lips."

> Her lips are conquerors; his lips obey,
> Paying what ransom the insulter willeth;
> Whose vulture thought doth pitch the price so high
> That she will draw his lips' rich treasure dry.

The BOAR, the earls of Oxford's heraldic device, intervenes to steal ADONIS away from VENUS. VENUS says:

> 'Tis he, foul creature, that hath done thee wrong:
> I did but act, he's author of thy slander. . . .
>
> But this foul, grim, and urchin-snouted boar,
> Whose downward eye still looketh for a grave,
> Ne'er saw the beauteous livery that [ADONIS] wore,
> Witness the entertainment that he gave.

Venus and Adonis, decked out in its Ovidian finery, with plenty of stylistic distractions to keep the general public ignorant of its courtly message, was nevertheless de Vere's warning to Southampton: Queen Elizabeth is a seductress. Don't end up smothered in a thousand "kisses" a year, gagged and gored by courtly duties to your sovereign.

Venus and Adonis fast became a best seller. The esoteric levels of meaning may have been lost on many readers. But the buzz the poem created was still enough to keep it flying off the shelves, generating an average of one new printing per year in its first decade on the book stands.

Not everyone remained in the dark, however, about the veiled courtly layers beneath *Venus and Adonis*'s Ovidian surface. One Londoner, a street-corner ranter named William Reynolds, wrote a letter to Burghley in the summer of 1593 that spelled out the terms of *Venus and Adonis* in plain and graphic Elizabethan English:

> Also within these few days, there is another book made of Venus and Adonis, wherein the queen represents the person of Venus–which queen is in great love (forsooth) with Adonis. And [she] greatly desires to kiss him. And she woos him most entirely, telling him [that] although she be old, yet she is lusty fresh and moist and full of love and life. (I believe a good deal more than a bushelful.) And she can trip it as lightly as a fairy nymph upon the sands. And her footsteps not seen. And much ado with red and white.

Red and white were the colors of the Tudor Rose, the emblem of the House of Tudor. Reynolds says, essentially, that *Venus and Adonis* is a work of pornography that stars Queen Elizabeth I of England. If Reynolds was right, following

the story of *Venus and Adonis,* this then meant that the Virgin Queen was a grasping she-wolf and a desperate spinster. Reynolds was declared an insane man.

Within a fortnight of *Venus and Adonis*'s registration at the Stationer's Guild, Gabriel Harvey had already gotten wind of it. Hardly known for his discretion, although more cultivated in his exposition than Reynolds, Harvey shot off another volley in his ongoing literary war with de Vere's MOTH, Tom Nashe. Writing his pamphlet *Pierce's Supererogation* in the form of an open letter, Harvey closes his diatribe with the following exhortation:

> ... And so for this present, I surcease to trouble your gentle courtesies, of whose patience I have ... in every part simply, in the whole tediously presumed under correction. I write only at idle hours that I dedicate only to *Idle Hours* [Harvey's emphasis]....
>
> This 27 of April 1593. Your mindful debtor, G.H.

Harvey's closing words are a parody of *Venus and Adonis*'s dedication to Southampton. Probably courtesy of his network of scholars and ecclesiastical contacts, Harvey could quote *Venus and Adonis* just nine days after the archbishop had declared the poem fit for public consumption.

But in the same pamphlet, in which Harvey mimics *Venus and Adonis*'s dedication, he does more: He says that the author of *Venus and Adonis* is "Pierce Penniless." Discussing the great writers of his age, Harvey praises authors whom he genuinely loves, such as Sir Philip Sidney and Edmund Spenser. Then he sarcastically overpraises three authors with whom he's fed up: Robert Greene, Thomas Nashe, and "Pierce Penniless."

> Wit [did] bud in such as Sir Philip Sidney and M. [Edmund] Spenser–which were but the violets of March or the primroses of May. Till the one began to sprout in M. Robert Greene ... the other to blossom in M. Pierce Penniless, as in the rich garden of poor Adonis. Both to grow in perfection in M. Thomas Nashe.

The *garden of Adonis* is an idiom meaning "a worthless toy" or "very perishable goods." *Venus and Adonis* is, Harvey suggests, a mere novelty, a trendy poetic trinket aimed at pleasing the younger crowd. With these words, Harvey registers his disapproval of the latest work of "Penniless."

Since *Pierce Penniless* was originally the title of a pamphlet written by Tom Nashe, Harvey sometimes called Nashe "Pierce Penniless." But Harvey also occasionally called *de Vere* "Pierce Penniless." Because Harvey mentions Nashe by name separately, Nashe cannot be "Pierce Penniless" in this case. Harvey is thus saying that the "Pierce Penniless" who wrote *Venus and Adonis* is de Vere.

This is direct contemporary testimony, and Harvey was in as good a position as anyone to know. But *Venus and Adonis*'s dedication to Southampton asserts the author is someone else:

> I leave it to your Honorable survey, and Your Honor to your heart's content, which I wish may always answer your own wish and the world's hopeful expectation.
>
> Your Honor's in all duty
> William Shakespeare.

For the first time, the name "Shakespeare" has been given the legitimacy of print. William Shakespeare is the author of *Venus and Adonis.*

By using the disguise of another man's name, de Vere had protected himself from the fate of William Reynolds–a man who had uncovered just one facet of *Venus and Adonis*'s hidden meaning and was cast aside to the very fringes of society. *Venus and Adonis* represents the debut of the ruse that would enable de Vere to become Elizabethan England's most candid truth-teller. Following the recipe laid out in Castiglione's *Courtier* (1572) and *Cardanus's Comfort* (1573), de Vere had published his heart in *Venus and Adonis* using a Batillus–the "upstart crow" Will Shakspere–as the beard who would distract the public gaze from the regal truths to be found within.

Enter COSTARD, stage left.

CHAPTER 10

THE SHARP RAZOR OF A WILLING CONCEIT

[1593–1598]

IN 1593, ELIZABETH I CELEBRATED THE THIRTY-FIFTH ANNIVERSARY of her coronation. The sixty-year-old queen had now sat on the throne for as long as her predecessors Edward VI, Mary I, and Henry VII combined. Her father, Henry VIII, was the only Tudor who had reigned longer. The sickly young princess whom few could have expected to survive the 1560s had instead established herself as the greatest member of the dynasty that had ended the War of the Roses, founded the Anglican Church, spawned the English Renaissance, and laid the groundwork for the British Empire.

But the house of Tudor would end with Elizabeth, and the power she and Lord Burghley had once monopolized was beginning to slip from her grasp.

It was probably in everyone's best interests that Elizabeth continued to distract herself with the coquette games she'd perfected in the 1560s and '70s, when she could still bear a child. Courtiers and visiting dignitaries in the 1590s still had to pretend that Her Majesty was the most radiant star in the firmament. Any young man seeking royal preferment still was required to act as if he only had eyes for England's Eliza. She wore embarrassingly low-cut dresses, and because of her love for sweets, her teeth had begun to rot. Her Highness's breath stank. She often sucked on a perfumed silk handkerchief before seeing visitors. And yet, eternally the ingenue, Elizabeth batted her eyelashes and played adolescent love games with the boys around her.

Meanwhile, forward-looking courtiers had begun to prepare for the coming war for the crown. Without any clear line of succession, nothing under the royal sun could be taken for granted. Because of the deal he had consummated before the execution of his mother, Mary, Queen of Scots, King James

VI of Scotland seemed a likely–but far from certain–successor. The eighteen-year-old Arabella Stuart, who traced her descent from a sister of Henry VIII, enjoyed a claim nearly as strong as did the Scots king. Lady Arabella would remain a staple of English conspiracy mongers for years. A Spanish takeover remained a possibility, too, as King Philip II and his daughter, Infanta Isabella Clara Eugenia, descended from John of Gaunt, the same royal grandsire whose line included the English kings Henry IV, V, and VI.

Nevertheless, even if one set aside all other viable claimants and assumed that King James VI of Scotland would become the next king of England, he would still be a foreign prince arriving in London with a woefully incomplete household. Who among Elizabeth's favorites would remain in high standing? Who would be falling from grace? What newcomers would the next king lavish gifts upon and appoint to positions of power? Who would find themselves out in the cold altogether? For the whole of Queen Elizabeth's court–approximately one hundred nobles and privy chamber members and the five to six hundred others granted access "above stairs"–a genteel free-for-all was about to begin, one that would set the course for the rest of their careers.

The 1590s would go down in history as one of the more brutal decades in the English court's existence. Two essential factions defined the face of power in the waning years of the Elizabethan era: A ring of gentlemen, spies, and nobles clustered around Sir Robert Cecil (age thirty in 1593); and a cult of personality surrounding the earl of Essex, the late earl of Leicester's stepson. The younger Cecil had continued his rise to power on the connections and networks his father had established. Essex, upon his stepfather's death in 1588, had been both blessed and burdened as the queen's new Leicester incarnate. The Leicester–Cecil power struggle of old was continuing into the 1590s–under new management.

Robert Devereux, earl of Essex (age twenty-eight in 1593), ironically, had grown up under the same roof as had Robert Cecil. Essex had been a ward of court since 1576, in Lord Burghley's household. Essex had become good friends with his fellow ward the earl of Southampton, as well as with the de Vere daughters.

Robert Cecil had begun to augment his father's extensive espionage networks with his own cabal of agents and assassins. One of Cecil's more promising minions was an operative named Robert Poley, who had helped to engineer the downfall of Mary, Queen of Scots. With characteristic flair, Poley had apprehended the Scots queen's conspirators one fateful night in August 1586 during a dinner that he'd hosted for them at a London tavern. Poley wined and dined his unwitting prey–and then snatched them up like rats in a trap.

Now, between December of 1592 and March of 1593, Poley had spent more than two months "rydeing in sondrey places" in Scotland–no doubt

conducting reconnaissance missions for his bosses, possibly communicating with James or his court. Poley's paymaster was Sir Thomas Heneage, a close adherent to the Cecil faction. If King James VI of Scotland was going to become King James I of England, such "rydeing" and knowledge gathering would be providing the intelligence necessary to keep the Cecil faction at the center of power into the next regime.

However communicating with Scotland concerning James's potential future on the English throne was treason; Elizabeth had forbidden discussion of her succession.

One particularly loose set of lips knew too much about Poley and his "rydeings." On May 30, 1593, at a tavern in Deptford, Poley had another dinner party. He and two agents under the employ of Sir Thomas Walsingham (the late Sir Francis Walsingham's cousin) feted a part-time agent who himself had been accused of carrying on correspondence with King James. The part-time agent had recently testified before the Star Chamber. He'd been released on bail pending further inquiries. His testimony might have exposed Poley and the Cecilian network for which he worked.

The dinner party was, like its predecessor in 1586, a convivial affair. There was a surprise ending too. By the time the bill had arrived, someone had started a fight, which ended with a dagger being lodged above the right eyeball of the part-time agent. There were no other witnesses to the homicide other than the three spies left standing.

The murdered part-time agent's name was Christopher Marlowe, the undisputed master of the London public stage at the time. A postmortem inquiry concluded that the four revelers had squabbled over the bar tab, and Marlowe had drawn the dagger that ended up killing him.

Some latter-day "Marlovians" have construed the dodgy inquiry as evidence of a conspiracy–that Marlowe had faked his own death so that he could move to Italy and, eventually, write the works of Shake-speare. Occam's razor, however, would suggest a simpler explanation: The murder was a hit job. None of the agents was ever punished because they were only carrying out the orders of powerful forces who could have been brought low had Marlowe lived long enough to complete his testimony for the Star Chamber.

In addition to being a secret agent, Marlowe was also the only serious literary competition Elizabethan England could offer Shake-speare. The careless youth and part-time spy had, in his tragically brief career, shown the potential of the public theaters as a canvas upon which masterpieces could be painted. De Vere had been raised to recognize courtly performances as the ultimate purpose of a courtier's theatrical endeavors. To de Vere, catching the conscience of the king had been the thing, the only thing. Yet Marlowe's *Tamburlaine, Doctor Faustus,* and *Edward II* reigned above all other works yet produced for the London stage in popularity and acclaim. Compared to the immediate and visceral appeal of Marlowe's plays, works by the

Euphuist-inspired playwrights and Queen's Men's contributors looked stilted and artificial.

After Marlowe's mellifluous voice had been silenced, the English theater could easily have gone back to the fawning courtly comedies of yesteryear. Such outmoded voices as John Lyly and George Peele were still around, and in the absence of anything better, they could be counted on to crank out more preening fluff. But Marlowe had shown the astonishing new directions that English drama could take–from the sea-spanning conquests of Oriental potentates to the inner dramas of historical English kings. It was now Shakespeare's torch either to dowse or to carry forward.

On February 6, 1594, the London printer John Danter registered "a booke intituled a Noble Roman Historye of Tytus Andronicus." It was the first published Shake-speare playscript, a blood-and-gore fest worthy of Marlowe's nightmarish vision. No hint of an author's name appeared anywhere in the book. The title page did announce, however, that the play had been performed by the troupes of de Vere's friends and colleagues the earl of Derby, the earl of Pembroke, and the earl of Sussex. On April 6, 1594, the theater manager Philip Henslowe recorded a performance, as previously noted, by the Queen's Men and Sussex's Men of the play *King Leare* [*sic*]. Three months later, Henslowe recorded two other troupes (the Admiral's Men and/or the newly formed Lord Chamberlain's Men) performing a play called *Hamlet.* Unknown forces, perhaps de Vere's new and settled married life, perhaps the impetus of Marlowe's death, had stoked de Vere's creative fires.

In 1594, the earl of Southampton faced a choice about the direction of his life. In refusing to marry Elizabeth de Vere, Robert Cecil's niece, Southampton risked alienating himself from a ruthless house that did not take kindly to being snubbed.

Southampton's widowed mother set the counterexample. On May 2, 1594, Mary Browne Wriothesley, dowager countess of Southampton, had married into the Cecil faction. Browne's new husband was Sir Thomas Heneage, the paymaster of Robert Poley. Heneage was also one of England's leading landholders. In addition to securing her family a place within the Cecil clan, Browne was also marrying a real estate tycoon active both in London and the provinces.

Browne was situating herself in a position of considerable comfort and power. If only her son would consider so smart an alliance.

Two of Heneage's provincial holdings, the forest of Waltham and Havering Park, had traditionally been owned by the earls of Oxford. De Vere had long yearned to repatriate these family properties. De Vere and Heneage had gone to law school together, at Gray's Inn, and had both taken degrees during the 1564 ceremonies at Cambridge University. De Vere no doubt wanted to

maintain good ties with his aging classmate–especially since de Vere's ancestral properties were now just one bequest away.

Furthermore, an office Heneage held, the Vice Chamberlainship of England, also made his ring particularly attractive to kiss in 1594. As Vice Chamberlain, Heneage was second-in-command of a new theatrical troupe that was consolidating the best actors and theatrical professionals in the country under one organizational structure.

The Lord Chamberlain's Men would soon become the country's premier band of actors. The troupe employed one of the finest tragedians in the land, Richard Burbage. Will Kemp, an unsurpassed comic talent, had joined the company at its 1594 founding. The rosters of the Lord Chamberlain's Men further boasted a theatrical player-manager-shareholder-producer-entrepreneur from Stratford-upon-Avon. So far as the woefully incomplete Elizabethan theatrical records reveal, Will Shakspere was from 1594 onward exclusively associated with the Lord Chamberlain's Men. According to oral histories of the English stage, Shakspere played the role of the GHOST in *Hamlet*–a witty piece of casting, considering the ephemeral nature of the play's actual author.

If de Vere was not present at the wedding of Heneage and the dowager countess of Southampton, a new play of his probably was. For more than a century, scholars have suspected that *A Midsummer Night's Dream* was performed in celebration of the May 2, 1594, Heneage–Browne nuptials. And given Heneage's close relationship with the nascent Lord Chamberlain's Men, the company that performed at his wedding would have been Shakspere's troupe.

Several references in the play suggest that *A Midsummer Night's Dream* had its world premiere on the night before the marriage of Sir Thomas Heneage and Mary Browne Wriothesley. When THESEUS encounters the four young lovers in the forest, he says, "No doubt they rose up early to observe/The rite of May," suggesting that the action of the play occurs on and just after May Day. Other lines in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* mention the notoriously inclement weather of the spring of 1594 ("thorough this distemperature we see/ The seasons alter: hoary-headed frosts/ Fall in the fresh lap of the crimson rose"), and the presence of Venus in the morning sky, where the planet could be found in the late spring of 1594 ("yonder Venus in her glimmering sphere").

A Midsummer Night's Dream is primarily a romantic farce of magically mistaken identities. But the play's central plotline is bookended by a more sober tale of the marriage of a powerful and gallant figure (DUKE THESEUS) with a former mortal enemy (HIPPOLYTA). THESEUS, the dignified elder statesman, stands in for the senior Elizabethan official Heneage, and HIPPOLYTA, the matriarch of a rival faction, for Mary Browne Wriothesley. HIPPOLYTA's alliance with THESEUS represents a truce between unfriendly clans. For a recalcitrant earl of Southampton, the moral of the story would have been that

of the *Sonnets:* that he, too, should marry into the Cecil clan. In *A Midsummer Night's Dream,* THESEUS in fact sounds the refrain heard in many Shakespeare sonnets, that the duty of a beloved youth is to make a copy of himself to preserve for future generations:

> THESEUS ... [E]arthlier happy is the rose distill'd
> Than that which, withering on the virgin thorn,
> Grows, lives, and dies in single blessedness.

When the text of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* was eventually published in 1600, the title page announced that Will Shakspere's troupe, the Lord Chamberlain's Men, had performed the play "sundry times." And the script contains a role that, like COSTARD, appears to have been tailor made for the company's Stratford-bred "upstart crow."

One of the subplots of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* concerns a theatrical troupe that features one garrulous, malaprop-spouting, limelight-grabbing ham at the center of the action. Thanks to the play's puckish magic, the star actor BOTTOM is transformed into an ass with whom the fairy queen TITANIA inappropriately falls in love.

BOTTOM briefly experiences the life of a royal consort. TITANIA, subject to an aphrodisiac spell, lavishes her carnal desires upon this amazed sir nobody. De Vere's own rumored days of flirtations and privy chamber sighs shared with the queen of England in 1573 must have seemed, two decades later, as strange as *A Midsummer Night's Dream*'s vision of a faerie queen tumbling in the hay with an ass.

> TITANIA Come sit thee down upon this flowery bed,
> While I thy amiable cheeks do coy,
> And stick musk roses in thy sleek smooth head,
> And kiss thy fair large ears, my gentle joy.

Once the magic wears off, returning BOTTOM to his human form and TITANIA to fairy land, BOTTOM marvels:

> I have had a most rare vision. I have had a dream, past the wit of man to say what dream it was. ... Man is but a patched fool if he will offer to say what methought I had. The eye of man hath not heard, the ear of man hath not seen, man's hand is not able to taste, his tongue to conceive, nor his heart to report what my dream was.

If BOTTOM's "dream" is to be taken at face value, the real-life Faerie Queen (Elizabeth) had taken a shine to a blowhard actor and jack-of-all-trades from Stratford. Will Shakspere's star was rising.

If *A Midsummer Night's Dream* was meant to persuade Southampton to a Cecil marriage, it didn't work. On May 9, one week after the Heneage wedding, de Vere tried again. The London bookseller John Harrison published the sequel to *Venus and Adonis*–that "graver labor" that the 1593 best seller had promised. It was titled, simply, *Lucrece.*

The story of *Lucrece* (which after the sixth edition in 1616 was given the fuller title *The Rape of Lucrece*) was a tragic allegory about the downfall of the Roman monarchy. Like *Venus and Adonis, Lucrece* was an epic poem, dedicated to the earl of Southampton. It would be de Vere's second published warning to his fond and foolish potential son-in-law about the path he was choosing, the road that led away from the house of Cecil–and de Vere. *Lucrece*'s dedication to Southampton is as tautly constructed a piece of courtly innuendo as was the first dedication. It begins:

> *To the Right Honorable Henry Wriothesley, earl of Southampton and baron of Titchfield.*
>
> The love I dedicate to Your Lordship is without end; whereof this pamphlet without beginning is but a superfluous moiety.

Moiety is a legal term meaning one half. In other words, if a reader doesn't already understand what *Venus and Adonis* is saying, *Lucrece* will seem a pointless trifle. The dedication continues:

> The warrant I have of your Honorable disposition, not the worth of my untutored lines, makes it assured of acceptance. What I have done is yours, what I have to do is yours, being in part all I have, devoted yours. Were my worth greater, my duty would show greater; meantime, as it is, it is bound to Your Lordship, to whom I wish long life still lengthened with all happiness.
>
> Your Lordship's in all duty,
> WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

If de Vere's fiscal house were in any state of order, he would have had dowries and other material inducements to draw Southampton into a marriage contract. But bereft of even his ancestral seat Castle Hedingham, de Vere could only promise his devotion.

Whereas *Venus and Adonis* painted the world as it once was, circa 1573, when de Vere and England's omnipotent Queen Venus had been intimate with each other, *Lucrece* portrayed the more desperate state of the union circa 1594–when female power had waned and the House of Tudor was fading. During the queen's final years, the male grasp held the scepter of power. The birth of the Roman Republic depicted in *Lucrece* parallels the rise of the

quasi-republican Regnum Cecilianum out of the ashes of the Tudor dynasty. The Cecils had practically become the winners, before the race had even reached its final lap. The Essex faction, such as it was, had only a vain, prancing whelp who had little appreciation for how brutal his courtly opponents could be.

But de Vere knew. He had lived under the Cecilian thumb for too long to be ignorant of his brother-in-law's plans for retaining power into the reign of the next king. This was the kind of knowledge that had probably killed Christopher Marlowe. And via the pseudonymous yarn-spinning of a Roman allegory, it was also the cautionary tale that Shake-speare would be relaying to his "patron."

LUCRECE is Elizabeth as the "Virgin Queen," a faithful and constant wife; in the later years of her reign, the queen often protested that she was married to the state. But the world of *Lucrece* is filled with ruthless male courtiers: TARQUIN, COLLATINE, OLD LUCRETIUS, and BRUTUS. These power brokers dominate the action of the poem. LUCRECE is little more than an observer in a world that she cannot control. One night, TARQUIN and company gather to boast about the chastity of their respective wives. But when these claims are put to the test, only COLLATINE's wife, LUCRECE, is discovered to be performing her spousal duties, spinning yarn and pining away the hours in modest observance of her husband's authority. Following the ancient tale of the historical Lucrece, TARQUIN grows jealous and entraps LUCRECE, raping her and fleeing.

Lucrece turns the tables on *Venus and Adonis,* from aggressive woman and submissive man to male dominator and female victim–from the autocratic control of a forceful queen to a male-dominated hierarchy of state power. The author had done what he could to warn the boy against offending the Cecilian new order.

But the warnings fell on deaf ears. On October 6, the earl of Southampton had reached the age of twenty-one, his majority. He could now say with complete legal authority what his inaction had previously only implied: He was not going to marry Elizabeth de Vere. For this dereliction of authority, Lord Burghley demanded Southampton pay an exorbitant fine of £5,000 ($1.3 million today).

The crazy scenario of the Shake-speare poems, steadfast refusals of marriage, and outlandish financial punishment would eventually make for some good comedy. At the turn of the century, as the Elizabethan Age became even more surreal, a clique of students at Cambridge University would stage a series of farces called *The Pilgrimage to Parnassus* and *The Return from Parnassus, Parts 1 and 2.* The college kids' plays offer one of the more candid views of court life as seen by a number of hip Elizabethan youth.

In the *Parnassus* plays, Southampton is satirized as a narcissistic courtly wannabe, "Gullio," who–in a sarcastic inversion of reality–hangs on every

word written by Shake-speare. In one scene, Gullio recalls a recent visit he'd paid to the household of an unnamed earl who wanted to marry his daughter to Gullio. Instead, Gullio gave his hosts a modest tip.

> GULLIO The countess and my lord entertained me very honorably. Indeed, they used my advice in some state matters, and I perceived the earl would fain have thrust one of his daughters upon me. But I will have no knave priest to meddle with my ring! I bestowed some 20 angels [£10] upon the officers of the house at my departure, kissed the countess, took my leave of the lord, and came away.

With *Venus and Adonis,* "Shakespeare" had become a best-selling author. *Lucrece* took longer to build momentum, but it, too, remained a solid seller for publisher John Harrison. The "graver labor" was reprinted seven times between 1598 and 1640.

Other writers around London soon tried to cash in on the phenomenon that *Venus and Adonis* and *Lucrece* had created. By September 1593 at the latest, Thomas Nashe had cranked out a pornographic spoof of *Venus* that he titled *The Choice of Valentines.* Nashe dedicated his manuscript to "Lord S."–no doubt Southampton–and made *Venus and Adonis*'s implicit sex as explicit as one could get. Nashe set his narrative in a brothel. *The Choice of Valentines,* not surprisingly, remained in manuscript form only–it was finally published in 1899.

In 1594, the Elizabethan dramatist Thomas Heywood published his own knock-off of *Venus and Adonis,* which he called *Oenone and Paris.* From the book's dedication "To the courteous readers" onward, it was clear which best seller Heywood was imitating, from the red and white of the Tudor Rose to the aggressive female assuring her lover that no one will know of their affair ("thy milk-white skin the pebbles shall not mark") to the silencing of the hero with a thousand kisses (a "thousand thanks" in *Oenone*). The following year, the poet-dramatist Michael Drayton produced his similarly Shake-spearean *Endymion and Phoebe.*

Drayton and at least four other poets in 1594–Richard Barnfield, John Dickenson, Sir William Harbert, and one anonymous elegist–also quoted from or otherwise referenced *Venus and Adonis* and *Lucrece.* Moreover, Harbert began to draw connections between the epic poems printed with the name "Shake-speare" attached to them and the plays, which had no such imprimatur.

The sieve was leaking. Shake-speare the officially recognized author of *Venus and Adonis* and *Lucrece* was beginning to become identified with the unofficially recognized "upstart crow" who'd been producing, acting in, and taking credit for various plays in the public theaters. If de Vere had ever thought the pseudonym Shake-speare could be isolated to just a couple of narrative poems, by 1594 he was being proven wrong.

Now that the two epic poems had demonstrated how many pounds and shillings could be made from the by-products of de Vere's pen, the marketplace began to take over. In 1594, Pembroke's Men's *Taming of A [sic] Shrew* and *The First Part of the Contention betwixt the two famous Houses of York and Lancaster* (later cleaned up and republished as Shake-speare's *Henry VI, Part 2*) were both published. Neither of these anonymous publications appears to have been approved or in any way supervised by the author.

Another play called *Locrine* was also registered for print in 1594, ultimately appearing on the book stands under the lucrative byline "W.S." Many scholars today suspect that the author of *Locrine* was Charles Tilney, a member of the Babbington conspiracy that had tried to install Mary, Queen of Scots, in 1586. The "W.S." on *Locrine*'s title page merely *implied* Shake-speare's authorship enough to sell an otherwise worthless old manuscript.

This was all too much. De Vere wrote to his former father-in-law to complain about maltreatment in what he termed "my office." The nature of de Vere's government job remains an unsolved mystery. But the widespread abuse of the Shake-speare name in the first half of 1594 provides another suggestion that the "office" had something to do with the Shake-speare brand. On July 7, de Vere wrote to Lord Burghley:

> My very good Lord: If it please you to remember that about half a year or thereabout past, I was a suitor to Your Lordship for your favor, that whereas I found sundry abuses, whereby both Her Majesty and myself were in mine office greatly hindered, that it would please Your Lordship that I might find such favor from you that I might have the same redressed.
>
> At which time I found so good forwardness in Your Lordship that I thought myself greatly beholding for the same. Yet by reason at that time mine attorney was departed the town, I could not then send him to attend upon Your Lordship, according to your appointment. But hoping that the same disposition still remaineth towards the justness of my cause, and that Your Lordship to whom my estate is so well known & how much it standeth me on, not to neglect as heretofore such occasions as to amend the same may arise from mine office, I most heartily desire Your Lordship that it will please you to give ear to the state of my cause, and at your best leisure, admit either mine attorney or other of my counsel in law to inform Your Lordship that the same being perfectly laid open to Your Lordship, I may enjoy the favor from you which I most earnestly desire. In which doing I shall think myself singularly beholding in this, as I have been in other respects. This 7th of July 1594.
>
> Your Lordship's ever to command,
> EDWARD OXENFORD

De Vere's prose, thick with legalistic provisos, reveals a man looking to play whatever cards he held in his hand very cautiously. Both he and the queen, de Vere noted, had been "abused" in some fashion. Perhaps de Vere hoped he could get the seventy-three-year-old Lord Treasurer to help de Vere preserve some dignity and semblance of ownership over the writings that were slipping out of his grasp. Perhaps de Vere wanted to establish some more permanent relationship with the country's best theatrical company, the Lord Chamberlain's Men, or otherwise pull some strings to rein in a situation that had spiraled out of control.

The "abuse" only continued unabated, however. In September, a London printer named John Windet registered for publication the most revealing and damning text about de Vere since the Arundell Libels. (It would later be reprinted in a pirated edition in 1596 and then banned by the archbishop of Canterbury three years after that.) The book was titled *Willobie His Avisa: Or the True Picture of a Modest Maid and of a Chaste and Constant Wife.* Chapter 9 quoted from *Willobie's* revealing portrait of Elizabeth Trentham de Vere ("Avisa"). But one crucial portion of the *Willobie* story remains untold. And it is probably why *Willobie* became such a hot and controversial text.

The Avisa of the story, as noted previously, had become known around literary London for associating with all manner of gentlemen and riffraff at the St. George's Pub near The Theatre. According to the book, Avisa dismisses the men seeking attention and patronage there. *Willobie* celebrates Avisa for her steadfast devotion to her unnamed husband. None of this should have been any cause for uproar. Yet *Willobie* also mentions one further suitor for Avisa's hand, a suitor who is particularly insistent. The suitor is named "H.W." This initialed Englishman is "a headlong youth" who is given to "fantastical fits." He's nicknamed "Harry." And, to add to the clues that would identify the mystery suitor, H.W. had also recently "departed voluntarily to Her Majesty's services." All of these descriptions fit the headstrong and petulant Henry Wriothesley, earl of Southampton, who in 1590 had run away across the English Channel to Dieppe, where he was expecting his friend the earl of Essex to bring English forces in aid of King Henry IV of France. Elizabeth summarily snatched Harry–as he was known to his family–back from the brink of his militaristic pretensions.

Thus, if *Willobie* is to be believed, at precisely the same time de Vere was trying to interest Southampton in his daughter, Southampton was paying undue attention to "Avisa," de Vere's wife! As the narrator of *Willobie* explains:

> H.W., being suddenly infected with the contagion of a fantastical fit, at the first sight of A[visa], pineth a while in secret grief. At length not able any longer to endure the burning heat of so fervent a humor, [H.W.] bewrayeth the secrecy of his disease to his familiar friend W.S., who not long before had tried the courtesy of the like passion–and was now newly recovered of the like infection.

The irony runs thick. De Vere (as "W.S.") had indeed "tried the courtesy of the like passion" for Avisa–he'd married her. But now the story suggests that "W.S." was feeling "newly recovered" from Avisa's love, which is perhaps the polite way of saying that "W.S." was becoming just as fond of "H.W." as he was of his spouse.

The narrator continues:

> Yet finding his friend [H.W.] let blood in the same vein, he [W.S.] took pleasure for a time to see him bleed–and instead of stopping the issue, he enlargeth the wound with the sharp razor of a willing conceit, persuading him [H.W.] that he [W.S.] thought it a matter very easy to be compassed.... In viewing afar off the course of this loving comedy, [W.S.] determined to see whether it would sort to a happier end for this new actor [H.W.] than it did for this old player [W.S.]. But at length this comedy was like to have grown to a tragedy by the weak and feeble estate that H.W. was brought unto by a desperate view of an impossibility of obtaining his purpose.

So, in a farce of mixed-up intentions, *Willobie* has Southampton confessing his lust for the countess of Oxford... to that old man of the stage, the earl of Oxford. And Southampton receives de Vere's amorous encouragement... as de Vere's endorsement of the wooing of his own countess. *Willobie* even has de Vere play the role of trickster, encouraging Southampton's dalliances believing that his wife will not cheat on him with Southampton. This is the stuff of great comedy–and not a little embarrassment. Little wonder, then, that the next authorized version of *Willobie* had to wait until 1605, after de Vere was dead.

And like Nashe roasting de Vere as "Gentle Master William," *Willobie* offers further evidence that London literati in the early to mid 1590s knew de Vere's secret identity as "W.S."

The last third of *Willobie* features a brief exchange between H.W. and W.S. about the art of wooing and winning a woman, followed by H.W.'s fruitless pursuits of Avisa, who turns him down at every occasion.

Shake-speare's sonnets 40, 41, and 42 conclude the love triangle story. Presuming Southampton is the "fair youth" being addressed in these poems, as has often been argued by scholars of all persuasions, the meaning of these once enigmatic poems becomes clear. De Vere had discovered that Southampton and his wife had become scandalously close. (Depending on the timing of the affair, the paternity of Henry de Vere could thus have been cast into doubt.) But de Vere's admiration for Southampton, and his trust in his chaste Avisa, were enough to keep his once insane jealousy under control. De Vere

had truly made a shift in his life: from jealous and paranoid doubter of his first wife to confident believer in the love of his second wife–even if she might have been briefly tempted by Southampton's charms.

40

Take all my loves, my love. Yea, take them all.
What hast thou then more than thou hadst before?
No love, my love, that thou mayest true love call.
All mine was thine, before thou hadst this more:
Then, if for my love, thou my love receivest,
I cannot blame thee, for my love thou usest.
But yet be blam'd, if thou this self deceivest
By willful taste of what thy self refusest.
I do forgive thy robbery, gentle thief,
Although thou steal thee all my poverty.
And yet love knows it is a greater grief
To bear love's wrong than hate's known injury.
    Lascivious grace, in whom all ill well shows,
    Kill me with spites, yet we must not be foes.

41

Those pretty wrongs that liberty commits,
When I am sometime absent from thy heart,
Thy beauty and thy years full well befits,
For still temptation follows where thou art.
Gentle thou art, and therefore to be won,
Beauteous thou art, therefore to be assailed;
And when a woman woos, what woman's son
Will sourly leave her till he have prevailed?
Ay me, but yet thou might'st my seat forbear,
And chide thy beauty and thy straying youth,
Who lead thee in their riot even there
Where thou art forced to break a twofold truth:
    Hers, by thy beauty tempting her to thee,
    Thine, by thy beauty being false to me.

42

That thou hast her, it is not all my grief,
And yet it may be said I loved her dearly;
That she hath thee is of my wailing chief,
A loss in love that touches me more nearly.
Loving offenders, thus I will excuse ye:

Thou dost love her, because thou know'st I love her,
And for my sake ev'n so doth she abuse me,
Suff'ring my friend for my sake to approve her.
If I lose thee, my loss is my love's gain,
And losing her, my friend hath found that loss;
Both find each other, and I lose both twain,
And both for my sake lay on me this cross.
    But here's the joy: My friend and I are one;
    Sweet flatt'ry, then she loves but me alone.

De Vere cannot have failed to anticipate at least some of Shake-speare's popular appeal. He'd first published an Ovidian kiss-and-tell poetic memoir about Queen Elizabeth at the height of her power and erotic appeal. Then he'd followed it up with a contemporary epic poem about sex, potency, and the continued ascent of the house of Cecil. Add to this a cluster of plays being performed around London with a loudmouthed actor and producer advertising himself as an author. And add to *that* a cluster of love sonnets–written to another man–being circulated in manuscript among the courtly class, and one has the makings of a guerrilla marketing campaign unlike any other in history.

Both of the official Shake-speare publications, *Venus and Adonis* and *Lucrece,* contained nuanced and circumspect dedications to Southampton. And as the Parnassus plays indicate, the university and literary set appreciated that Southampton's involvement in the Shake-speare enterprise had soon become its own comedy: The preoccupied and paternalistic author had gotten hung up on a dashing young star at court; the dashing young star at court was growing enamored of the "Shakespeare" plays and poems, not to mention the "Shakespeare" wife; the "Shakespeare" plays and poems, contrary to design, were leading the young star ever farther away from the author's daughter; the author's daughter was probably slinking away from the whole embarrassing scene; the whole embarrassing scene was making perfect fodder for farce.

Farce was how the strange year of 1594 ended too. On December 13, de Vere and Heneage's alma mater, Gray's Inn, sent out invitations for a blowout season of plays and entertainments to rival anything ever seen or staged before in England. With Her Majesty's blessing, the law students–potential courtiers of tomorrow, every one–established a faux princedom named after the manor house (Portpool) around which Gray's Inn was built.

On opening night, the "Prince of Purpoole" and his moot entourage had entertained and danced with so many noteworthy ladies of London that word of this new singles club soon disseminated around town. The following night of festivity, December 28, the stage and the halls of Gray's Inn

were thronged with actual courtiers, pretend courtiers, and randy poseurs of all persuasions. This was no public-theater afternoon of russet jackets and modest kirtles. Like its royal counterpart at Whitehall, the court of Purpoole demanded ostentation. Some of London's finest doublets and gowns strode up and down the crowded Gray's Inn stage like the countless powdered gallants de Vere had seen in his visits to "Queen" Henri III's flamboyant court in Paris.

The stench of wall-to-wall sweat, perfumes, and aromatic herbs–soap and hot-water baths were a rarity even for the well-heeled–must have laden the heavy winter air that hung over the evening's overflow-capacity crowd at Gray's Inn. Actual peers of the realm, unaccustomed to crowds and tight spaces, pickled in their own sweet juices.

According to an anonymous scribe's account of the evening, an entourage from another nearby law school–Inner Temple–was so repelled by the mob scene that they left "discontented and displeased." The Inner Temple students missed a real show too. "After such sports, a *Comedy of Errors*... was played by the players," the chronicler notes. The evening, he adds, "was ever afterwards called 'The Night of Errors.'"

An unnamed "sorcerer or conjurer" received most of the blame. This "sorcerer" had ordered the construction of the stage at Gray's Inn; he'd invited much of the crowd that had horded into the makeshift theater; he'd also "foisted a company of base and common fellows to make up our disorders with a play of errors and confusions." So the "sorcerer" was brought before the prince of Purpoole. The mystery man pleaded that the entertainment was "nothing else but vain illusions, fancies, dreams, and enchantments." Purpoole ultimately accepted the "dream" defense and dismissed any outstanding mock charges that his court might have brought. Whether the "sorcerer" was the author de Vere or producer-actor Will Shakspere–Don Armado or Costard–is anybody's guess. But one of the two men behind the Shake-speare ruse appears to have been the instigator of Gray's Inn's "Night of Errors."

In early December of 1594, Elizabeth de Vere had convinced her family to accept her own choice of mate. As *Venus and Adonis* and *Lucrece* suggest, de Vere had advocated for Southampton's hand until the very last. But Burghley had urged his grandchild to try other bachelors too–the earl of Bedford, then the earl of Northumberland, whom the nineteen-year-old de Vere girl told her officious grandfather she "[could not] fancye." She "fancyed" another man–William Stanley.

William Stanley, a thirty-four-year-old courtier poet, was a younger brother to the theatrical patron and courtier poet Ferdinando Stanley, fifth earl of Derby, Lord Strange. The Stanley brothers were great-great-grandchildren of King Henry VII and thus lived on the outer fringes of royalty. Practically, this had meant nothing to William, the landless and untitled younger sibling–until in July 1594, when his older brother had died suddenly of a stomach ailment.

Ferdinando's marriage had produced two daughters and thus no heirs to the earldom. During the remainder of the year, the Stanley family remained on tenterhooks. Ferdinando Stanley's widow was pregnant. If she delivered a boy, by the laws of primogeniture the newborn would become the next earl of Derby. If the child was a girl, William Stanley would succeed.

The dowager countess of Derby gave birth to a daughter. Elizabeth de Vere would soon become the next countess of Derby.

Those "vain illusions, fancies, dreams, and enchantments" that the bride's father specialized in were pulled out for the girl's wedding. As the chronicler John Stow recorded:

> The 26 of January, William, earl of Derby, married the earl of Oxford's daughter at the court then at Greenwich, which marriage feast was there most royally kept.

Sunday the twenty-sixth would actually be the first of several nights of parties that would conclude eighty-five miles to the north at Burghley House in Lincolnshire, where four days later the wedding ceremony itself would be held. The groom's family was particularly sensitive to the astrological significance of the timing of events, so the service was scheduled to fall on the date of the new moon, January 30.

In the meantime, Queen Elizabeth bade farewell to her maid of honor in a soiree at Greenwich Palace on Sunday night. According to a letter posted to Robert Cecil as the plans were being laid for the party, at least one play had been prepared to entertain the many gentlefolk who would attend. A dance also closed out the night, with the queen entertaining an exiled Spaniard with her merry footwork.

A Midsummer Night's Dream was probably the play performed in the Great Chamber of Greenwich Palace on the evening of the twenty-sixth. Although the *Dream* had been used once before to celebrate another Cecil family wedding, events peculiar to William Stanley and Elizabeth de Vere's marriage get prominent mention in this play too. *A Midsummer Night's Dream* begins with the observation that "four happy days bring in another moon," while the play ends with a dance and a cast of faeries being sent off to bless "each several chamber... through this palace."

A Midsummer Night's Dream retells the story, in satirical form, of de Vere's obsession with one of his daughter's potential bridegrooms, while she remained fixated upon the man she would ultimately marry. The central love triangle of Elizabeth Vere and the earls of Southampton and Derby translate respectively into the trio of mixed-up lovers Hermia, Demetrius, and Lysander. Hermia's doting father, Egeus (de Vere), is embarrassingly enamored of Demetrius

(Southampton), his choice for HERMIA's husband. Meanwhile, HERMIA (Lady Elizabeth) and LYSANDER (Derby) only have eyes for each other. De Vere's self-mocking side comes to light once again in the play's first scene:

DEM. [*Southampton*]:
Relent, sweet HERMIA; and LYSANDER, yield
Thy crazed title to my certain right.
LYS. [*Derby*]:
You have her father's love, DEMETRIUS:
Let me have HERMIA's. Do you marry him.
EGEUS [*de Vere*]:
Scornful LYSANDER! True, he hath my love;
And what is mine my love shall render him;
And she is mine, and all my right of her
I do estate unto DEMETRIUS.
LYS. I am, my lord, as well deriv'd as he,
As well possess'd; my love is more than his;
My fortunes every way as fairly rank'd.

EGEUS's description of his love for DEMETRIUS, in fact, sounds suspiciously like Shake-speare's fond descriptions of the "fair youth" of the *Sonnets*.

Bowing to the laws of romantic comedy, in the end the true lovers are united. LYSANDER marries HERMIA, just as Elizabeth de Vere won her Derby. DEMETRIUS winds up matched with a maiden who's infatuated with him. (Southampton would not be walking down the aisle for a few more years, but would ultimately make a love match.) And EGEUS stages a wedding masque for *A Midsummer Night's Dream*'s lucky couples.

On the actual night of the earl and his new countess of Derby's wedding, another masque was presented–this time by the poet John Davies. Davies's solemn "Masque of the Nine Muses" is nothing like the uproarious send-up of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Think of the *Dream* as a lighthearted entertainment crafted for de Vere's daughter's royal wedding shower. Davies, on the other hand, presented a carefully constructed homage to the newlyweds as seen through the eyes of the nine legendary Muses. History (Clio) honors the bridegroom who has been "raised by the heavens" into his earldom. Tragedy (Melpomene) recites the great military victories won by "Warlike Vere," the bride's father's cousin. Astronomy (Urania) unfolds the heavenly significance of the marriage day. And so on.

The January 30 wedding at Burghley House may have been de Vere's first visit since the completion of Burghley's country seat in 1587. Guests–a courtly who's who that included the queen herself–could relax in the house's drawing rooms and extensive libraries. The master of the household proudly displayed his rare books and maps, his coins and gems, and his marble busts

of all the Caesars in Roman history. The mansion's vast courtyard, gardens, and even sprawling rooftop provided ample grounds for the wandering sort to explore the country seat of an English family unrivaled in their power.

De Vere's later reflection upon his eldest daughter's wedding would appear in *The Tempest*. In tribute to Derby's brother–the lamented Ferdinando, Lord Strange–the earl of Derby character in *The Tempest* is named FERDINAND. Puns on the word *strange* pepper the play's dialogue, while contemporary legends about Derby's extensive travels provide fodder for jokes about FERDINAND. *The Tempest*'s authorial character, PROSPERO, is initially unconvinced of FERDINAND's worthiness for the hand of his daughter, MIRANDA, who must play a waiting game. Ultimately, however, FERDINAND convinces PROSPERO. FERDINAND and MIRANDA wed, and PROSPERO stages a wedding masque for the newlywed couple.

PROSPERO's masque turns the tables on the bride and groom, presenting the story of a maid (Psyche) who must go to extreme lengths to please an exacting mother of the groom (Venus). PROSPERO later admits that he's asked a great deal of his potential son-in-law. But, he adds, the payment for FERDINAND's efforts is "a third of mine own life"–one of the author's three daughters.

PROSPERO If I have too austerely punish'd you
Your compensation makes amends, for I
Have given you here a third of mine own life,
Or that for which I live.... All thy vexations
Were but my trials of thy love, and thou
Hast strangely stood the test.

Between the marriage of his eldest daughter and the midsummer of 1595, Edward de Vere was occupied with two troubles that shaped his final years: his declining financial state and his physical infirmities. Poverty was a condition he'd been raised to believe that only other, less fortunate souls experienced. But now that he had children to provide for, de Vere attempted to repair the fiscal damage wreaked during his reckless youth. The mining and commodities trading of tin would be de Vere's latest last-ditch scheme. De Vere scratched out more than a dozen letters and memoranda in 1595 to petition for a royal patent on the production of tin, and in the next few years he would continue to pursue it.

Tin, the element that, when alloyed with copper, makes bronze, was a precious national resource abundant in the southwestern tip of England, in the counties of Devon and Cornwall. These tin deposits had proved valuable for international trade from the days of the Roman Empire onward. Some scholars have suspected the presence of Cornish tin in the smelting fires of the ancient Greeks and Phoenicians.

By the first half of the sixteenth century, the tin mines were producing nearly two million pounds of metal per year. But in the 1590s, due to economic hard times and poor management, tin production fell by a third. De Vere was one of a handful of Elizabethan courtiers who recognized that Cornish tin could once again become an international commodity.

De Vere's "tin-mining letters" constitute the single most concentrated source of manuscript pages yet collected from his pen. Between March 9, 1585, and March 14, 1586, he wrote fifteen dated tin-mining letters and memoranda; no doubt some of his eight undated tin-mining documents come from this period as well. Taken as a whole, de Vere's careful and meticulous tin-mining letters are also strikingly out of character with his wastrel image. One suspects the influence of Elizabeth Trentham de Vere lurking behind the schedules and figures.

She didn't write the letters, though. Even when idling over the driest of managerial minutiae, de Vere still churned out curious images, phrasings, and metaphors. One characteristic feature of Shake-speare's rhetorical style is the extensive use of a classical figure called *hendiadys*–or, more plainly, the "two-in-one" construction. ("*Slings and arrows* of outrageous fortune"; "full of *sound and fury*"; "*abstract and brief* chronicles of the time"; "*wild and whirling* words") So, amid the tin filings and marginal calculations of de Vere's petitions, one finds the tin petitioner introducing such curious hendiadyses as "she shall never have any *sense or feeling* thereof..."; "under *titles and mean-shows* into the hands of private persons..." and "he should effect his *cross and overthwart* towards me...."

The letters, though dry and legalistic, show a rhetorician's training, a characteristic delight in rare words, and a deft use of metaphors:

> Those matters which I allege and bring forth to be judged by you... be so pondered that reason be not oppressed with a vain confidence in a light person, nor truth smothered up rather by false appearance than assisted by indifferent hearing, nor that Her Majesty's former trusts be now made the very instruments of her infinite loss.

And

> By the breach of this custom, many abuses creep in which are neither profitable to the realm nor to Her Majesty in especial.

And

> I find of [the queen] herself to have oftentimes sundry good motions and dispositions to do me good. Yet for want of such a friend as Your Lordship [Burghley] that may settle her inclination to a full effect, I perceive all my hopes but fucate [*falsified, counterfeit*] and my haps to wither in the herb.

De Vere didn't get the job. The queen instead awarded supervisory roles in the "stannaries" to four other gentlemen of her court, including Sir Walter Raleigh.

De Vere's health was also failing. On March 25, 1595, he wrote to Burghley, apologizing for his inability to keep up with a man thirty years his senior.

> When Your Lordship shall have best time and leisure if I may know it, I will attend Your Lordship as well as a lame man may at your house.

Three days later, he wrote to one of Burghley's servants that he could not visit the old Lord Treasurer because "I am not able nor fit to look into that place, being yet no better recovered." In seven other letters, dating from 1590 to 1602, de Vere complains of ill health, infirmity, or lameness. Shake-speare complains of lameness in Sonnet 37:

> I, made lame by fortune's dearest spite
> ...am not lame, poor, nor despised,
> Whilst that this shadow doth such substance give...

and in Sonnet 89:

> Speak of my lameness, and I straight will halt,
> Against thy reasons, making no defense.

During the summer of 1595, de Vere reported to Burghley that his health continued to be "not so good" and that doctors were bloodletting to fight the maladies that plagued him. Sometime between October 1595 and '96, de Vere visited the western city of Bath. For two millennia the hot mineral springs at Bath had been used as cure-alls for ailing English subjects seeking to balance their uneven body fluids, or humors.

Shake-speare's Sonnets 153 and 154, the last two in the series, recount an Ovidian tale of a healing journey to this same site.

> 153
> [Cupid's] love-kindling fire did quickly steep
> In a cold valley fountain of that ground,
> Which borrowed from this holy fire of love,
> A dateless lively heat still to endure–
> And grew a seething Bath which men yet prove
> Against strange maladies a sovereign cure....

I sick withal the help of Bath desired,
And thither hied, a sad distempered guest. . . .

By the late fall of 1595, rumors had begun circulating that de Vere had succumbed to the maladies that plagued him. Rowland Whyte, agent of Sir Philip Sidney's younger brother Robert, wrote to his boss, "Some say my lord of Oxford is dead."

These were days of strange rumors and chatters. In 1595, the poet George Chapman wrote a proud and critical poem ("A Coronet for His Mistress's Philosophy") that mentioned an unnamed poet-playwright whose "loose feathers beautify" someone else. Because of its extensive allusions to Shakespeare's *Sonnets* and other works, some orthodox scholars have suspected Shake-speare was Chapman's critical target. However, none of them has addressed why Chapman seems to be suggesting–à la *Greene's Groatsworth of Wit*–that the works of Shake-speare involve the use of an "upstart crow" front man. Also during 1595, the poet Thomas Edwardes published his tribute to Shake-speare's *Venus and Adonis* (cited in Chapter 7) and the unnamed nobleman poet who "differs much from men tilting under friaries"–de Vere and his servants who had once fought Sir Thomas Knyvet's servants at the Blackfriars.

Taken as a whole, the above squibs suggest that halfway through the final decade of the sixteenth century, the London gossip mill was ruminating over de Vere, his writings, and the country clown being beautified by the shadowy feathers of his rhyme.

The year 1596 for Edward de Vere was more quiet.

The only record of de Vere's activities, other than a debt to a joiner that he couldn't pay, are two brief letters in September to Robert Cecil, who had recently been promoted to secretary of state. In the first letter, written on September 6, de Vere put in his first sentence what was now in all likelihood first in his life:

> The writing which I have is in the country, for I had such care thereof as I carried it with me in a little desk. Tomorrow or the next day I aim to go thither and so soon as I come home, by the grace of God, I will send it you.

The "writing" in this case was probably a letter or petition: One reader whom de Vere certainly did *not* tap to proofread poems or plays was his former brother-in-law. But if only that "little desk" could have been inventoried for other papers, posterity might have cared more about it.

De Vere was also concerned about his newlywed daughter's lifestyle. The twenty-year-old girl was evidently living wildly and acting in a manner unbecoming to a noblewoman. Eleven days after writing the above letter, de Vere wrote again to Cecil:

> I am most earnest to desire you that you are her [*Elizabeth de Vere's*] uncle and nearest to her next to myself, that you will friendly assist her with your good advice. You know her youth and the place wherein she lives–and how much to both our houses it imports that she carry herself according to her honor. Enemies are apt to make the worst of everything. Flatterers will do evil offices, and true and faithful advice will seem harsh to tender ears.

De Vere entreated Cecil to give his eldest niece a guiding hand. The uneasy father continued:

> But sith my fortune hath set me so far off as I cannot be at hand in this her troublesome occasions, I hope you will do the good office of an uncle. And I commit unto you the authority of a parent in mine absence. Thus confounded with the small understanding of her estate and the care of her well-doing, I leave to trouble you any farther–most earnestly desiring you as you can get leisure to advertise me how her causes stand. . . .

De Vere wrote the first of these two personal appeals from Cannon Row, his son-in-law's house. He was still trying to negotiate a contract that would guarantee his daughter £1,000 per year from her well-to-do husband. De Vere had stayed at Cannon Row in 1595 as well. Indeed, into the late 1590s, the historical record reveals traces of family ties retained between both father and daughter, stepmother and son-in-law.

Derby himself was recognized by contemporaries as an accomplished court poet and playwright. In 1599, a correspondent would note that de Vere's son-in-law "is busied only in penning comedies for the common players." A tantalizing possibility thus opens up. Although the Shake-speare canon speaks in one distinctive voice and concerns itself primarily with de Vere's life and affairs, one topic sorely in need of research is the possibility of de Vere–Derby collaborations on scenes or portions of plays–or perhaps touch-ups of de Vere's work after the author was dead. *The Tempest* or *A Midsummer Night's Dream,* concerning themselves as they do with Derby's marriage, make attractive candidates for attribution studies attempting to detect a trace of Derby's hand.

On April 23, 1597, five new royal knights of the Garter were elected at Windsor Castle, and an installation ceremony was set for the following month. De

Vere had once garnered a majority of votes for membership in the Order of the Garter himself, but by age forty-seven, he must have realized that he would never be appointed. Yet, as a courtier, de Vere was privy to the ceremonies and gossip surrounding the Order. *The Merry Wives of Windsor* recites inside jokes about one of the newly elected knights Garter in 1597, the German count Frederick of Mompelgard, duke of Würtemberg.

Mompelgard had made a nuisance of himself since his visit to England in 1592, pestering Elizabeth incessantly that he should be promoted to a Garter knighthood. De Vere had probably met the cloying German peer at Windsor Castle during that visit. In 1597, Elizabeth finally gave in. But she took advantage of a rule introduced during her father's reign that she didn't technically have to notify a Garter inductee that he was going to be inducted. So on April 23, St. George's Day, Elizabeth and her court hosted a feast and revels for the new knights of the Garter. All the inductees were there, except one. Somehow, through some oversight, Mompelgard had never received an invitation.

In *The Merry Wives of Windsor,* the HOST OF THE GARTER INN exchanges an otherwise throwaway line with BARDOLPH about a certain unnamed German duke:

> BARDOLPH Sir, the German desires to have three of your horses. The duke himself will be tomorrow at court, and they are going to meet him.
>
> HOST What duke should that be comes so secretly? I hear not of him in the court.

Even in the late 1590s, de Vere was still adding offhand topical references to plays that he'd probably begun writing twenty years or more before.

In the same year, 1597, when the Lord Chamberlain's Men were casting about for a new theater to call home, Shakspere's troupe staged *The Merchant of Venice.* Taking its plotline from a fourteenth-century Italian book of short stories (unavailable in English), early drafts of *The Merchant of Venice* may have graced English stages as early as 1578. But, as with *Merry Wives,* de Vere also added an underplot relevant to current events in 1597. It was a specialized message for a crowd of specialists: lawyers and law students.

According to Elizabethan legal practice, if two parties were embroiled in a contract dispute, they could try it in the common law courts. The loser at common law could then take his claim to a separate legal system called the chancery (equity) courts. Both common law and chancery had jurisdiction over the case, and both could rule independently of each other. This naturally led to innumerable collisions and traumas, wherein each disputant held opposing legal judgments or decrees. The common law courts, firmly bound to centuries of precedent, were more strict and tended to render "letter-of-the-law" judgments; whereas equity courts, given more free reign

by the crown, could answer appeals to higher principles like mercy and justice.

In January of 1597, de Vere's wife, Elizabeth, was served with a "supplication" for enforcing an outstanding bond. The bond concerned back wages de Vere had paid out to some gunners during the brief period when he was stationed in the Lowlands in 1585. The plaintiff in the lawsuit, named Thomas Gurlyn, in 1585 had promised to loan de Vere the money needed to pay out the gunners' salaries–stipulating that Gurlyn would then receive the government's reimbursement for the payroll. But neither the reimbursement nor Gurlyn's pledged loan had ever been paid, at least not in any form useful to de Vere. Gurlyn's 1597 case is a miasma of twelve years of payments promised and payments dodged. (Gurlyn originally promised de Vere £300; an undertreasurer named Sir Thomas Sherley owed Gurlyn £300; at de Vere's behest, Sherley didn't pay Gurlyn; Gurlyn then twice paid de Vere £200 . . . out of de Vere's own accounts; Sherley finally paid Gurlyn £300; Gurlyn thereafter claimed de Vere owed *him* £100.) It was all a big mess, and Gurlyn had presented a petition to de Vere's wife–who had nothing to do with the dispute, but controlled the household's purse strings now.

Exasperated, on January 11 de Vere wrote to his former brother-in-law appealing for justice.

> Good Sir Robert Cecil, whereas my wife hath showed me a supplication exhibited to the lords of the [Privy] Council against her, I have longed both to yield thanks to you for your courtesy to her and myself in making her acquainted therewith–and also to advertise you how lewdly therein he [Gurlyn] behaves himself. . . . [C]onsider the date of his supplication, which signifieth five years ago, at what time I think she never knew the man.

De Vere was embarrassed by the legal quagmire his wife had been dragged into because of him. The letter continues:

> I do not doubt therefore but . . . you will let him [Gurlyn] have his deserts according to his presumption. . . .
>
> [I]f he hath had any cause to have complained, it should then have been against myself, as the same will complain. But his shifts and knaveries are so gross and palpable, that doubting to bring his parties and jugglings to light, he doth address his petition against her that is utterly ignorant of the cause.
>
> Thus desiring you to conceive how thankfully I take this honorable dealing with my wife and friendly care to me, I will the less set forth in words what I the more desire in deeds to show, if I were so happy as to find opportunity.

De Vere and his wife wanted the chance to present their case. If the venue was going to be a common law court, however, Gurlyn stood a fighting chance: If one wanted to split judicial hairs, Gurlyn did have a marginally feasible argument.

De Vere and his countess did ultimately prevail over Gurlyn. As Elizabeth Trentham de Vere reflected years later, after the death of her husband, "Thomas Gurlyn . . . [sued] for a debt pretended to be due unto him from the said late earl [and] was at the trial thereof overthrown upon manifest proof made of the satisfaction of that debt." But the idea of conflicting possible verdicts in common law and equity courts provided the inspiration to update an old Venetian chestnut.

The Merchant of Venice stages the core problems behind Gurlyn's frivolous "supplication." ANTONIO has taken out a loan from SHYLOCK in anticipation of money from overseas. When the money fails to come through, ANTONIO must default on his debt. ANTONIO and SHYLOCK square off in a Venetian court of law. Their trial scene is rich in legal terminology.

The case of *SHYLOCK v. ANTONIO* loosely parallels Gurlyn's 1597 case; it also debates the larger questions the Gurlyn case raises over Justice versus Mercy and common law verdicts versus chancery edicts. Abstruse as the issue sounds today, law versus equity was perhaps the leading judicial question of the age. As de Vere saw firsthand in 1597, the unsettled dispute between these conflicting modes of justice upset many lives and unjustly harassed many innocent people.

The verdict in the Gurlyn case, de Vere's pleading letter to Robert Cecil, and the story of *The Merchant of Venice* all deliver the same judgment: Letter-of-the-law verdicts corrupt justice; equity must carry the day. The Shake-speare canon's greatest legal mind, PORTIA, weaves arguments from both common law and chancery courts, arguing that strict and myopic reading of the law must yield to that quality that is "mightiest in the mightiest." PORTIA's immortal speech is, in part, a prayer for the relief of unjustly persecuted subjects at the hands of literalist and strict-constructionalist common law:

> PORTIA The quality of mercy is not strained;
> It droppeth as the gentle rain from heaven
> Upon the place beneath. It is twice blest;
> It blesseth him that gives and him that takes.
> 'Tis mightiest in the mightiest; it becomes
> The thronèd monarch better than his crown.

PORTIA is de Vere's most touching tribute to his adroit and talented wife. She had been dragged in as a third party to the Gurlyn dispute and ultimately had carried the day.

Around this time, rumors had begun to spread that Elizabeth de Vere Stanley, countess of Derby, was having a love affair with the earl of Essex.

If the rumors were true, her infidelity would have been concern enough for her father; but her choice of bedmates would have been a slap in the face. De Vere harbored a grudge against Essex. In 1595, de Vere had written to Robert Cecil about a long-standing legal case before Lord Burghley concerning the possible inheritance of the forest of Waltham. Burghley had referred de Vere to the earl of Essex on the matter, but de Vere had flat out refused to deal with Essex. De Vere wrote to his brother-in-law:

> [Burghley] wisheth me to make means to the earl of Essex–that he would forbear to deal with it. [That is] a thing I cannot do in honor, since I have already received diverse injuries and wrongs from him [*Essex*]–which bar me from all such base courses.

At the time, though, Essex was on the rise. In the summer of 1596, Essex had launched a successful naval strike against the garrison at Cádiz, Spain's primary Atlantic port. Countess Elizabeth may not have been attracted to Southampton, but she took a fancy to his comrade-in-arms.

Before Essex and Southampton embarked on a raid of the Spanish fleet in the Azores in July of 1597, one rumor monger reported that Essex "laye with my lady of Darbe before he went." In the same month, Derby moved himself and his countess far away from the temptations of the court to the Stanley family's ancestral estate in Lancashire. Robert Cecil employed at least one agent working in Derby's household, keeping him informed of the latest bruit about the young couple. On August 9, one of Cecil's agents reported that Derby "is in such a jealous frame as we have had such a storm as is wonderful [*wondrous*]."

Cecil's niece would be protected. De Vere's daughter had, the agent noted, "by courtesy and virtue got the love of all here." So when Derby threw a tantrum over his wife's alleged infidelities, the household's servants stood on the bride's side. Cecil's agent wrote his master that

> They [Derby's servants] all went to my lord . . . and told him that as they had served him and his father and been the same by them . . . if he would hate her and [not] desist from this jealousy and bitterness to Her Ladyship and not dishonor himself, or else [*then*] they would hate him and bring her to my lord [Burghley] and you [Cecil]. . . . My lady wanteth not friends, friends firm to our purposes, wise and experienced in this humorous house.

Two days later the earl of Cumberland, Derby's uncle, arrived on the scene and backed the countess as well. All in all, it was a successful show of Cecil's political muscle.

Within a week, Derby had his opportunity to save face. On August 20, Derby issued the following public statement:

> If anyone can say that I know my wife to be dishonest of her body or that I can justly prove it by myself or anyone else, I challenge him the combat of life. If anyone suppose any speeches of mine to have proceeded out of that doubt, he doth me wrong.

Burghley, Robert Cecil, and the Lord Admiral Charles Howard countersigned this challenge. De Vere did not. Two days later, Derby and his countess wrote to Cecil to express their newfound appreciation for each other. They signed the letter, "Your loving niece and nephew."

Even as the younger Cecil was taking over his father's political power, Southampton was moving farther away from the house in which he'd grown up. Southampton had lately been courting Mistress Elizabeth Vernon. Vernon was one of the queen's maids of honor–a vestal virgin so far as Her Majesty was concerned. Vernon was also Essex's cousin. The court observer Rowland Whyte had noted in 1595 that Southampton had "with too much familiarity" been pursuing Vernon. The clandestine courtship carried on into 1596 and '97.

In *A Midsummer Night's Dream,* Southampton's character (DEMETRIUS) ends the play paired with the infatuated young maid HELENA–after he escapes the externally enforced match with the daughter (HERMIA) of de Vere's self-mocking self-portrait (EGEUS). However, so far as the Cecil–Essex power game was concerned, *Midsummer Night's Dream* hedges its bets: DEMETRIUS ends up marrying HELENA (Vernon), but DEMETRIUS is also the only character in the play who's still under the influence of the love potion as the final curtain rings down. *A Midsummer Night's Dream* conceals the secret hope that the play's one remaining spell would be broken–and DEMETRIUS would break off his dangerous courtship with HELENA and offend the powerful Cecils no more.

In October 1597, Southampton and his commander, the earl of Essex, had returned from their mission to the Azores. The expedition's intent was both to weaken Spanish naval forces and to plunder the *flota,* the Spanish treasure fleet that carried its New World riches from Havana to Spain every year. Essex's Azores mission did neither. It did little more than squander a lot of money and time and further anger the Spanish. Essex, naturally, tried to cast his failure in a positive light. Rowland Whyte reported the first news from Essex's newly returned fleet after they'd made landfall during the last week of October:

> [Essex's fleet] had unfortunately missed the [Spanish] king's own ships with the Indian [*New World*] treasure and fell upon the merchant's fleet [instead]. Four of them he hath taken and brought home safe and sunk many more. My lord of Southampton fought with one of the king's great men of war and sunk her.

In a bid to distract from his own disaster, Essex played up Southampton's minor achievement. Essex had also knighted Southampton during the voyage.

Elizabeth was now furious at her naval commander, so Essex sequestered himself in his house and claimed to be sick. Essex's sometime secretary Sir Henry Wotton later recalled that in times of trouble Essex was known to "evaporate his thoughts in a sonnet (being his common way)."

Essex was hardly a poet for the ages. What little verse of his that survives reveals Essex to be technically proficient and clearly learned–but incapable of and probably uninterested in divining such apolitical matters as the nature of truth, beauty, or the depths of the soul. Essex wrote sonnets for political reasons–to impress his queen and courtly colleagues and to advance his own causes. Upon returning from the Azores, Essex had, it appears, begun to write sonnets in praise of the mission's single success story: the earl of Southampton.

This conclusion emerges from Shake-speare's Sonnets 78–86, sometimes called the "Rival Poet series." Essex fits Shake-speare's description of the mysterious adversarial poet vying for the immortal beloved's attentions.

79

Whilst I alone did call upon thy aid
My verse alone had all thy gentle grace.
But now my gracious numbers [*sonnets*] are decayed,
And my sick Muse doth give another place.
I grant, sweet love, thy lovely argument
Deserves the travail of a worthier pen,
Yet what of thee thy poet doth invent
He robs thee of and pays it thee again.
He lends thee virtue, and he stole that word
From thy behavior; beauty doth he give
And found it in thy cheek; he can afford
No praise to thee but what in thee doth live.
Then thank him not for that which he doth say,
Since what he owes thee thou thyself dost pay.

80

O how I faint when I of you do write,
Knowing a better spirit doth use your name,
And in the praise thereof spends all his might,
To make me tongue tied speaking of your fame.
But, since your worth, wide as the ocean is,

The humble as the proudest sail doth bear,
My saucy bark, inferior far to his,
On your broad main doth willfully appear.
Your shallowest help will hold me up afloat,
Whilst he upon your soundless deep doth ride;
Or, being wracked, I am a worthless boat,
He of tall building and goodly pride.
Then, if he thrive and I be cast away,
The worst was this: My love was my decay.

De Vere, fed up with a tempter who had already enticed his daughter away from his son-in-law's marriage bed, was not going to stand by as Essex pulled Southampton ever farther away. De Vere acknowledges Essex's prowess as a naval commander (his is "the proudest sail") and Essex's "tall building [*stature*] and goodly pride." Like the ailing de Vere, the newly returned Essex draws his inspiration from a "sick Muse." De Vere puns on Essex's family mottoes ("Virtue With Envy" and "Loyalty the Basis of Virtue") by noting that the Rival Poet "stole that word [*virtue*]/From thy behavior." De Vere also plays upon Essex's recently granted monopoly on cochineal, a red dye used in cosmetics. Portraits of Essex from this period show the sitter unabashed in his use of makeup on the face and lips. Sonnet 83 begins, "I never saw that you [*Southampton*] did painting need."

The concluding couplet to Sonnet 79 states de Vere's argument against Essex: You don't owe Essex any thanks or attention because of his praise of you; your plunder of the Spanish man-of-war was practically the only saving grace of the entire Azores mission.

Yet no mere words from de Vere's pen could convince Southampton to stay his outbound course. De Vere continues to chronicle Southampton's slippage into the Essex camp, a camp that was growing ever more paranoid. Essex's chief intelligence officer at the time was a scholar named Anthony Bacon, brother of the famous philosopher Francis. Sonnet 86 observes how the Rival Poet had lately been "gulled" with nightly intelligence briefings–a Latin pun on the name Bacon. (The gull family is called *laridae;* the Latin for *bacon* is *larida.*)

86

Was it the proud full sail of his great verse,
Bound for the prize of all too precious you,
That did my ripe thoughts in my brain inhearse,
Making their tomb the womb wherein they grew?
Was it his spirit, by spirits taught to write
Above a mortal pitch, that struck me dead?
No, neither he, nor his compeers by night

Giving him aid, my verse astonishèd.
He, nor that affable familiar ghost,
Which nightly gulls him with intelligence,
As victors, of my silence cannot boast;
I was not sick of any fear from thence.
But when your countenance filled up his line,
Then lacked I matter, that enfeebled mine.

As the Christmas season of 1597 approached, the opposition between the Cecil and Essex factions grew deeper and the outlines starker. No doubt hoping to escape the intensifying courtly infighting, Southampton prepared to take flight, securing a two-year license from the queen for foreign travel. The next sonnet after the Rival Poet series, Sonnet 87, begins, "Farewell, thou art too dear for my possessing."

At this time, de Vere himself was also withdrawing even further from court life. The queen had summoned Parliament in October 1597, but de Vere assumed his place in the House of Lords only once during the entire four-month session, on December 14, 1597. It would be his last day ever as an MP.

Sometime in 1597, de Vere, his wife, and their four-year-old son packed their trunks and horse carts and moved to the suburban village of Hackney. Their new £3,300 home, King's Place (later Brooke House), would be held in a joint trust that included the countess, her brother Francis, and her cousin Ralph Snead. De Vere was kept out of the ownership circle, no doubt to insulate the family domicile from any more unexpected lawsuits or carping creditors.

King's Place, while spacious, was no Fisher's Folly or Castle Hedingham. The structure sat on a quarter-acre-sized footprint and was originally constructed for William Worsley, a fifteenth-century curate of St. Paul's Chapel. Worsley had adorned his residence with a holy painting of himself kneeling before St. Peter; he also decorated a nearby wall jamb with emblems of the Tudor Rose. Henry VIII's principal minister, Thomas Cromwell, had later occupied King's Place, as did the former Lord Chamberlain Henry Carey, Lord Hunsdon.

Lord Hunsdon had engraved his family arms and emblems on the ceiling of a long second-floor gallery that overlooked King's Place's courtyard on one side and the backyard gardens and lawn on the other. Ironically, in one of the rooms where de Vere would have prepared and revised plays to be handed off to the Lord Chamberlain's Men, the Lord Chamberlain's menagerie of heraldic horses, bulls, swans, and stags looked down from their overhead perches. Unable to afford his own rich engravings of boars, stars, and other earl of Oxford emblems, de Vere nevertheless left his own mark on the gallery space, temporary though it was. An early seventeenth-century inventory of

King's Place reveals that the great parlor was adorned with a blue-and-yellow military banner (a "hanging of blewe and yellow seigne"). Oxford blue and Reading tawny (yellow) were the heraldic colors of the house of de Vere.

In King's Place's "little parlor"–probably de Vere's private study–one noteworthy item caught the eye of the man conducting the house's inventory: "A story of the rich man and death." (The word *story* here refers to a now-antiquated definition, meaning a painting or sculpture that depicts a narrative or historical scene.) The independent American scholar Gerit Quealy has recently discovered an inventory at the National Portrait Gallery in London for a painting that is probably the "story" in question. The 51.5-by-50.5-cm panel presents a pictorial allegory of

> a rich young nobleman and old man holding a skull and prayer book facing each other across a table containing a rhyming morality verse, surmounted by a winged figure of Father Time flanked by four more tablets, containing further admonitory verses, a skull on the floor before them....
>
> It has been suggested that the figure of the young nobleman... bears a good resemblance to the [Wellbeck] portrait of Edward de Vere, 17th Earl of Oxford, dated 1575 in the National Portrait Gallery, London.

It's appropriate that the rooms at King's Place that posterity knows most about are the quiet rooms–the places of study, contemplation, and writing. King's Place was no "Silexedra" for its guest list. Afternoons would have been much quieter than the tavernlike atmosphere that had prevailed at the Folly. De Vere could no longer afford his extravagant 1580s lifestyle, but he was also no longer a man fleeing an unhappy marriage, and his deteriorating health would probably have made him a tankard-of-ale-with-supper sort of man. The roistering was only going on in his imagination.

By the time of the King's Place move, de Vere's former secretaries and close literary associates John Lyly and Thomas Nashe had plenty of troubles of their own to worry about. In 1597 Nashe was practically in exile. Never known for his propriety, Nashe and the rapscallion poet-playwright Ben Jonson had, in 1597, collaborated on a satire, *The Isle of Dogs*, so politically explosive that it shut the theaters down. *The Isle of Dogs*, "a lewd plaie... contanynge very seditious and sclanderous [*sic*] matter," remains one of the great unknowns in the history of the Elizabethan theater. It was never printed, nor has it been preserved in any manuscript yet discovered. For his offense, Jonson was thrown in jail. Nashe fled to Great Yarmouth in Norfolkshire.

Lyly spent practically the entire 1590s applying for and never receiving the mastership of the revels. Lyly had married, had a son, and was living to the northwest of the London city wall, near Aldersgate. He disappears

have been quietly continuing to serve in his secretarial post for his longtime employer–or not.

The same ambiguity plagues the late 1590s activities of de Vere's other longtime secretary, Anthony Munday. Munday, aged thirty-seven in 1597, remained on friendly terms with de Vere, although whether their relationship was simply collegial or more formal remains uncertain. What is known but hard to explain without de Vere is the fact that Munday published two English translations under the pseudonym "Lazarus Piot" in 1595 and '96. (In the biblical parable of Lazarus and the rich man, Lazarus is lame and sickly; *piot* is northland slang for "saucy chatterbox.") One of the two "Lazarus" publications represented part of Munday's ongoing project to Anglicize the continental Primaleon and Palmerin series of chivalric romances–a primary source for *The Tempest*. The other "Lazarus" translation, published in English in 1596, was Alexandre Sylvain's rhetorical guidebook *The Orator*. Sylvain's *Orator* recalls, among other tales, the legend of a Jew who insists upon a pound of flesh as his form of payment from a Christian debtor; another of Sylvain's tales concerns a ravished maid who demands first that her rapist be made her husband and then that he be sentenced to death–the same punishment advocated by the DUKE in *Measure for Measure*. The complete works of "Lazarus Piot," two books that inspired at least three Shake-speare plays, may still have come from Munday's pen. But as with the Euphues series, de Vere would have been the motivating force. Or perhaps "Piot" represents the combined efforts of a secretary and the man who had once employed him.

De Vere's only known secretary during his later years was the philosopher Nicholas Hill. Hill was ridiculed around London as the leading advocate of Democritus's atomic philosophy. The scientist and skeptic was just the sort of maverick thinker–like Nashe or the Paracelsian physician John Baker–whom de Vere indulged. *Romeo and Juliet* and *As You Like It* both toy with Hill's "atomies" as nature's unit of irreducible smallness, while PORTIA fuses Hill's atomism with a meditation on the immortality of the human soul:

> PORTIA There's not the smallest orb which thou behold'st
> But in his motion like an angel sings,
> Still quiring to the young-eyed cherubins;
> Such harmony is in immortal souls.
> But whilst this muddy vesture of decay
> Doth grossly close it in, we cannot hear it.

Rude reminders of mortality were no mere poetic conceit at the time of de Vere's move to King's Place. "I have not an able body," he wrote in a letter to Robert Cecil in September 1593. De Vere must have known that he and his

Yet, the grim reaper was preparing to harvest another crop much sooner. In the summer of 1598, Lord Burghley, age seventy-seven and suffering from painful attacks of the gout, took to his bed to ease his way into death. During the spring and early summer, Burghley had been negotiating for peace with Spain in the Lowlands, a position that the earl of Essex would hear nothing of. In one of his final acts on the Privy Council, Burghley had taken in his arthritic hand a Psalter and held up Psalm 55:23 to Essex: "The bloody and deceitful men shall not live out half their days." The queen, who had never known a time on the throne without her "Sir Spirit," came to Burghley's bedside and fed him with her own hand.

Burghley's climb to political dominance and steady accumulation of influence, titles, lands, and offices had been stunning in its magnitude. From the time of Henry VIII, William Cecil had advanced through a half century in government to become the preeminent nonroyal political power of his day. Life as Burghley's ward and son-in-law may have been a macabre game of duck and dodge. But practically all that de Vere now had, he owed to that fading nova of omnipotence. The very world the lame and despised de Vere now inhabited was in no small part Burghley's bequest. Burghley's private library, one of the greatest in Elizabethan England, had provided inspiration for the works of Shake-speare, and the tutors Burghley had hired for de Vere had shaped his thought and character.

The meddlesome Lord Burghley may be most notoriously commemorated in Shake-speare as POLONIUS, but let it not be said that de Vere could only speak ill of his guardian and father-in-law. *The Tempest*'s ailing sorcerer, PROSPERO–representing de Vere in his final days–has nothing but generous words for the play's kindly and doddering court counselor GONZALO. And PROSPERO remembers GONZALO for the most important gift anyone ever gave him–the written word.

> PROSPERO A noble Neapolitan, GONZALO,
> Out of his charity . . . did give us–with
> Rich garments, linens, stuffs, and necessaries
> Which since have steaded much–so of his gentleness,
> Knowing I lov'd my books, he furnish'd me
> From mine own library with volumes that
> I prize above my dukedom.

On August 4, the great Lord Treasurer breathed his last. "Serve God by serving of the queen; for all other service is indeed bondage to the devil," he implored his son Robert in his final handwritten letter. The queen had never been so bereaved. For months, she could not even hear the name of her faithful Sir Spirit without bursting into sobs.

The recent widower Robert Cecil had lost the closest confidant he would ever have. A profound religious faith had always anchored Burghley's moral beliefs. But the thirty-five-year-old Sir Robert had no such ethical bedrock on which to build his world. Religion was, like everything else in Robert Cecil's life, about power.

Lord Burghley's passing would effectively remove his son Robert's muzzle. Payback time was nigh.

In 1597, the play *Richard III* had first appeared in print. The analogy between Shake-speare's humpbacked usurper and the power-hungry Robert Cecil was hardly obscure and not hard to apprehend. Common libelers, for instance, were fond of comparisons between Cecil and Richard III. ("Richard [III] or Robin [Cecil], which was the worse?/ A crook't back great in state is England's curse," etc.) And although *Richard III* appears to have been printed without the author's permission, its appearance in London bookstalls could not have been more poorly timed for de Vere.

A tantalizing cover page for a circa-1597 manuscript of *Richard III*–and a number of other controversial works–has survived the centuries and now sits in the archives of Alnwick Castle in Northumberland. The manuscripts for which this page serves as the cover have all, however, been lost or destroyed. The one-page document is a list of seditious or surreptitiously obtained texts: *Richard III, Richard II* (treasonously depicting the deposition of a sitting monarch), Nashe and Jonson's *Isle of Dogs*, and the libelous *Leicester's Commonwealth*.

On this single surviving sheet, a scrivener, whose handwriting has never been identified, scratched out two words that would henceforth be seared into the flesh of every mature play from de Vere's pen. There on a single page, scattered amid sundry sentence fragments, quotes, and titles, are written the words "Willi . . . Sh . . . Sh . . . Shak . . . will Shak . . . Shakespe . . . Shakspeare . . . Shakespeare . . . william . . . william Shakespeare . . . William Shakespeare."

"Thence comes it," in the words of Sonnet 111, "that my name receives a brand." Robert Cecil's ex-brother-in-law, who had so tormented Cecil's sister, who had so skewered Cecil's father onstage, who had so debased the court with his lewd and scandalous plays, would finally be getting his just deserts. Will Shakspere, now devoting more time in the country to his newly purchased Stratford-upon-Avon mansion New Place, was about to become more famous than he could have imagined.

Lacking the approval of the state censors at the Stationer's Company, sometime in 1598 Cuthbert Burby–publisher of one of the "Lazarus Piot" books–presented posterity with the first dramatic publication under the Shakespeare byline. It was titled *A Pleasant Conceited Comedy Called Love's Labor's Lost . . . Newly corrected and augmented by W. Shakespere* [sic]. "Shakespeare" was no longer another short-lived pseudonym like "Pasquill Caviliero" or "Lazarus Piot." "Shakespeare" was now a poet *and* playwright.

In the fall of the same year, Burby published another book crucial to the genesis of Shake-speare. This one was approved by the state censors. The rector Francis Meres's *Palladis Tamia . . . : A Treasury of Divine, Moral, and Philosophical Similes and Sentences, Generally Useful* (1598) served as something of a *Farmer's Almanac* for the educated and well-to-do Londoner.

One chapter of *Palladis Tamia* gathers an assortment of sixteenth-century English literary criticism, drawing heavily from the anonymous 1589 book *The Art of English Poesie*–the one that praised de Vere's skills as a comic playwright and secret court poet. Meres makes slavish analogies between the ancients and the latter-day English writers. For instance:

> As the Greek tongue is made famous and eloquent by Homer, Hesiod, Euripides, Aeschylus, Sophocles, Pindarus, Phocylides, and Aristophanes and the Latin tongue by Virgil, Ovid, Horace . . . [*etc.*], so the English tongue is mightily enriched and gorgeously invested in rare ornaments and resplendent habiliments by Sir Philip Sidney, [Edmund] Spenser, [Samuel] Daniel, [Michael] Drayton, [W.] Warner, Shakespeare, [Christopher] Marlowe, and [George] Chapman.

In the words of Don Cameron Allen, the editor of the modern edition of Meres's treatise, *Palladis Tamia*'s chapter on poetry is "pseudoerudition and bluff." Meres's compilation would never merit consideration today were it not for one additional fact: *Palladis Tamia* is the first book of literary criticism that mentioned Shake-speare as a dramatist.

> As the soul of Euphorbus was thought to live in Pythagoras, so the sweet witty soul of Ovid lives in mellifluous and honey-tongued Shakespeare: Witness his *Venus and Adonis,* his *Lucrece,* his sugared sonnets among his private friends, &c.
>
> As Plautus and Seneca are accounted the best for comedy and tragedy among the Latins, so Shakespeare among the English is the most excellent in both kinds for the stage: Witness for comedy *Gentlemen of Verona, Errors, Love's Labor's Lost, Love's Labor's Won, Midsummer Night's Dream, Merchant of Venice.* For tragedy: *Richard the 2, Richard the 3, Henry the 4, King John, Titus Andronicus, Romeo and Juliet.*

This list of eleven Shake-speare plays plus the mysterious *"Love's Labor's Won,"* like the "upstart crow" passage in *Greene's Groatsworth of Wit,* is in practically every Shake-speare textbook ever written.

Orthodox scholars treat the above passage as if it were a comprehensive listing of the entirety of the Shake-speare canon in 1598–as if plays that Meres did not mention must ipso facto have been written sometime after Meres's book was published.

Yet by 1598, the poet Michael Drayton had written at least nine works; Meres neglects to mention four of them. More generally, Meres was hardly in a position to make original observations about any author. Meres's treatise on poetry was only one small part of a seven-hundred-page book. As Meres's modern editor has demonstrated, Meres's classical quotes came from a quotation dictionary; his information about classical and neoclassical authors came from a schoolboy's textbook; practically every statement Meres made about an English author came from another critic; and Meres doesn't seem to have minded that inevitable clashes of opinion and fact arose from his multiple and conflicting sources.

One of Meres's lists proclaims "Edward, earle of Oxford" as first for comedy–just as he was cited in *The Arte of English Poesie*–while farther down "Shakespeare" is mentioned as another fine comic playwright. Thus it is often said that Meres disproves that de Vere could have been Shake-speare–because Meres implies that Shake-speare and de Vere were two different people.

Yet, even setting aside Meres's questionable authority, mistaking a pseudonym or literary alter ego for a distinct author is not an uncommon error in the history of literary criticism and accolades. Late nineteenth-century editors of *Who's Who,* for instance, wrote separate biographical entries for the authors William Sharp and Fiona Macleod, although they were the same person. The names Joseph Shearing, Marjorie Bowen, George R. Preedy, John Winch, and Robert Payne were all pseudonyms for Margaret Vere Campbell Long, and each of Campbell Long's bylines occasioned its own separate entry in publishers' lists or *Who's Who.* When Stephen King published his novel *Thinner* under the pseudonym Richard Bachman in 1984, one reviewer praised the work as "what Stephen King would write if Stephen King could write." In 1953, screenwriter Ian McLellan Hunter won the Academy Award for Best Story for the movie *Roman Holiday;* but McLellan Hunter was just a front man for the blacklisted screenwriter Dalton Trumbo.

In perhaps the most extreme example of confused literary identities in Western history, the Portuguese poet Fernando Pessoa (1888–1935) wrote under as many as seventy-five different pseudonyms in his lifetime. Some of his alter egos were literary critics who lambasted the work of some of his other alter egos. Pessoa had great, puckish fun with his sheaf of alternative identities–creating biographies for each. Pessoa's master poet "Alberto Caeiro" was born in Lisbon in 1889 and "committed suicide" in 1915. "Caeiro"'s disciple "Ricardo Reis" was two years older than "Caeiro," while "Caeiro"'s other disciple "Alvaro de Campos" was three years younger. These two critics often vehemently disagreed on the proper interpretation of the works of their late lamented master. "Reis" eventually gave up on literature, became a physician, and moved to Brazil.

In a series of books published in 1597 and '98, two scolding Elizabethan satirists named Joseph Hall and John Marston blasted a scurrilous poet whom they dubbed "Labeo." The problem with criticizing Labeo, Hall said, was that Labeo laughed at his detractors from behind a protective screen.

> Labeo is whip't, and laughs me in the face.
> Why?...
> Who list complain of wronged faith or fame
> When he may shift it to another's name?

Marston gives the reader a clue to Labeo's identity. Labeo, Marston notes, once wrote that "his love was stone: Obdurate, flinty, so relentless none." This is a quote from line 199 of *Venus and Adonis*. ("Art thou obdurate, flinty, hard as steel?")

"Labeo" is Shake-speare.

But if de Vere was laughing at anybody's attempts to criticize and unmask him, the mirth was just clown's-mirth, fool's-mirth. The *Sonnets*, the closest there is to Shake-speare's private diaries, reveal the complexity of the author's relationship to "Will." "Will" had taken over from Edward. "Will" was no longer de Vere's to control. "Will," a thing of his own creation, had taken over the very creatures of his brain. But mixed with the outrage and horror was some degree of fascination. De Vere had always been in love with the brink, the uncontrollable, the extreme. Now, one last time, it had found him.

De Vere probably wrote the following two salacious sonnets to the queen, sardonically cursing his fate as a politically compromised author, whose courtly exposés could only be published under the disguise of a common "Will":

135

Who ever hath her wish, thou hast thy *Will*,
And *Will* to boot, and *Will* in overplus;
More than enough am I that vex thee still,
To thy sweet will making addition thus.
Wilt thou, whose will is large and spacious,
Not once vouchsafe to hide my will in thine?
Shall will in others seem right gracious
And in my will no fair acceptance shine?
The sea, all water, yet receives rain still,
And in abundance addeth to his store;
So thou being rich in *Will* add to thy *Will*
One more will of ruin to make thy large *Will* more.
Let no unkind, no fair beseechers kill;
Think all but one, and me in that one *Will*.

136

If thy soul check thee that I come so near
Swear to thy blind soul that I was thy *Will*,
And will thy soul knows is admitted there;
Thus far for love, my love-suit sweet fulfill.
Will will fulfill the treasure of thy love,
Ay, fill it full with wills–and my will one.
In things of great receipt with ease we prove
Among a number one is reckoned none.
Then in the number let me pass untold,
Though in thy store's account I must one be.
For nothing hold me, so it please thee hold
That nothing me, a something sweet to thee.
Make but my name thy love, and love that still
And then thou lov'st me, for my name is *Will*.

[*Emphases in original*]

CHAPTER 11

BURIED BE

[1598–1604]

THAT LOVELY BOY WHOM DE VERE HAD DOTED OVER–AND EVEN, AS suggested previously, forgiven for an affair with his wife–had been in Paris since February 1598. Southampton's mistress, Essex's cousin Elizabeth Vernon, had become visibly pregnant by the late summer. Southampton, enjoying a lusty bachelor's French vacation at the time, sneaked back into England in August (the same month Lord Burghley died) long enough to marry Vernon. Then Southampton returned to his wanton life in Paris. Sir Robert Cecil sent Southampton a letter on September 3, noting that the queen had learned about Southampton's clandestine marriage and demanded that he return to England immediately. Southampton, with heavy gambling debts in Paris, postponed his return.

The *Sonnets* chronicle de Vere's reaction to this sex scandal involving his beloved youth. "Thou didst forsake me for some fault," Sonnet 89 laments. Sonnet 92 taunts, "But do thy worst to steal thyself away"–dating, one suspects, to Southampton's brief return to England in August for a sub rosa marriage followed by a hasty departure. Sonnet 95 notes the "beauty of thy budding name"–a reference to Southampton's budding wife. The shameful Parisian escapades lamented in Sonnets 87–96 are then followed by Southampton's return to England and swift imprisonment on or around November 11, as described in Sonnet 97

97

How like a winter hath my absence been
From thee, the pleasure of the fleeting year!
What freezings have I felt, what dark days seen!
What old December's bareness everywhere!

And yet this time removed was summer's time,
The teeming autumn big with rich increase,
Bearing the wanton burthen of the prime,
Like widowed wombs after their lords' decease.
Yet this abundant issue seemed to me
But hope of orphans, and unfathered fruit;
For summer and his pleasures wait on thee,
And thou away, the very birds are mute;
Or if they sing, 'tis with so dull a cheer,
That leaves look pale, dreading the winter's near.

Sonnet 98 notes that Southampton was also absent "when proud-pied April, dressed in all his trim,/ Hath put a spirit of youth in everything." Southampton had indeed been missing from England and from de Vere's life during the spring, summer, and fall of 1598. The newlywed but as yet still abandoned countess of Southampton delivered a daughter on November 8–explaining the comparison to "widowed wombs." And the autumn of 1598 was indeed "teeming" twice over–both in that Southampton was now father to a newborn infant and that England's harvest that year had been unusually bountiful.

Southampton did not stick around England long after his November return. In April 1599, Southampton joined the officer corps leading troops into Ireland. Irish rebels, led by the earl of Tyrone, had won a decisive victory the previous year over occupying English forces at Armagh. The Irish populace, spurred on by Tyrone's upset victory, was soon bristling with rebellion. Only an extreme show of English force was going to keep Ireland an English territory. Southampton's friend Essex had at first balked at the opportunity to lead the Irish military expedition. His previous sorties to Cádiz and the Azores had left a power vacuum, which Robert Cecil and his minions were only too glad to fill. Every time Essex returned from an overseas mission, he was feted at a court in which he wielded less and less power. Yet, the temptation to serve once more as England's glorious soldier was too great. Southampton, it was rumored, would be Essex's second-in-command, serving as general of the horse.

De Vere held long-standing sympathies for the Irish rebels. The Arundell Libels of 1581 tell of de Vere's admiration for the Irish patriots Viscount Baltinglas and Nicolas Sanders–the latter of whom *Henry VI, Part 2,* jestingly memorializes as "Saunder Simpcox." And, as de Vere's previously quoted April 1595 letter to Robert Cecil shows, de Vere was also no friend of Essex.

De Vere must thus have felt torn. A mewling buccaneer-*cum*-nobleman named Essex was about to lead an expedition against a sympathetic Irish foe. If this had been the whole story, de Vere might well have gotten himself into trouble rooting for the Irish. But one factor made the 1599 Irish expedition a very different situation. Southampton would be in danger.

Around this time, Robert Bertie (son of Peregrine and de Vere's sister Mary) wrote his uncle an affectionate letter in French referring to de Vere's "*plus serieux affaires.*" These *affaires* had been, one suspects, what the *Sonnets* would call "spending old words new"–rewriting his courtly and Queen's Men's interludes of years past.

Sometime during the first half of 1599, scholars concur that the Lord Chamberlain's Men performed Shake-speare's *Henry V* at the newly constructed Globe Theatre on the south bank of the Thames. *Henry V*–probably first written during the 1570s and later played by the Queen's Men as *The Famous Victories of Henry V*–expressed the public, propagandistic side of de Vere's feelings about the Essex expedition to Ireland. It was a prayer for the success of Essex's, and therefore Southampton's, mission.

The CHORUS to Shake-speare's *Henry V* notes:

> Were now the general of our gracious empress,
> As in good time he may, from Ireland coming,
> Bringing rebellion broached on his sword,
> How many would the peaceful city quit
> To welcome him!

And Londoners did indeed throng the streets to give the warriors a royal send-off. The largest army Queen Elizabeth had ever sent abroad made their way westward out of London through a gauntlet of cheering subjects. De Vere's mixed feelings must have made the farewell bittersweet.

But de Vere would again turn toward his muse to express his more private feelings about Essex in the Shake-speare play *Coriolanus*. The correlation between the historical Roman general Caius Marcius Coriolanus and the earl of Essex was not unheard of at the time. The Elizabethan prelate William Barlow would later famously compare Essex to Coriolanus in a sermon at Paul's Cross. (The play *Coriolanus* may well be what Essex was referring to when in 1600 he wrote to Elizabeth, "They print me and make me speak to the world, and shortly they will play me on the stage.")

Coriolanus is rarely performed today, in part because the protagonist, the least sympathetic in the Shake-speare canon, is so snobbish and unappealing. Audience members often find themselves disappointed in Shake-speare's story, because the play leaves them indifferent to whether the hero lives or dies. But *Coriolanus* is one of the more unjustly neglected works of Shake-speare. Once one appreciates that de Vere disliked the man who inspired CORIOLANUS, then the nature of the story turns upside down.

Read as a classical tragedy, wherein deadly human flaws lead a sympathetic protagonist into the inferno, *Coriolanus* is an artistic failure. However, if one instead reads *Coriolanus* as a darkly comic critique that intentionally strips all ennobling qualities from its hero, the play becomes a devilish satire of the

entire genre of tragedy–and of Essex, in particular, as a man incapable of rising to tragic grandeur. "It is," George Bernard Shaw once quipped, "the greatest of Shakespeare's comedies."

Coriolanus recites the history, as recorded in Plutarch's *Lives*, of a military conqueror from the days of the Roman Republic. The title character is an arrogant general who leads a victorious force against a foreign uprising. The parallels between the plot of *Coriolanus* and Essex's Irish expedition and its aftermath are, in the words of the twentieth-century Shakespearean actor Robert Speaight, "unmistakable." Essex's haughtiness and irksome sense of infinite entitlement are sarcastically mirrored in the Roman soldier-statesman who berates a starving mob as

> CORIOLANUS ... dissentious rogues
> That, rubbing the poor itch of your opinions,
> Make yourself scabs.

CORIOLANUS's trusty aged friend MENENIUS recites the twisted moral of the play in the first scene.

> MENENIUS There was a time when all the body's members
> Rebell'd against the belly....
> The senators of Rome are this good belly,
> And you the mutinous members: For examine
> Their counsels and their cares, digest things rightly
> Touching the weal o'th'common, you shall find
> No public benefit which you receive
> But it proceeds or comes from them to you,
> And no way from yourselves. What do you think,
> You, the great toe of this assembly?

In Plutarch's original version of the Coriolanus story, the historical Menenius also recites a fable of the belly–but in a very different context. Here, as a patronizing jeremiad intended to quiet a crowd of starving Romans, MENENIUS's fable of the belly is gruesome. It's so cruel that it's comic for a self-satisfied patrician with a full stomach to tell a crowd of starving people that their problems will go away if they just "digest things rightly."

Shake-speare had found his late voice, that complex and contradictory amalgam of misanthrope and humanist. The earls of Essex and Southampton and the politics of Elizabeth's last years were proving to be almost as much of an inspiration for growth and great art as de Vere's hellish first marriage–no small accomplishment.

Sometime during May or June of 1599, de Vere's second child by Anne was married. Bridget de Vere, now age fifteen, had gone through nearly as

many prospective grooms as had her older sister, the countess of Derby. Two years before, in 1597, Bridget had been engaged to a son of the Brooke family. Shortly thereafter, Bridget had been matched with William Herbert, son of Mary Sidney Herbert, countess of Pembroke. Mary, sister to the late Sir Philip Sidney, was a munificent literary patron and talented versifier with whom de Vere was friendly. One of de Vere's letters indicates he was keen on this match–he was very fond of the Herbert family and wrote that the prospective groom "hath been well brought up, fair conditioned, and hath many good parts in him." But Bridget's potential alliance with the Herbert clan had also fallen through.

Instead, Bridget's husband was to be the twenty-year-old aspiring politician Francis Norris, a hothead who would years later fight a duel with Peregrine Bertie junior "upon an old reckoning." The de Vere–Norris wedding was an understated affair due to the recent passing of Lord Burghley, who cast a long shadow in death as in life.

Soon after saying "I do," Norris raced off to the Continent and left his blushing bride behind. Bridget had wound up with a husband who, all too like her father, would become the absentee man in her life.

During the summer of 1599, word came from Ireland that Essex's mission was proving to be a disaster. Essex had been running through his supplies and cash like a spoiled child on holiday. Elizabeth quipped that she'd given her commander "a thousand pounds a day to go on progress."

Moreover, before Essex departed in the spring, the queen had rebuked him for attempting to appoint Southampton to the position of general of the horse. Her Majesty had made it clear, or so she thought, that Essex's best friend would be receiving no such promotion. But when the battalions disembarked onto Irish soil, Essex gave Southampton the generalship anyway.

That was a mistake. Queen Elizabeth may have become a parody of her youthful self by 1599. But behind that perfumed suck-handkerchief and beneath that powdered wig operated the same strategic genius that had led a nation from crisis and irrelevance to power and consequence. Elizabeth sent a rebuke across the Irish Sea, demoting Southampton. In response, the petulant Essex abolished the post of general of the horse altogether.

In August, although Essex expressed grand intentions of attacking the rebel earl of Tyrone at his Ulster stronghold, the only conquest the invading English army made was five hundred cows and sixty garrans (small Irish horses). The embarrassment continued into the fall. In September, Essex and Tyrone met in a secret conference at the ford of Bellaclynthe. The two commanders, who should have been leading forces against each other, instead agreed to a truce that allowed Tyrone to keep his rebel positions and prohibited the English from building any new forts or garrisons. It is

difficult to understand how Essex could have felt good about this settlement. Tyrone was only biding time. Reinforcements were on their way from Spain to Ireland.

Elizabeth was, naturally, furious. When she learned of Essex's hastily brokered accord, she dispatched another blistering letter, reminding her commander that he had abused his authority once again. She noted that unless English garrisons could be stationed around Ireland, Essex had only thrown together a "hollow peace."

De Vere must have watched with wonder at Essex's astonishing devolution. The forty-nine-year-old earl of Oxford had come to know the many different flavors and varieties of royal shame and disapproval. But nothing de Vere had experienced compared with this. As recently as 1597, when Essex was still the celebrated hero of Cádiz, the clouds parted when he strolled through the courtly sky. But now, after having embarrassed himself in the failed Azores mission, having regularly disobeyed the queen's orders, and having led an Irish expedition that spewed money like a geyser, Essex was a body in free fall.

To make matters more interesting, the Elizabethan gossip William Reynolds reported at the time that, in the sexually charged environment of war, Southampton had begun to dote upon one Pierce Edmonds. Reynolds, who had served under Essex and Southampton in Ireland, said:

> Pierce Edmonds . . . ate and drank at [Southampton's] table and lay in his tent. The earl of Southampton gave him a horse. . . . The earl [of] Southampton would cole [*embrace*] and hug him in his arms and play wantonly with him.

Troilus and Cressida, which is perhaps Shake-speare's most murky and impenetrable play, presents a likely portrait of Southampton's situation in the form of two Grecian officers who are part of the force besieging the city of Troy. ACHILLES and his fellow commander PATROCLUS represent Shakespeare's one same-sex friendship, outside of OTHELLO and IAGO' s troubled relationship, that is touched with intimations of homosexuality. Rather than fight and serve honorably with their fellow Grecians, ACHILLES and PATROCLUS prefer to while away the days in their tent, privately enjoying each other's pleasures. *Troilus and Cressida*'s railing satirist THERSITES spells out the rumors against ACHILLES and PATROCLUS

> THERSITES [to PATROCLUS] Thou art said to be ACHILLES's male varlet.
> PATROCLUS Male varlet, you rogue? What's that?
> THERS. Why, his masculine whore. Now the rotten diseases of the south [*venereal diseases*] . . . take and take again such preposterous discoveries!

PATRO. Why, thou damnable box of envy, thou, what means thou to curse thus?
THERS. Do I curse thee?
PATRO. Why, no, you ruinous butt, you whoreson indistinguishable cur, no.
THERS. No? Why art thou then exasperate, thou idle immaterial skein of sleeve silk, thou green sarsenet [*fine silk*] flap for a sore eye, thou tassel of a prodigal's purse, thou!

THERSITES calls PATROCLUS a varlet and a femme, and PATROCLUS makes no effort to refute the charge. He just returns the vitriol in kind.

Elizabethan authors had equated Essex with the legendary figure of Achilles at least four times in the preceding five years, so no doubt de Vere was displacing some of his resentment toward Southampton onto a man he already disliked. In *Troilus and Cressida*'s Greek officers' camp, then, Southampton's alleged sexual dalliances with a fellow officer become an accusation of degenerate and improper conduct against Essex himself. (One might read ACHILLES as Essex and PATROCLUS as Southampton or, alternately, ACHILLES as Southampton and PATROCLUS as Pierce Edmonds. Both interpretations would appear to be valid.)

In *Troilus and Cressida,* the idealized officer ULYSSES utters Shake-speare's most eloquent homage to the Elizabethan chain of being: nature's rank and degree for everything and everyone. So it is only fitting that ULYSSES is the one who sits ACHILLES down for a mentoring session about the fleeting nature of courtly favor. De Vere, who probably portrayed himself as ULYSSES in the 1584 court masque *Agamemnon and Ulysses,* knew this lesson from first-hand experience.

ACHILLES What, am I poor of late?
'Tis certain, greatness, once fall'n out with fortune,
Must fall out with men too. . . .
What, are my deeds forgot?
ULYSSES Time hath, my lord, a wallet at his back,
Wherein he puts alms for oblivion,
A great-siz'd monster of ingratitudes.
Those scraps are good deeds past, which are devour'd
As fast as they are made, forgot as soon
As done. . . .
For beauty, wit,
High birth, vigor of bone, desert in service,
Love, friendship, charity, are subjects all
To envious and calumniating Time.
One touch of nature makes the whole world kin.

Here, again, where ULYSSES serves as de Vere's mouthpiece, ACHILLES might be seen to represent Essex–although ULYSSES's caring and sage counsel makes it more likely that Southampton was the intended audience.

De Vere probably wrote his dark Trojan satire for a private performance before the court or a select subset of courtiers sometime in 1599. (Although the play was first published in 1609, its first recorded performance was not until 1679.) An anonymous 1599 play, *Histrio-Mastix* ("The player whipped"), spoofs *Troilus and Cressida. Histrio-Mastix* features a miniature love scene between two characters named Troilus and Cressida. As if to ensure that the identity of the playwright being burlesqued is entirely clear, the play's "Troilus" speaks of himself in the third person as someone who "shakes his furious spear."

Near the end of *Histrio-Mastix,* the play's character "Poverty" says:

I scorn a scoffing fool about my throne,
An artless idiot that like Aesop's dawe [*crow*]
Plumes [*plucks*] fairer feathered birds. No, Poverty
Will dignify her chair with deep divines.
Philosophers and scholars feast with me.

"Poverty" respects philosophers and scholars but scorns an "artless idiot" and "scoffing fool" who disguises himself behind the feathers plucked from other birds. *Greene's Groatsworth of Wit* had said essentially the same thing about Will Shakspere in 1592.

Notice, too, that *Histrio-Mastix* mentions multiple "birds" from whom the "artless idiot" filches feathers. The dramatist and satirist Ben Jonson points to a similar conclusion–that Will Shakspere was stealing from writers other than de Vere. Jonson wrote an epigram circa 1599 about someone he calls a "poet-ape."

Poor "poet-ape," that would be thought our chief,
Whose works are even the frippery of wit,
From brokage [*brokerage*] is become so bold a thief
As we, the robbed, leave rage and pity it.
At first he made low shifts, would pick and glean,
Buy the reversion [*revision*] of old plays. Now grown
To a little wealth and credit in the scene,
He takes up all, makes each man's wit his own.
And told of this, he slights it. "Tut, such crimes
The sluggish, gaping auditor devours;
He marks not whose 'twas first, and aftertimes
May judge it to be his, as well as ours."
Fool! as if half-eyes will not know a fleece
From locks of wool, or shreds from the whole piece.

One might paraphrase Jonson's sonnet in modern English as follows: The man who many people think is England's finest author (Will Shakspere) is in fact a "poet-ape"–someone whose works are sloughed-off pieces of wit from one or more actual authors. The "poet-ape" began his career as a (play?) broker and then, emboldened, he became an out-and-out play-thief. We playwrights were mad, but we also pity the guy. He used to be sly and would cobble together bits and pieces of plays here and there. But now that he's prominent in the London theatrical scene, he takes an entire play and claims it as his own. When he's confronted with this, he responds that others may figure out who wrote it–or not. But what a fool he is! With one's eyes halfway closed, anyone can easily tell the difference between hanks of wool and a whole fleece, or between mere patches and an entire blanket.

What was Will Shakspere actually doing? There are no company records or playbills from the early days of the Globe, so there's no way of verifying what Will Shakspere said or did during public performances. If one takes Jonson's "Poet-Ape" sonnet literally, Shakspere claimed credit for texts or shreds of text that didn't have an author's name firmly attached. "Poet-ape" Shakspere may have provided publishers with cobbled-together texts for such "bad" Shake-speare quartos as the 1597 first edition of *Romeo and Juliet* and the 1603 first edition of *Hamlet* ("To be or not to be; Ay, there's the point. . . ."). Perhaps part of "poet-ape" Shakspere's job included patching incomplete de Vere scripts together with scenes that were handed off to other playwrights: For centuries critics have suspected other authors' contributions to such lesser Shakespeare plays as *Titus Andronicus, Pericles, Two Noble Kinsmen,* and *Henry VIII.*

In 1599, Ben Jonson wrote a comedy for the Lord Chamberlain's Men called *Every Man Out of His Humor.* Jonson promptly published the play the following year, thereby ape-proofing the text from Shakspere, who might want to "pick and glean" from Jonson's complete and indivisible creation. In a later edition of the play, Jonson advertised which of the Lord Chamberlain's Men performed which roles in his play. Notably missing from Jonson's cast list is Will Shakspere.

This is probably because Jonson savages Will Shakspere in *Every Man Out of His Humor. Every Man Out of His Humor* features a pitiful, buffoonish wannabe named "Sogliardo." Jonson, who prefaced his print edition of the play with descriptions of each character, anatomizes "Sogliardo" thus:

> So enamored of the name of a gentleman that he will have it, though he buys it. He comes up every term to learn to take tobacco and see new motions [*puppet plays*]. He is in his kingdom when he can get himself into company where he may be well laughed at.

In 1596, an application was submitted to London's College of Arms to buy Will Shakspere's father, John, a coat of arms. By 1599, the application had gone through, and Shakspere could style himself a gentleman. The college presented the country landholder with a heraldic crest and a new motto, Not without right *(Non sanz droit)*–sounding suspiciously like an underhanded joke on the part of the granting officer, implying that the arriviste is not *entirely* without a claim to the gentry.

Jonson satirically skewers Shakspere's newly purchased gentlemanhood. In the following scene from *Every Man Out of His Humor,* "Sogliardo" is Shakspere, "Carlo" is Jonson's jester, and "Puntarvolo" is a vainglorious knight and world traveler (who, given that he elsewhere parodies *Romeo and Juliet*'s balcony scene, is probably a spoof on de Vere):

> SOGLIARDO [*Shakspere*] By this parchment, gentlemen, I have been so toiled among the heralds yonder, you will not believe! They do speak in the strangest language and give a man the hardest terms for his money that ever you knew.
>
> CARLO [*Jonson*] But have you arms, have you arms?
>
> SOG. I'faith, I thank them. I can write myself gentleman now. Here's my patent. It cost me thirty pound, by this breath.
>
> PUNTARVOLO [*de Vere?*] A very fair coat, well charged and full of armory.
>
> SOG. Nay, it has as much variety of colors in it as you have seen a coat have. How like you the crest, sir?
>
> PUNT. I understand it not well. What is it?
>
> SOG. Marry, sir, it is your boar without a head, rampant. A boar without a head! That's very rare!
>
> CAR. Ay, and rampant too! I troth, I commend the herald's wit. He has deciphered him well: a swine without a head, without brain, wit, anything–indeed, ramping to gentility. . . .
>
> PUNT. Let the word [*motto*] be "NOT WITHOUT MUSTARD." Your crest is very rare, sir.

"Sogliardo"/Shakspere tells "Puntarvolo"/de Vere that the newly obtained crest contains "*your* boar without a head." This was no idle slip of the pen. With the Shake-speare ruse, de Vere's ancient heraldic crest had been turned into "a swine without a head" and handed over to Shakspere to parade around as his own.

Jonson's "poet-ape" and "Sogliardo" and the "artless idiot" of *Histrio-Mastix* provide just a sampler of the revelations about Shakspere and Shakespeare that appeared in London bookstalls and on London stages near the turn of the century. As society teetered on the brink of social revolution–with England still lacking an heir to the throne, the stilling of the sixty-six-year-old Elizabeth's heart could engender a nationwide religious and political upheaval in a matter of days–the market for explosive and outrageous books

and plays mirrored the bizarre and unstable world in which English subjects now lived. New books of railing satires and epigrams had become so outrageous as to make the Nashe–Harvey pamphlet wars of the early 1590s look genteel.

Religious extremists and Puritanical versifiers saw Ovidian poetry such as the pornographic *Venus and Adonis*–which went through two separate editions in 1599 alone–as symbols of the decadence of modern life. Joseph Hall berated "Labeo" (the author Shake-speare) using words that one might associate with a scolding schoolteacher: "For shame! Write better, Labeo, or write none." Another unhinged scribbler was the bluntly named Thomas Bastard. In one of Bastard's epigrams (published in his 1598 collection *Chrestoleros*), no names were named, but Shake-speare is clearly his target: The author Bastard criticizes writes sinful works, is widely admired, and hides behind another man's identity.

> Thou, which deluding raisest up a fame
> And having showed the man, concealest his name,
> Which canst play earnest as it pleaseth thee
> And earnest turn to jest as need shall be,
> Whose good we praise, as being liked of all,
> Whose ill we bear as being natural,
> Thou which art made of vinegar and gall...
> Cease, write no more to aggravate thy sin.
> Or, if thou wilt not leave, now I'll begin.

Hall and Bastard were no doubt aware of Shake-speare's latest book. In 1599, *The Passionate Pilgrim by W. Shakespeare* was published, containing sonnets and other poems that revealed de Vere's innermost feelings toward Southampton–potentially perceptible, to the censorious at least, as homosexual feelings.

De Vere must have been angry with the publisher of *The Passionate Pilgrim* (William Jaggard) for sneaking compromising material into print under the Shake-speare imprimatur. Printing works intended for the public stage was one thing, but *The Passionate Pilgrim* was another altogether. De Vere's conflicting feelings about Southampton were certainly not meant to become the fable of the world, at least not during de Vere's lifetime. To add insult to injury, fifteen of *The Passionate Pilgrim*'s twenty poems–all said to be "by W. Shakespeare"–were actually written by other authors. This cobbling together of various surreptitiously obtained patches of verse may well be the handiwork of "poet-ape" Will Shakspere.

One of the poets anthologized in *The Passionate Pilgrim* was Thomas Heywood, a sometime servant to Southampton and a playwright who had worked with de Vere's son-in-law the earl of Derby. Heywood later reflected

that his unwitting contributions to *The Passionate Pilgrim* were "not worthy his [*de Vere's*] patronage... so the author I know [was] much offended with Mr. Jaggard–that altogether unknown to him presumed to make bold with his name."

The book publishers, the satirists, and the epigrammatists had all gone too far. During the summer of 1599, the archbishop of Canterbury and bishop of London issued an edict banning Joseph Hall's satires, John Marston's satires, John Davies's epigrams, Thomas Nashe's satires, Gabriel Harvey's books, and many other topical works. All were to be recalled and burned. ("No satires or epigrams [will] be printed hereafter.... No English histories [will] be printed except [if] they be allowed by some of Her Majesty's Privy Council....") *Willobie His Avisa*, which had recently reappeared in a pirated edition, was also recalled from London bookstalls.

The very archbishop whose patronage Tom Nashe had once enjoyed had now decreed that "All Nashe's books and Dr. Harvey's books be taken wheresoever they may be found and that none of their books be ever printed hereafter." One can imagine the down-and-out Nashe–who had alienated so many that no one stood up for him anymore, not even de Vere–watching the bonfire of books outside London's Stationer's Hall. As the flames licked into the summer sky, Nashe's life's work turned into anonymous ash. Nashe, who would die in obscurity three years later, must have wondered whether any of his merry jestings with "Gentle Master William" would escape the inferno.

De Vere must have wondered, too, as flames consumed the life's work of the unfortunate authors targeted in the Bishops' Ban, if his own degenerate, sex- and bloodstained works would ultimately survive the torches and press raids of the burgeoning Puritan movement. The fates of Nashe, Harvey, and their ilk issued de Vere a warning written in fire.

❧

On September 24, Essex and Southampton had decided they were through dealing with the troublesome earl of Tyrone; they were through with receiving angry missives from the queen; they were through with her contradicting their orders. Despite specific instructions not to leave Ireland without Her Majesty's permission, Essex, Southampton, and a cadre of other discontented commanders departed for London, leaving their botched military campaign in charge of a junior officer, Sir George Carey, and the archbishop of Dublin.

The decision to desert his command while on active duty was quintessential Essex. He felt he was owed the opportunity to speak with Elizabeth in private, without any Cecilians whispering poisons in her ear. So Essex, not unlike de Vere in the heat of the Spanish Armada campaign, simply left his post. Essex showed up at the royal Nonsuch Palace four days later. He'd left his fellow travelers back in London, thinking it best to keep his controversial sometime general of the horse, Southampton, out of the picture.

It was midmorning when Essex arrived, and without taking time to wash up or change out of his mud-spattered clothes, the once unassailable CORIOLANUS burst into the queen's bedchamber while she was still in her dressing gown. Without her wig or her daily cake of makeup, Elizabeth must have looked as astonishing to the surprise visitor as she was astonished to see him. Still, the queen maintained her composure, listened to what Essex had to say, and bid him good-day.

She would never allow Essex in her presence again. In October the queen had her onetime favorite confined to the chambers of Yorke House. By December, Essex would be under censure by the Star Chamber and all but stripped of his nobility. His household of 160 servants dispersed to find new work.

The Cecil faction could now win the entire game if they could only complete Essex's ruin before his star rose again. De Vere must have feared for his beloved young favorite, damned by association.

During the autumn of 1599, with nothing else to do, Southampton and his friend the earl of Rutland–another former ward from Cecil House–spent their afternoons at the public theaters. (One correspondent wrote to Cecil, in October, that Southampton and Rutland "pass away the tyme in London merely in going to plaies every Day.") The chance diary entry of a Swiss tourist in London in September 1599 records that at the time one of the works onstage at the Globe was the old tragedy *Julius Caesar*–probably first written, as previously noted, about the duke of Guise's 1588 assassination. However, by 1599 de Vere was undoubtedly less interested in the blood sports of princes than in the political force of gravity: that ghostly impulse that tails a man's meteoric rise and drags him ever earthward.

Coriolanus continues to chart Essex's descent. For his haughty irreverence toward the people and the government, Rome's crestfallen general is eventually banished from the state. CORIOLANUS's response mingles de Vere's heartfelt devotion to the ancient feudal order with his satirical impulse to bring low a megalomaniac who had taken the privileges of rank too far.

CORIOLANUS It is a purpos'd thing, and grows by plot
To curb the will of the nobility:
Suffer't, and with such as cannot rule,
Nor ever will be rul'd....
My nobler friends,
I crave their pardons.
For the mutable, rank-scented meinie [*mob*], let them
Regard me as I do not flatter, and
Therein behold themselves. I say again,
In soothing them, we nourish 'gainst our senate

The cockle of rebellion, insolence, sedition,
Which we ourselves have plough'd for,
sow'd, and scatter'd.

In Essex's disastrous return from Ireland–and its workings-through in *Coriolanus*–one can almost hear the crunching of gilded gears in de Vere's mind. In an abstract sense, Essex was the embodiment of all that Castiglione's *Courtier* celebrated: Essex could rightly boast of birth, wealth, valor, patronage, and courageous service to his prince. Yet Essex was also reaping the harvest of enmity his arrogance and overweening ambition had sowed.

Coriolanus is a bitter symphony in a minor key, scarcely pausing to lighten the mood with a comic interlude. And in its unstinting darkness, as Shaw rightly noted, *Coriolanus* is all comedy. Yet de Vere had experienced the same arcing trajectory from promising star to powerful young elite to dejected exile. De Vere probably drew inspiration from *Coriolanus* to retell the same story–but this time in autobiographical form.

Timon of Athens is Shake-speare's self-portrait as a downwardly mobile aristocrat. And thanks to some jokes about *Timon of Athens* that appear in a John Marston play from 1600 and a Ben Jonson play from 1601, it follows that Shake-speare's dark satire must have been staged and known to London audiences by 1600 at the latest. Marston and Jonson were probably riffing on *Timon* because it was then current news.

Timon's railing philosopher APEMANTUS encapsulates the theme of this play when he tells the title character:

APEM. The middle of humanity thou never knewest, but the extremity
of both ends. When thou wast in thy gilt and thy perfume, they
mock'd thee for too much curiosity; in thy rags thou know'st none–
but art despis'd for the contrary.

Timon of Athens tells the story of de Vere's precipitous drop from finery to patches. TIMON begins the play as an admired and admirable lord, patronizing all worthy endeavors that come to his attention. He pays out generous grants to poets and painters. TIMON is the very mirror of Castiglionian nobility–not unlike *The Merchant of Venice's* ANTONIO in both bounteousness and recklessness. Yet, when TIMON's credit slips, his impulse is all too familiar:

STEWARD My lov'd lord,
Though you hear now (too late), yet now's a time:
The greatest of your having lacks a half
To pay your present debts.

TIMON Let all my land be sold!
STEWARD 'Tis all engag'd, some forfeited and gone,
And what remains will hardly stop the mouth
Of present dues. The future comes apace.

TIMON ends the play a bitter misanthrope, exiled from Athens, railing at the whole of humanity. In his jeremiads against everyone and everything, TIMON even recalls the first step of de Vere's downward spiral–the doubtful paternity of his first child by Anne Cecil de Vere. Shaking his dirty fist at a city that has spurned him, TIMON wants nothing more than to see everything laid to waste.

TIMON Spare not the babe
Whose dimpled smiles from fools exhaust their mercy:
Think it a bastard, whom the oracle
Hath doubtfully pronounc'd the throat shall cut,
And mince it sans remorse. Swear against objects.
Put armor on thine ears and on thine eyes
Whose proof nor yells of mothers, maids, nor babes,
Nor sight of priests in holy vestments bleeding
Shall pierce a jot. There's gold to pay thy soldiers.
Make large confusion.

But the presence of one of England's greatest comedians on de Vere's doorstep come Christmastime would be a reminder that nothing was ever wholly good or bad for the earl of Oxford. Only the musing made it so.

The comic actor Robert Armin, who had just joined the Lord Chamberlain's Men the previous year, in 1600 published an otherwise disposable jokebook called *Quips Upon Questions* in which he made a most indisposable statement. In an introductory epistle, dated in late December 1599, Armin wrote that he was preparing to spend the holiday with an unspecified nobleman. "On Tuesday [Christmas Day 1599] I take my journey," Armin wrote, "to wait on the Right Honorable good my lord my master whom I serve in Hackney."

There were two known noblemen with established households in Hackney at the time, de Vere and Edward, Lord Zouche. Zouche was out of town in 1599 on diplomatic missions to Denmark and preparing to settle in to a new interim job as deputy governor of the island of Guernsey in the English Channel. The only "Right Honorable" lord whom Armin could have been serving in person in the borough of Hackney was de Vere.

Armin is famous today as one of Shake-speare's greatest clowns. Scholars suspect his first role was that of TOUCHSTONE in *As You Like It.* De Vere and Armin were probably working together during the holiday season of

1599–1600 to put the final touches on an old play about an old family to whom the author had long felt indebted.

As noted in previous chapters, *As You Like It* primarily concerns the legally entangled fortunes of the three sons of the executed duke of Norfolk (SIR ROWLAND DE BOYS, as the lamented patriarch is named in the play). In 1577, de Vere had attended the wedding of Norfolk's youngest son, William, to the heiress Lady Elizabeth Dacre.

And now, some twenty-two years after William Howard had pledged his love to the young Dacre girl, the light at the end of the tunnel *finally* appeared. At the time of Armin's visit to Hackney, Howard was approaching an agreement to purchase the rights to his wife's inheritance for the exorbitant fine of £10,000 (some $2.5 million today). De Vere, who himself never enjoyed his full inheritance, surely felt for his cousin. *As You Like It* was to be the present that celebrated small victories. It is–unlike *Troilus and Cressida, Coriolanus,* or *Timon of Athens*–an exuberant display of the author's still expert hand at creating comedy and romance, even amid the bitter disappointment of exile.

The unstoppable wit Armin, whose visits to King's Place must have recalled the riotous days of Fisher's Folly, probably joined his lord in the great study–beneath the carved wood ceiling figures of the Lord Chamberlain–and jested and parried back and forth as if it had been the 1580s all over again. Armin's character in *As You Like It,* TOUCHSTONE, was to play a crucial role both as the author's mouthpiece and as the comedic combatant in one of the most underappreciated scenes in the Shake-speare canon. *As You Like It,* Act 5, Scene 1, re-creates the COSTARD–DON ARMADO–JAQUENETTA triad from *Love's Labour's Lost* that burlesqued de Vere's strange relationship with his muse and with Will Shakspere. In *As You Like It,* de Vere's muse is named AUDREY.

This time around, though, Will Shakspere's character was not nearly as sympathetic a figure as COSTARD. De Vere was probably fed up with the Shake-speare ruse and wanted to unleash a literary assault upon the man who symbolized the whole rotten mess.

Armin was a rapid-fire comic whose humor delighted thousands of Londoners. But even he, a man who could work with dark material, must have been taken aback when handed the lines for TOUCHSTONE's confrontation scene with a simple country lad named WILLIAM.

The scene is full of the sort of sardonic comedy that was becoming de Vere's specialty: TOUCHSTONE wants to marry AUDREY, but WILLIAM wants to marry her too. Sparks fly. The setting is the forest of Arden, near de Vere's former property of Bilton, near his extended family's property of Billesley, and–most important–near Stratford-upon-Avon. TOUCHSTONE and AUDREY hire a priest to carry out the nuptials. The priest's name, SIR OLIVER MARTEXT, harkens back to the pamphleteer Martin Marprelate: De Vere tipped his

hat to the role that the government's post-Marprelate crackdown played in bringing WILLIAM onto the scene.

TOUCHSTONE We shall find a time, AUDREY, patience, gentle AUDREY.
AUDREY Faith, the priest was good enough, for all the old gentleman's saying.
TOUCH. A most wicked SIR OLIVER, AUDREY, a most vile MARTEXT. But, AUDREY, there is a youth here in the forest lays claim to you.
AUD. Ay, I know who 'tis; he hath no interest in me in the world. Here comes the man you mean.

Enter WILLIAM

TOUCH. It is meat and drink to me to see a clown. By my troth, we that have good wits have much to answer for; we shall be flouting. We cannot hold.
WILLIAM Good ev'n, AUDREY.
AUD. God ye good ev'n, WILLIAM.
WILL. And good ev'n to you, sir.
TOUCH. Good ev'n, gentle friend. Cover thy head, cover thy head; nay, prithee be cover'd. How old are you, friend?
WILL. Five and twenty, sir.
TOUCH. A ripe age. Is thy name WILLIAM?
WILL. WILLIAM, sir.
TOUCH. A fair name. Wast born i' the forest here?
WILL. Ay, sir, I thank God.
TOUCH. "Thank God"–a good answer. Art rich?
WILL. Faith, sir, so so.
TOUCH. "So so" is good, very good, very excellent good; and yet it is not, it is but so so. Art thou wise?
WILL. Ay, sir, I have a pretty wit.
TOUCH. Why, thou say'st well. I do now remember a saying, "The fool doth think he is wise, but the wise man knows himself to be a fool."

Notice that TOUCHSTONE calls WILLIAM "gentle." The word in sixteenth-century usage meant not "docile" or "kindly" but rather someone of the next highest caste above yeoman. After the granting of Shakspere's coat of arms, as Ben Jonson's "Sogliardo" points out, Shakspere could indeed finally style himself a gentleman.

TOUCH. ... Do you love this maid?
WILL. I do, sir.
TOUCH. Give me your hand. Art thou learned?
WILL. No, sir.

TOUCH. Then learn this of me: To have is to have. For it is a figure of rhetoric that drink, being pour'd out of a cup into a glass, by filling the one doth empty the other. For all your writers do consent that *ipse* is he. Now, you are not *ipse*–for I am he.

Here is where the tone shifts. This is no longer comedy.

In Italian, "To have is to have" translates as *Avere è avere*: A Vere is a Vere. To make sense of TOUCHSTONE's "figure of rhetoric," one needs to turn to Plato's *Symposium,* wherein the transfer of knowledge from one person to another is contrasted to the pouring of a drink from one cup to another:

My dear Agathon, Socrates replied as he took his seat beside him, I only wish that wisdom *were* the kind of thing one could share by sitting next to someone–if it flowed, for instance, from the one that was full to the one that was empty, like the water in two cups finding its level through a piece of worsted [*fine woolen fabric*]. If that were how it worked, I'm sure I'd congratulate myself on sitting next to you, for you'd soon have me brimming over with the most exquisite kind of wisdom.

Yet, Socrates says, wisdom does not have the properties of water. TOUCHSTONE concurs.

Finally, *ipse* is an emphatic pronoun in Latin, meaning "he himself." TOUCHSTONE suggests that there has been a confusion of identities: "You are not *ipse*–for I am he."

In plain English, then, TOUCHSTONE tells WILLIAM: Know this, kid. I am he himself, the author, a Vere. Don't think that just by being associated with me, you can drink in all the talent and wisdom in my head. You are only pretending to be me. You are not me. You never will be me.

WILLIAM is, naturally, flabbergasted at TOUCHSTONE's outburst. He replies:

WILL. Which he, sir?
TOUCH. He, sir, that must marry this woman [*my muse*]. Therefore, you clown, abandon–which is in the vulgar, "leave"–the society–which in the boorish is "company"–of this female–which in the common is "woman." Which, together is, "Abandon the society of this female"–or, clown, thou perishest; or, to thy better understanding, diest. Or, to wit, I will kill thee, make thee away, translate thy life into death, thy liberty into bondage. I will deal in poison with thee, or in bastinado, or in steel; I will bandy with thee in faction. I will o'errun thee with policy. I will kill thee a hundred and fifty ways. Therefore, tremble and depart!
AUD. Do, good, WILLIAM.
WILL. God rest you, merry sir. [*Exits*]

As tension mounted between the real-life TOUCHSTONE and the real-life WILLIAM, the national mood itself was turning ugly. Essex was under house arrest and the threat of prosecution for his Irish escapades. Southampton and others began plotting for Essex's escape–and even for armed rebellion. But in April, Southampton left for Ireland to seek out the more placid atmosphere of a battlefield. During the summer he decamped Ireland to join the Protestants' army in the Lowlands. All the while, Essex was subject to occasional interrogations for his alleged treasons in cutting deals with the rebel earl of Tyrone.

Smart families, once strongly allied with Essex and his stepfather, began looking around for the nearest exit. One key booster of Essex and his cause during the 1590s, the powerful and titled Somerset family, during the summer of 1600 made a key marriage alliance with the Cecil faction. Edward Somerset, earl of Worcester, de Vere's contemporary, had served his sovereign honorably as ambassador to Scotland, knight of the Garter, and deputy Master of the Horse. Worcester had also bankrolled poetic tributes to the earl of Essex and stood by the troubled commander upon his stormy return from Ireland. But now, on June 16, 1600, Worcester married his son and heir Henry to Cecil's cousin Anne Russell.

De Vere was still trying to repair his ruined finances. In July, de Vere wrote to his former brother-in-law asking for the governorship of the isle of Jersey. Neither Cecil nor the queen appears to have taken his case seriously. Sending his letter from Hackney, de Vere wrote:

> Although my bad success in former suits to Her Majesty have given me cause to bury my hopes in the deep abyss and bottom of despair, rather than now attempt–after so many trials made in vain and so many opportunities escaped–the effects of fair words or fruits of golden opportunities, yet for that, I cannot believe but that there hath been always a true correspondence of word and intention of Her Majesty. I do conjecture that with a little help, that which of itself hath brought forth so fair blossoms will also yield fruit. . . .
>
> And I know not by what better means or when Her Majesty may have an easier opportunity to discharge the debt of so many hopes–as her promises have given me cause to embrace–than by this which give she must, and so give as nothing extraordinarily doth part from her. If she shall not deign me this in an opportunity of time so fitting, what time shall I attend which is uncertain to all men unless in the graves of men there were a time to receive benefits and good turns from princes.

De Vere says, in effect, that he'd heard many promises from Elizabeth for a long time. But unless she advanced or appointed him to something soon, the only place he'd be able to enjoy his "benefits and good turns" was in his grave. His ailing body told him his days were few. The following year, de Vere would similarly make pitiful pleas for the presidency of Wales, which would also fall on deaf ears.

De Vere wasn't the only former favorite who no longer enjoyed access to offices and incomes. In September of 1600, the queen refused to renew Essex's monopoly on sweet wines–a financial mainstay in his household. Shakespeare's Sonnet 125 draws upon de Vere's, and now Essex's, inability to win this license to farm "compounds sweet" as a symbol of the futility of all royal office-seeking:

> Have I not seen dwellers on form and favor
> Lose all and more by paying too much rent
> For compound sweet, forgoing simple savor,
> Pitiful thrivers, in their gazing spent?

Also in 1600, Anthony Munday wrote a prefatory poem to a book that–like Francis Meres's *Palladis Tamia*–appears to separate de Vere from "Shakespeare." John Bodenham's 1600 quotation anthology *Belvedere* claimed to excerpt verse from contemporary authors including both "Edward, earle of Oxenford" and "William Shakspeare" [*sic*]. At first glance, Bodenham's list would appear to testify that "Shakespeare" and de Vere were two separate entities. And unlike the dismissable case of *Palladis Tamia*, one of de Vere's secretaries had given his tacit endorsement to the project.

Munday, however, may be absolved when *Belvedere* is put under the microscope. Detailed analysis of *Belvedere*'s contents reveals that Bodenham's list of authors is a case of dressed-up hucksterism: Bodenham claims to anthologize famous authors of the day (King James VI of Scotland, John Davies, and George Peele) whose works are nowhere to be found in the book, while neglecting to list plenty of the lesser-known authors whom he actually does anthologize. *Belvedere*'s list was, in short, a paradise of bylines that the editor could use to sell books. De Vere is mentioned for his title, Shake-speare because he was a best seller.

As seen by the occupant of the upstairs study at King's Place, *Belvedere* was only the latest reminder that the author was being bound and tied down on all sides, like Gulliver among the Lilliputians. One can begin to appreciate the bitter frustration articulated in Shake-speare's Sonnet 66:

> 66
> Tir'd with all these, for restful death I cry:
> As to behold desert a beggar born
> And needy nothing trimmed in jollity,

And purest faith unhappily forsworn
And gilded honor shamefully misplaced
And maiden virtue rudely strumpeted
And right perfection wrongfully disgraced
And strength by limping sway disablèd
And art made tongue tied by authority....

Even in a remote London suburb like Hackney, courtly ears were still privy to courtly rumblings. Essex had lately been heard uttering such blasphemies as that the queen "being now an old woman ... was no less crooked and distorted in mind than she was in body." The queen's godson Sir John Harrington, who'd been keeping tabs on the defrocked commander for his godmother since the Irish expedition, recorded a visit he paid to Essex's household in late 1600. Harrington wrote:

> [Essex] shifteth from sorrow and repentance to rage and rebellion so suddenly as well proveth him devoid of good reason or right mind.... He uttered strange words, bordering on such strange designs that made me hasten forth and leave his presence.

Another of Essex and Southampton's rash decisions in Ireland would come back to haunt them. During his brief tenure as general of the horse, Southampton had imprisoned an officer for insubordination. The shaming of that man, Thomas, Lord Grey de Wilton, turned a potential ally into a hardened enemy. On the evening of January 9, 1601, Lord Grey de Wilton and some of his henchmen ambushed Southampton as he rode through the London streets. In the ensuing melee, one of the attackers lopped off the hand of Southampton's houseboy.

Queen Elizabeth had Grey de Wilton thrown in the Fleet Prison for his lawlessness. But the signal was clear. Swords were coming unsheathed, and more blood would be spilled. Unless some very skilled mediator interceded, civil war would probably determine whether Essex's or Cecil's party remained standing.

Essex and his ragged and dwindling band had one last point in their favor: Much of the public at large still loved Essex for his military heroics during the mid-1590s. An effective coup d'état relies upon the support–or at least docility–of the masses. Essex now needed to rouse the rabble in his support.

Two years earlier, the lawyer John Hayward had published a controversial book, *The Life and Reign of Henry IV,* that told the history of the deposition of England's king Richard II. Hayward, a supporter of Essex and Southampton, had written a best-selling tract that none too subtly drew parallels between the corruption and misgovernment in Richard II's court and the abuses of

Elizabeth's. The historical king Richard II had been forced to abdicate the throne by the man who would become Henry IV; Hayward's polemic implied that a similar fate should befall the queen. Queen Elizabeth saw Hayward's book as incitement to revolution. He was tried for treason in the summer of 1600.

On February 6, 1601, Essex and Southampton pushed Hayward's historical parallel further by hiring the Lord Chamberlain's Men to perform Shakespeare's *Richard II* at the Globe. As it happens, Shake-speare's RICHARD II is actually de Vere through and through–a philosophical poet-king and proto-HAMLET whose origin probably dates back to the 1580s when the author was more politically engaged himself. But what motivated the February 6 performance of *Richard II*–containing an actual deposition scene, no less–was the equation of "Richard II" with Queen Elizabeth in the public's mind.

Elizabeth got the gist of the performance. "I am Richard [II]. Know ye not that?" she later asked the scholar William Lambarde. It is indicative that none of Elizabeth's officials tried to find or punish the author of the play *Richard II.* The queen and her interrogators knew de Vere's enmity toward Essex already, and neither needed to discover more about *Richard II*'s author, or inquire about his loyalty.

While de Vere's loyalty to Elizabeth was indeed true, the follow-up to the *Richard II* performance was tumultuous. On the evening of Sunday, February 8, de Vere–probably in Hackney with his wife and son–received word that the entire structure of English power had changed. In one swift and deadly day, Essex and Southampton had gambled everything and lost.

That morning, Essex and Southampton, along with some three hundred other nobles and remaining adherents to the Essex faction, had gathered at Essex House (formerly Leicester House) to discuss their next move. Cecil's spies had long since infiltrated the Essex House staff, however. The turncoats notified their superiors. The Lord Chief Justice, the Lord Keeper, and other privy councilors arrived at the Essex House gates asking the cause of such an assembly. Essex explained to them that plots had been laid against his life. Southampton recalled the recent unprovoked attack by Lord Grey de Wilton.

The officials responded that Lord Grey de Wilton had been punished and that if Essex had any specific information about specific plots, he should notify the proper authorities. This was not the response the insurgents were looking for. So Essex, Southampton, and a rabble of some two hundred men raced through the London streets to the sheriff's house. (Essex believed the sheriff of London to be on his side.) "For the queen! For the queen! A plot is laid for my life!" Essex shouted as the throngs made their way up Fleet Street toward Ludgate.

Once Essex and his men had arrived at the sheriff's house, however, they learned their supposed ally had fled for the lord mayor's house.

Essex was stuck in the middle of London leading a mob that now had no

particular purpose. They marched back toward Essex House to regroup. But Cecil had already drawn in the net. The bishop of London, a man who owed his job to Cecil, had ordered that Essex's men be stopped in their tracks. A chain was placed across the street at the west end of St. Paul's, and armed guards ensured that neither Essex nor his men could proceed any farther.

Essex responded like the hothead he was, by fighting. In a matter of minutes, the ensuing violence left four men dead and many more wounded. And Essex had become the de facto commander of a rebel army inside the city gates of London.

Essex had handed Cecil everything the scheming spymaster had wanted. The game was now up.

Essex, Southampton, and other advisors were allowed to return to Essex House. They holed themselves up there for the rest of the day. By evening, a force led by the Lord Admiral, Lord Grey de Wilton, and others were besieging Essex House. Southampton tried to convince the Lord Admiral to send some of his men into Essex House as hostages to ensure safe passage to the queen's chambers, where Essex and Southampton could then have a private conference with Her Majesty. The Lord Admiral told them they were in no position to make any demands. The only acceptable option was unconditional surrender. After several tense hours, at 10 P.M., Essex, Southampton, and their cabal laid down their arms.

A treason trial was the next logical step. De Vere must have heard before the night's end that, as a member of the House of Lords, he would soon be sitting in judgment of his young, proud, dearly beloved, and grievously stupid Southampton.

On February 19, the trial of Essex and Southampton took place at Westminster Hall. For the event, the Hall had been arranged in the same spare layout as at the arraignment of Mary, Queen of Scots, at Fotheringhay. De Vere joined twenty-five other peers sitting on either side of the cavernous room. The canopy of state was set at the upper end, underneath which sat the Lord Treasurer, the Lord High Steward, and seven sergeants-at-arms.

The constable of the Tower and his assistants brought in the pair of prisoners. As the peers' names were called who would sit on the jury, Lord Grey de Wilton's name came up. Essex laughed and tugged Southampton by the sleeve. They both objected to the personal vendetta Lord Grey had against Southampton. The Lord Chief Justice informed the prisoners, however, that peers of the realm could not be excused from any jury.

The trial lasted from nine till six. Sir Francis Bacon, a onetime member of the Essex faction, headed the prosecution, which called upon such witnesses as the earl of Worcester, John Davies, and Sir Walter Raleigh. Essex scoffed when Raleigh swore his oath to tell the truth and nothing but the truth. When it was

Essex's turn to testify, he dropped a bombshell. Cecil, Essex claimed, had been advocating in secret for the Infanta Isabella Clara Eugenia of Spain. At this charge, Cecil approached the Lord Steward, dropped to his knees, and pleaded he be allowed to respond to this malicious fiction. Cecil asked Essex and Southampton to name any privy councilor to whom he had supposedly advocated the Spanish succession. They named no one. Further questioning revealed that Cecil had simply been seen reading a book that argued for the Spanish infanta's claim to the English throne. Cecil turned the moment around masterfully, addressing Essex:

> Your malice whereby you seek to work me into hatred amongst all men hath flowed from no other cause than from my affection to peace for the good of my country and your own inflamed heart for war, for the benefit of military men which may be at your beck.

The jury took only a half hour to find both Essex and Southampton guilty of high treason. De Vere had performed his duty as a peer to condemn his dear Southampton to death.

Essex said he was prepared to die, but he asked that the court spare the life of Southampton. In the *Sonnets,* many of which were evidently written to Southampton, de Vere later reflected upon his bizarre role as judge and jury against his beloved–from the first sessions to trial to the adversarial role de Vere played against himself in the jury room.

30

When to the sessions of sweet silent thought
I summon up remembrance of things past,
I sigh the lack of many a thing I sought,
And with old woes new wail my dear time's waste.
Then can I drown an eye, unused to flow,
For precious friends hid in death's dateless night . . .

35

No more be grieved at that which thou hast done. . . .
All men make faults, and even I in this
Authorizing [*Avouching*] thy trespass [*revolt*] with compare [*compeer; an aristocratic equal or rival*],
Myself corrupting salving thy amiss,
Excusing thy sins more than thy sins are;
For to thy sensual fault I bring in sense–
Thy adverse party is thy advocate–
And 'gainst myself a lawful plea commence.
Such civil war is in my love and hate,

That I an accessory need must be
To that sweet thief [*the trial*] which sourly robs from me.

46

To [de]cide this title is empaneled
A quest of thoughts, all tenants to the heart;
And by their verdict is determined
The clear eye's moiety, and the dear heart's part.

Between seven and eight A.M. on Ash Wednesday, February 25, Essex was beheaded. Although the loss of Essex evidently meant little to de Vere, the loss it foreshadowed meant the world. In the Tower, Southampton had literally worried himself sick; fever and swelling threatened to take his life without the aid of any ax. (Sonnet 45 frets over the return of "swift messengers returned from thee/ Who ev'n but now come back again, assured/ Of thy fair health, recounting it to me.")

On March 13, the fellow Essex rebels Sir Gelly Merrick and Henry Cuffe were taken to the gallows at Tyburn and hanged, cut down while still alive, then drawn and quartered. On March 18, Sir Charles Danvers and Sir Christopher Blount were taken to Tower Hill and given the comparatively humane end of an ax chop to the neck.

De Vere recognized in Danvers's death an opportunity to make an ancestral claim to one of Danvers's forfeited properties. De Vere would be presenting legal briefs to Cecil and the queen for months to come that the Danvers property should be transferred to the earldom of Oxford. In the words of historian Lawrence Stone:

> After the Essex revolt there was a hectic rush for the spoils.... The earl of Oxford angled for Sir Charles Danvers's lands, Sir Robert Cecil grabbed John Littleton's horses, Lord Burghley [*Thomas Cecil, Robert's elder brother*] asked for those of the earl of Southampton.

Sir Robert Cecil had begun receiving petitions from Southampton's wife and mother to spare their beloved from the executioner's ax. One wonders, too, if some version of what became Shake-speare's Sonnet 94 was part of the pleading:

They that have the power to hurt and will do none,
That do not do the thing they most do show,
Who, moving others, are themselves as stone,
Unmovèd, cold and to temptation slow;
They rightly do inherit heaven's graces,

And husband nature's riches from expense;
They are the lords and owners of their faces,
Others but stewards of their excellence.
The summer's flower is to the summer sweet,
Though to itself it only live and die,
But if that flower with base infection meet,
The basest weed outbraves his dignity.
For sweetest things turn sourest by their deeds;
Lilies that fester smell far worse than weeds.

The queen's execution orders had effectively eliminated the only real rival to the Cecils, the Essex faction. Leaving Essex's sidekick still standing would be a fitting coup de grace, ensuring that a living reminder and testament to Cecil's power would endure into the next regime.

Sometime on or around March 18, news arrived that Southampton's sentence had been commuted to life in prison in the Tower of London.

68

Before the golden tresses of the dead,
The right of sepulchers were shorn away.
To live a second life on second head–
Ere beauty's dead fleece made another gay.

Southampton had been spared, and Cecil had been instrumental in convincing the queen to pardon him. But Southampton was, in fact, not Southampton anymore. He'd been stripped of all his lands and titles. He was a commoner, plain old Henry Wriothesley.

69

Those parts of thee that the world's eye doth view
Want nothing that the thought of hearts can mend....
But why thy odor matcheth not thy show,
The soil is this, that thou dost common grow.

The ensuing seven sonnets muse over de Vere's compromised literary fate and, with the fair youth now spared the death sentence, ponder the one fell messenger that de Vere knew would be visiting soon enough.

70

That thou art blamed shall not be thy defect....
Thou hast passed by the ambush of young days.

71

No longer mourn for me when I am dead....
Nay, if you read this line, remember not
The hand that writ it, for I love you so....
Do not so much as my poor name rehearse,
But let your love ev'n with my life decay.

72

After my death, dear love, forget me quite...
Unless you would devise some virtuous lie....
My name be buried where my body is–
And live no more to shame nor me nor you.
For I am shamed by that [*literary work*] which I bring forth
And so should you, to love things nothing worth.

74

The prey of worms, my body being dead,
The coward conquest of a wretch's knife,
Too base of thee to be remembèrd.

76

Why write I still all one, ever the same,
And keep invention [*writing*] in a noted weed [*disguise*]?...
So all my best is spending old words new,
Spending again what is already spent.
For as the sun is daily new and old,
So is my love still telling what is told.

In 1601, the reverend and poet Charles Fitzgeffrey wrote a book of Latin poems and epigrams about friends, colleagues, and the celebrities of his day. In Fitzgeffrey's *Affaniae: Sive Epigrammatum*... (1601), the poet lauded the big names in contemporary English literature: Samuel Daniel, Michael Drayton, Ben Jonson, George Chapman, Thomas Nashe, John Marston, Edmund Spenser, and so on. Glaring in its absence, however, is even the slightest mention of Shake-speare.

However, Fitzgeffrey does include a series of couplets addressed to a writer he cryptically calls "the Bard." One couplet wonders about the state of the Bard's health and suggests that the Bard consider complete literary self-censorship. Another avers that the Bard is melodramatically crucifying himself–and rushing headlong toward posthumous publication. As translated into English, Fitzgeffrey's enigmatic couplets read:

To The Bard

Are you healthy, he who writes for the last generation? [*posterity?*]
Let "the letter" [*the* Sonnets*?*] never be handed over, O Bard. Be silent.

To The Bard

You have been cautious, saying, "I will publish verses after my death."
I would not so hurriedly crucify yourself, O Bard.

Fitzgeffrey may have gotten his hands on some of Shake-speare's *Sonnets*. He may not himself have known the identity of the sonneteer, but if he is referring to the *Sonnets*, he was the first of countless readers to puzzle over the riddles these poems pose. Evidently troubled by the political and/or homoerotic character of the verse, Fitzgeffrey advised that the sonneteer never "hand over" the poems to a printer: "Be silent."

In addition to being maddeningly opaque to every reader from Fitzgeffrey onward, the *Sonnets* mark the final drama in Shake-speare's Elizabethan career. De Vere owed back taxes and was still petitioning for hopeless causes like the forfeited estate of the Essex conspirator Sir Charles Danvers. But there were no more new and grand statements to be made on the political stage. The author was sick and getting sicker; the Cecil cabal was strong and getting stronger; and the queen was still stringing England along, refusing to name an heir.

Wriothesley's recent brush with death–and de Vere's moribund physical state–must have cast de Vere's world in drab, funereal colors. Elizabeth was reaching the end of her line too. The author had once upon a time known Her Majesty as a nubile VENUS, a consort and a lover, the most powerful woman in Europe, with the future of Britain in her blood. But what had become of their lives? De Vere had squandered his on "trifles"–in the self-effacing language of Sonnet 87. Elizabeth had led one of the most incredible lives of her age, but dynastically, her cause was now as hopeless as de Vere's. Elizabeth's mythic emblem in her twilight years was a phoenix rising from the ashes. Yet, without an heir, when mortal fire consumed Elizabeth, the phoenix would not be reborn.

In 1601, an unregistered book called *Love's Martyr* appeared on the London book market. The versifier Robert Chester had written a florid poem imagining the queen's sad state of mind after the loss of the earl of Essex. *Love's Martyr* also anticipated the arrival of a "New Phoenix"–a mythic emblem that would soon become associated with King James VI of Scotland, son of Mary, Queen of Scots. Cecil had been grooming James for the English throne for years. Cecil had unchecked access to Elizabeth's ear to determine who would be the future king of England–and who would be in power and who would not. Chester dedicated *Love's Martyr* to an up-and-comer in the Cecil faction, Sir John Salisbury.

Appended to *Love's Martyr* was a group of thematically related poems, including one by "William Shake-speare" [*sic*] that lamented the death of "Beauty" and "Truth." (De Vere's family motto was "Nothing Truer than Truth.") De Vere pictured himself as the lonesome TURTLE[DOVE] and his sovereign as a dimming and dying PHOENIX. Shake-speare's *Phoenix and the Turtle* is an anticipatory dirge, simultaneously harkening back to the author's youthful passion for his queen and looking ahead to their imminent deaths

Here the anthem doth commence:
Love and constancy is dead;
PHOENIX and the TURTLE fled
In a mutual flame from hence.

So they lov'd, as love in twain
Had the essence but in one:
Two distincts, division none;
Number there in love was slain.

Hearts remote, yet not asunder;
Distance and no space was seen
'Twixt this TURTLE and his Queen
But in them it were a wonder....

Whereupon it made this Threne [funeral song]
To the PHOENIX and the DOVE,
Cosupremes and stars of love,
As Chorus to their tragic scene....

Death is now the PHOENIX' nest,
And the TURTLE's loyal breast
To eternity doth rest.

Leaving no posterity:
'Twas not their infirmity,
It was married chastity.

Truth may seem, but cannot be;
Beauty brag, but 'tis not she;
Truth and Beauty buried be.

To this urn let those repair
That are either true or fair:
For these dead birds sigh a prayer.

Perhaps as he mused in his "trifles" to Wriothesley over the power of his immortalizing pen, de Vere began to ponder the effect of burying his name where his body was. Shake-speare was a corpus of diminishing value to the world for which it was initially created–the court. At least one courtly Shake-speare revival, with halfhearted new topical additions, would amuse the aging queen in the first few years of the seventeenth century. (That throwback to 1580s rivalries, *Twelfth Night,* was staged once at Middle Temple Hall in 1602 and perhaps another time at court the year before.) But other courtly wits, such as Ben Jonson and Thomas Dekker, were generating new and brilliant allegorical comedies, histories, and tragedies for the court's delectation. Jonson, Dekker, et. al., would, naturally, be replaced someday, too, and the life cycle of disposable court dramas and dramatists would continue.

Yet the *Sonnets* reveal that de Vere knew his works would live on.

81

Your name from hence immortal life shall have,
Though I, once gone, to all the world must die.
The earth can yield me but a common grave,
When you entombèd in men's eyes shall lie.
Your monument shall be my gentle verse,
Which eyes not yet created shall o'er-read,
And tongues to be your being shall rehearse,
When all the breathers of this world are dead,
You still shall live–such virtue hath my pen–
Where breath most breathes, ev'n in the mouths of men.

The cover that Will Shakspere provided protected de Vere's writings by depoliticizing their meaning. Yet, despite the self-effacing nature of Sonnet 81, de Vere must also have hoped that the "Shakespeare" ruse would one day unravel, that "Shakespeare" would become a kind of Venetian Carnival mask, withholding the owner's identity from the thronging crowds until the chimes at midnight sounded–when the mask could finally be taken off.

Shake-speare's farewell quartet of plays–*Measure for Measure, King Lear, The Tempest,* and *Hamlet*–forestall dusty death long enough to eke out some concluding thoughts, reconsidering the paradox of an author's obliterated identity in spite of his works' unquestionable immortality. These four plays represent the author's ultimate message to the latter day, his time capsule buried five full fathoms deep, awaiting the indulgence of eyes and ears yet unborn.

Four passages in de Vere's Geneva Bible (with de Vere's underlining) encapsulate what would become Shake-speare's parting request to a darkening world:

13. Then I heard a voice from heaven saying unto me, "Write. Blessed are the dead, which hereafter die in the Lord. Even so saith the Spirit. For they rest from their labors, and their works follow them."

Revelations 14:13

10. For God is not [so] unrighteous that he should forget your work and labor of love. . . .

Hebrews 6:10

c. As the hope of the daylight causeth us not to be offended with the darkness of the night, so ought we patiently to trust that God will clear our cause and restore us to our right.

Psalm 38, footnote c (Geneva ed.)

9. I will bear the wrath of the Lord because I have sinned against him, until he plead my cause and execute judgment for me. Then will he bring me forth into the light, and I shall see his righteousness.

Michah 7:9

Between February and May of 1601, de Vere presented his pleadings to Cecil for the presidency of Wales. The previous long-serving president of Wales–Henry Herbert, earl of Pembroke–had died in January. De Vere was fond of the Herbert family and had been a strong promoter of a marriage alliance between his own second daughter, Bridget, and Pembroke's son William. Now de Vere wanted Pembroke's old position.

As with de Vere's previous unsuccessful attempt at a diplomatic appointment–the governorship of the isle of Jersey in 1600–his letters reveal little grasp of the enormity of the task. Appeals to family ties are all the qualifications de Vere lists. ("... None is nearer allied [to you] than myself, since of your sister, of my [late] wife, only you have received nieces.") The presidency of Wales was no idle monopoly or forest to be farmed for its resources. The previous president had spent practically the whole of his fifteen years in office at the Welsh presidential palace, Ludlow Castle in Shropshire, discharging the daily duties of a regal overseer to an entire nation.

De Vere must have imagined some kind of rule by proxy, wherein he could delegate all the actual duties of leadership. As it was, simply living in the suburb of Hackney, de Vere could scarcely make it to court to pay tidings to his all-powerful former brother-in-law. De Vere's excuse for not being at court more often, an observation that could hardly have helped his application, was that he was a "hater of ceremonies." If the lame, ailing, and friendless de Vere actually thought he stood a chance at becoming president

of Wales, one in which ceremony played no small role, he was living in another world.

The other world that de Vere appears to have inhabited at that moment traces its source to his year abroad at the age of twenty-five. During de Vere's Italian sojourn, manuscripts circulated of the comedy *Epitia* by the Ferraran courtly novelist and playwright Giraldi Cinthio. Adapted from one of Cinthio's short stories, *Epitia* tells the tale of a strange Austrian emperor who decides one day to take leave of his office, transferring power to an underling. The underling is corrupt and hypocritical; all is restored to normality, but only after the figurehead has been toppled and the true original resumes his rightful place.

Measure for Measure is one of Shake-speare's most abstract and autobiographically haunted pieces of writing. The play borrows heavily from Cinthio's *Epitia*–from the cast list to the plot's outline to the drama's setting and tone. But to view *Measure for Measure* merely as a work of adaptation is to miss the point of the exercise. Perhaps more than any other work in the canon, *Measure for Measure* is a parable of the author's own unique predicament.

There is no COSTARD or WILLIAM in *Measure for Measure*. De Vere had satisfied his fascination with the front man in *Love's Labor's Lost* and *The Taming of the Shrew* and purged himself of his anger in *As You Like It* and the *"Will"* sonnets. The play's secret wellspring of comedy is the protagonist's compromised situation. Although *Measure for Measure*'s DUKE (de Vere) would appear to be in complete control of his surroundings, powers outside the scope of the play force him into disguise. It's no coincidence that the word *authority* appears in *Measure for Measure* more often than in any other Shake-speare play. De Vere had come to know more about the censoring power of authority than anyone else of his time.

Measure for Measure's DUKE is a tongue-tied playwright situated within his own creation. Wherever a simple resolution might naturally occur, thus prematurely ending the play, the DUKE jumps in and artificially extends the drama with an unnecessary bit of tension. The DUKE leaves a sex-crazed Puritan in charge of the state and remains in the city incognito, only to complicate matters for scene after inexplicable scene. Drawing from his grab bag of autobiographical favorites, de Vere has the DUKE throw in a "bed trick"–like the one his first wife played on him–while he saves another character from execution by the skin of his teeth–like the Southampton-*cum*-Wriothesley predicament de Vere had so recently sweated through.

If one tries to understand the DUKE as a rational ruler, *Measure for Measure* will be a jumble of inexplicables. But the brilliance of the comedy is in its conceit. *Measure for Measure* is tragicomedy beyond mere laughter and tears. *Measure for Measure* is, with de Vere restored as author, every bit as profound, as moving, and as transcendent as the Bard's tragedies. *Measure for Measure* is one of the greatest plays by Shake-speare, because *Measure for Measure* is also one of the greatest plays *about* "Shakespeare."

In the play's first scene, when the DUKE supposedly leaves Vienna–only to don a disguise and remain–he explains his hasty retreat:

> I love the people
> But I do not like to stage me to their eyes.
> Though it do well, I do not relish well
> Their loud applause and *aves* vehement,
> Nor do I think the man of safe discretion
> That does affect it.

Reprising a familiar theme from the Anne Cecil years, the disguised author sets a chaste and wronged wife (MARIANA) upon the state's unsuspecting deputy (ANGELO). ANGELO has sex with his long-ago betrothed MARIANA, although he thinks he's sleeping with another woman (ISABELLA). The DUKE watches the fireworks–as if he'd become detached enough from his own first marriage that he could set the Anne Cecil predicament on some other character's shoulders.

Ultimately, the wronged ISABELLA becomes the play's advocate for truth telling and mask removing. As de Vere would write in a letter to Cecil, "Truth is truth, though never so old, and time cannot make that false which was once true." Now ISABELLA practically recites these same words, mingled with de Vere's family motto, to the DUKE. The DUKE, in response, self-mockingly dismisses ISABELLA's pleadings.

> ISABELLA It is not truer he is ANGELO
> Than this is all as true as it is strange.
> Nay, it is ten times true. For truth is truth
> To th'end of reckoning.
> DUKE Away with her! Poor soul.
> She speaks this in the infirmity of sense!

As *Coriolanus* comically turns the formula of the tragic hero upside down, *Measure for Measure* expands the bounds of comedy to envelop the tragedy of a man's looming anonymity. Like the other three cornerstones in Shakespeare's farewell quartet, *Measure for Measure* presents an author coming to terms with his willed mask and his masked *Will*.

Measure for Measure was experimental theater as radical as the works of Eugene Ionesco or Samuel Beckett were in the twentieth century. One wonders if it was ever staged before its first known performance in 1738.

Ironically, the theatrical troupe with de Vere's name attached to it was not only not radical, it scarcely merits a footnote in the history of theatrical companies from the early 1590s onward: De Vere's fiscal and organizational ineptitude probably explains why the Earl of Oxford's Men was such a washout.

An anonymous slapdash comedy, *The Weakest Goeth to the Wall,* appeared in print in 1600 stating that it had been performed by the Earl of Oxford's Men. Since *Weakest* draws its source from the 1581 Christopher Hatton–subsidized book *Farewell to Military Profession,* the play reads like a cast-off from the Fisher's Folly years that one or more hangers-on at the Folly put together to amuse their patron. In 1601, another play, *The History of George Scanderbeg,* was registered for publication, with the stationer's entry stating that it was "lately played by the Right Honorable earl of Oxenford his servants." Unlike *Weakest, Scanderbeg* was never printed. Gabriel Harvey mentions *Scanderbeg* in one of his pamphlets and suggests that the play was probably Tom Nashe's attempt circa 1592 to cash in on the hype surrounding Christopher Marlowe's *Tamburlaine.*

These two plays, likely written by two or more de Vere secretaries or associates, are the whole of the Earl of Oxford's Men's known repertoire under de Vere's supervision. The Earl of Oxford's Men, however, did soon find a willing and capable supervisor. After the downfall of Essex, the earl of Worcester, the newly appointed Master of the Horse, was still optimistically climbing the Elizabethan courtly ladder. According to the rules of the courtly game, the highest flyers needed their own theatrical troupe to advocate their patron's pet causes during the annual Christmastime revels season. By 1602, Worcester's fledgling troupe had subsumed whatever remained of de Vere's company. On March 31, 1602, this newly amalgamated troupe applied for a permanent home at the Boar's Head Inn in London.

Had Worcester's enthusiastic takeover come at an earlier phase in de Vere's literary career, the history of Shake-speare might have been radically different. But Worcester assumed the newly consolidated company's leadership at the bitter end of de Vere's life. What use did a social climber like Worcester have for a backward-looking author who obsessed over such cheery topics as death, enforced anonymity, and a lifetime of wrong turns and bad decisions? While Worcester's Men thrived well into to the reign of King James I, one never sees a hint of de Vere's affiliation with them again.

On March 22, 1602, de Vere sent Cecil a fifth and final petition to receive the inheritance of the late Sir Charles Danvers's Wiltshire estate. De Vere claimed that Elizabeth had promised him the property but, as was her wont, was doing nothing to fulfill her promise. "I find by this waste of time that lands will not be carried without deeds," he snapped. And no judges or other functionaries of state would move forward without word from on high. "Then is my suit as it was the first day," de Vere lamented. The Danvers case proved as fruitless as his petitions for the isle of Jersey appointment, presidency of Wales, and various monopolies de Vere had attempted to secure during the previous decade.

Other than a legal entanglement with an old tenant and notices of more back taxes owed in Hackney, nothing else of note about de Vere slipped into the historical record for the rest of 1602. At the end of the year, the countess of Oxford exchanged New Year's gifts with Elizabeth.

By February 1603, Queen Elizabeth was dying. Since acceding to the throne in 1558, she'd superstitiously never taken off her coronation ring. By 1603, the ring had grown into her flesh. The ingrown piece of jewelry had to be sawn off her finger. Elizabeth was sensitive about symbols; as far as she was concerned, this portended a dissolution of her sacred union with the nation. A second ill omen came on February 24, when Elizabeth's closest personal friend died. Catherine (Kate) Carey, countess of Nottingham, had been installed as a maid of honor in 1558, had nursed Elizabeth through her nearly fatal bout with smallpox in 1562, and had been variously first lady of the bedchamber, mistress of robes, and mistress of jewels. Now robbed of her spiritual sister, Elizabeth began hinting at her own imminent death.

The question of the succession was on everyone's mind. According to an inquiry Cecil later spearheaded, on March 21, de Vere hosted a dinner party at King's Place where the topic was broached. De Vere's guest was another flighty and temperamental lord, the earl of Lincoln. De Vere and Lincoln talked into the night about the future of England and what the old nobility should do about it. De Vere no doubt regaled his guest with chivalric visions of succession by sword–involving spiriting a rightful heir to the throne over to France only to return with a conquering army. According to a secondhand account recorded by the commander of the Tower of London, Sir John Peyton:

> [De Vere and Lincoln] after dinner retired apart from all company [and] began, as the earl of Lincoln said, to discourse with him of the impossibility of the queen's life and that the nobility, being peers of the realm, were bound to take care for the common good of the state in the cause of the succession–in the which, himself (meaning the earl of Lincoln) ought to have more regard than others, because he had a nephew of the blood royal, naming my lord Hastings [Lincoln's nephew], whom he persuaded the earl of Lincoln to send for. And that there should be means used to convey him [*Hastings*] over into France, where he should find friends that would make him a party of the which there was a precedent in former times.

English kings-to-be had indeed been known to gather their forces across the Channel to mount an invasion. This "precedent" came both from recent history (as, described in *Richard III*) and from the English chronicles (such as informed *King Lear*).

Lincoln claimed that during the post-supper chatter, de Vere also began to rail against the legitimacy of the Scots king, James VI–a prince who practically

every other noble in England had recognized would become King James I of England. But, as Peyton later explained to Cecil:

> I knew him [de Vere] to be so weak in body, in friends, in hability, and all other means to raise any combustion in the state as I never feared any danger to proceed from so feeble a foundation.

De Vere had set himself apart from practically every other English subject. So, alone on the hill, the old man howled.

On the other hand, Lincoln was probably the ultimate instigator of the illconceived earl of Hastings conspiracy–it was Lincoln's, not de Vere's, kinsman who was being put forward as an heir to the throne; Lincoln, not de Vere, had discussed the Hastings succession with the French embassy. Moreover, Peyton himself admitted that Lincoln was the sort who would blame someone else for his own mutterings or seditions: "His [*Lincoln's*] fashion is to condemn the world if thereby he might excuse himself," Peyton later wrote to Cecil.

By the week of March 20, 1603, it was clearly only a matter of days. Elizabeth was ill, could not eat, refused medicine, and refused to go to bed. "She saw things" when in bed, it was said. Cushions were laid on the floor where she rested instead. And still she would not address the question of her successor. She lost her voice sometime on the twenty-first or twenty-second. Dubious accounts exist of the queen privately informing Cecil–whether by word or by pantomime gestures–that James of Scotland had her dying blessing. In fact, it's just as likely that Elizabeth never named a successor and that the "Great Council" of peers, privy councilors, and bishops made the decision for her posthumously.

Between one and three A.M. on March 24, Sir Robert Carey heard from Elizabeth's private chambers the wails and sobs of the queen's ladies-in-waiting. Her Majesty had just died. Carey raced from Richmond Palace, where the queen's body now lay, to Westminster to await official orders from the Privy Council to make his way north to Scotland. By ten A.M., without any further instructions, Carey risked it. He posted 155 miles to Doncaster by nightfall–the longest recorded journey on horseback in England over a single day. On March 25, the nation's official harbinger to the future king James I of England had made it as far as Northumberland, and on the evening of March 26, Carey arrived at Holyroodhouse in Edinburgh, just as James was being seated for supper. Carey's land speed record–London to Edinburgh in less than sixty hours–would not be bested by any form of transportation until the early nineteenth century.

The Great Council issued a broadside proclamation announcing the impending arrival of King James I of England, Scotland, and Wales. De Vere neither signed the proclamation, nor was his name listed as a signatory on the

proclamation's first imprint. However, de Vere's name appeared on subsequent reprints of the nation's declaration of King James I's legitimacy as heir to the throne.

News of the queen's death triggered a nationwide wave of mourning. At least thirty printed ballads, books, and broadsides quickly appeared in shops around London. One of these funerary tributes, Henry Chettle's *England's Mourning Garment,* mused over Shake-speare's silence at this most auspicious turning point in the nation's history. "Shepherd, remember our Elizabeth," Chettle wrote. "And sing her rape, done by that TARQUIN, death."

In the days that followed Elizabeth's death, a now leaderless state turned its eyes north toward a foreign king, raised on foreign soil. James's peaceful progress southward into England would signify the unification of two previously sovereign nations: England and Scotland. Such a smooth and seamless transition of power was a tribute to the political cunning of Sir Robert Cecil. Cecil had spent years working toward this moment, when his cabal would engineer the very succession of the monarchy–thereby ensuring themselves the leading positions of power in the new regime.

King James I was a politically shrewd man, albeit one with his own weaknesses and sore spots that aspirants for his favors would exploit in the years to come. One particularly sensitive subject was Elizabeth's execution of his mother. James may have acquiesced to his mother's judicial murder in 1586, but he would still harbor a lifelong resentment of the political compromise to which he had once agreed. Although Elizabeth was first buried in the grand sepulcher of Henry VII at Westminster, James eventually turned Elizabeth's funerary monument into a public symbol of his animosity toward his predecessor. At James's behest, Elizabeth's remains were later reburied in a new tomb. The king also had his mother reburied in Westminster, practically within spitting distance of Gloriana's statuary. Visitors to Westminster Abbey to this day can see Mary Stuart's ornate mausoleum on the south side of the Henry VII Chapel, while on the chapel's north side, half the size of the Scots queen's memorial, is the more modest tomb of Queen Elizabeth I. James's predecessor, perhaps the greatest monarch England has ever known, rests atop the remains of her Catholic rival and hated half-sister Mary Tudor.

Payback came in other, less superficial forms as well. One of James's first acts as king of England was to order the release of Henry Wriothesley and to restore the common rebel against the Elizabethan state to his former titles and appointments. Nineteen days remained between Southampton's release from the Tower of London (April 10, 1603) and the state funeral of Queen Elizabeth (April 28). As the scholar and author Hank Whittemore recently pointed out, the nineteen sonnets beginning with Sonnet 107 appear to present daily meditations that culminate in the interment of the house of Tudor.

107

Not mine own fears nor the prophetic soul
Of the wide world dreaming on things to come
Can the lease of my true love control:
Supposed as forfeit to a confined doom.
The mortal moon [*Elizabeth, associated with the moon goddess Diana*]
    hath her eclipse endured [*died*]....
My love looks fresh, and death to me subscribes,
Since spite of him I'll live in this poor rhyme.

109

O never say that I was false of heart,
Though absence seemed my flame to qualify....
    If I have ranged
Like him that travels [*King James*], I return again,
Just to the time, not with the time exchanged:
So that myself bring water for my stain.

The final line quoted above from Sonnet 109 involves a point of ceremonial arcana. As Lord Great Chamberlain of England, de Vere was heir to a tradition at the royal coronation that involved bringing water and towels to the monarch. Earl John had performed this office at Queen Elizabeth's coronation in 1558. Before and after King James's coronation feast, the seventeenth earl of Oxford would–with all its baptismal implications–wash the royal countenance. "Hater of ceremony" though he professed to be, de Vere applied for and received this ancestral water-bearing role for King James's coronation. In the context of Sonnet 109, de Vere writes of performing the same function for himself, cleansing his soul from the metaphorical "travels" (and travails) of his own life.

As the reactions to Southampton's release from his "confined doom" continue to flow, the sickly author reflects upon the shame of his lowly playwrighting profession and to the Shake-speare "brand" now stamped on his works.

110

Alas, 'tis true, I have gone here and there
And made myself a motley [*fool*] to the [*public's*] view,
Gored mine own thoughts, sold cheap what is most dear,
Made old offences of affections new.

111

Thence comes it that my name receives a brand,
And almost thence my nature is subdued

To what it works in....
Pity me then, dear friend, and I assure ye,
Ev'n that your pity is enough to cure me.

115

Those lines that I before have writ do lie,
Ev'n those that said I could not love you dearer....
But reck'ning time, whose millioned accidents
Creep in 'twixt vows and change decrees of kings...

De Vere's worsening state of health remained at the forefront of his thoughts too.

118

[S]ick of welfare, [I] found a kind of meetness
To be diseased ere that there was true needing.

119

What potions have I drunk of Siren tears,
Distilled from limbecks [*alchemical medicines*] foul as hell within...
How have mine eyes out of their spheres been fitted
In the distraction of this madding fever!

123

No, Time, thou shalt not boast that I do change....
Thy registers [*the biblical "book of life"*] and thee I both defy,
Not wond'ring at the present nor the past....
This I do vow, and this shall ever be,
I will be true despite thy scythe and thee.

The grim reaper hovered ever nearer to the author's head, even as final preparations for Elizabeth's state funeral fell into place.

The historical records are unclear whether de Vere attended Queen Elizabeth's funeral. He was granted forty yards of cloth for fashioning mourning garments for himself and his servants. De Vere's role in royal processions–such as one conducted for King James the following March–was to flank the canopy bearers. And if Sonnet 125 is to be believed, de Vere was indifferent to the whole undertaking. He states that it means nothing to him to perform such ceremonial duties as a canopy bearer, putting on a great show of outward mourning for the late queen, laying a foundation for funerary monuments that will ultimately be decimated by time anyway:

125

Were't aught [*anything*] to me I bore the canopy
With my extern the outward honoring,
Or laid great bases for eternity,
Which proves more short than waste or ruining...

Nostalgia is a kaleidoscope. At the dawn of the Jacobean Age, one disillusioned courtier was fixing his retrospective gaze into the viewfinder: The queen had certainly indulged her lordly fool; her £1,000 annuity never stopped, although it was also never enough. She was maddeningly opaque and fickle; she was amazingly brilliant and fascinating. She was tightfisted, two-faced, and a horrible tease. She was, in her day, perhaps the sexiest and most alluring woman de Vere had ever met in his life. She was a hag; she was a goddess. She was dead.

In a letter dated variously April 25 and 27–mere days before Elizabeth's funeral–de Vere wrote his first reflections upon the late queen's life for Cecil. The missive is an arresting departure. Reading de Vere's sixty other extant letters, nine tenths of which were written to his father- and brother-in-law, is mostly like watching a poker game. Cards are dealt, played, and held close. But rarely, if ever, does de Vere lay them all on the table. How could he? Every piece of information handed to either Cecil *père* or *fils* was potentially a nugget of power–a tip for the spy network, a piece of gossip to be seeded among the enemy, an innocent fact that might someday be transformed into a weapon.

But de Vere's April 1603 letter to "the ryght honorable my very good Brother in Lawe, Sir Robert Cecil, principall secretarie" is as candid a glimpse into the author's mind as he ever set on paper for his in-laws. De Vere first asked what he could do "concerning our duties to the King's Majesty." De Vere had recently been caught playing in the wrong playground; now was clearly a time for an excess of "oblation" toward the new monarch. To break the ice, de Vere then shared a candid anecdote about trying to keep up with Cecil, despite a state of deteriorating health:

> For the attending or meeting of His Majesty, for by reason of my infirmity, I cannot come among you [at court] so often as I wish. And by reason my house is not so near... either I do not hear at all from you or at least with the latest [news]. As this other day it happened to me, receiving a letter at 9 of the clock, not to fail at 8 of the same morning to be at Whitehall–which, being impossible, yet I hasted so much as I came to follow you into Ludgate, though through press of people and horses, I could not reach your company as I desired. But followed as I might.

De Vere's sketch of life at King's Place makes it clear that he had picked his domicile to put some distance between himself and the court. Yet, when the call to appear at Whitehall arrived at his doorstep, he couldn't *not* respond.

The letter now shifts its attention to the upcoming state funeral. De Vere writes:

> I cannot but find a great grief in myself to remember the mistress which we have lost–under whom both you and myself from our greenest years have been in a manner brought up. And although it hath pleased God, after an earthly kingdom, to take her up into a more permanent and heavenly state, wherein I do not doubt but she is crowned with glory... yet the long time which we spent in her service, we cannot look for so much left of our days as to bestow upon another....
>
> In this common shipwreck, mine is above all the rest–who least regarded, though often comforted, of all her followers, she hath left to try my fortune among the alterations of time and chance: either without sail, whereby to take advantage of any prosperous gale; or with[out] anchor to ride till the storm be overpast.

De Vere's April 1603 letter to Cecil pines for a familiar Elizabethan courtly landscape, however flawed and corrupt it may have been. To stress his point about the extremes of his fortunes, de Vere draws analogies to gales and shipwrecks. Maritime metaphors were ready at hand.

In the fall of 1575, when de Vere had been in his "greenest years" in Genoa, the visiting English earl had mustered troops alongside a leading Genoese patrician named Prospero Fattinanti–or so libels of Charles Arundell *et al.*, claim he claimed. Lord Prospero became the duke of Genoa soon after the city's civil-war-that-almost-was, while Lord Oxford allegedly bragged that he was almost made duke of Milan, were it not for Queen Elizabeth's intercession.

In 1603, as de Vere looked back upon a lifetime of misfires and should-haves, the glory of his former Genoese comrade-in-arms must have summoned up a sympathetic image of a Castiglionian courtier standing tall for the ancien régime. A world that Lord Prospero fought for and won in 1575 was a world that de Vere no doubt realized was dying just as surely as he.

As previously noted, de Vere's on-and-off secretary Anthony Munday had for years been working on translating a series of continental chivalric romances about a knight named Primaleon and his progenitors. The third book in the Primaleon series tells of a magician who controls an "enclosed island"; the magician spirits Primaleon, a prince, and other assorted characters to his island and manipulates their surroundings so as to resolve conflicts and bring lovers together. Munday's literary mining expeditions in the *Primaleon* vein

paid generous dividends for his former employer: *Primaleon, Book III,* served as the source for Shake-speare's play of PROSPERO and his enchanted, "uninhabited" isle.

Generations of scholars have debated where this island could be–the Bermudas, the Azores, somewhere in the Mediterranean, the island Cuttyhunk off the coast of Massachusetts, etc. But they've missed the joke. Just as *The Tempest* is a surreal recasting of the events of the final years of de Vere's life, so the play's setting is naturally a surrealist vision of the island he called home. *The Tempest*'s "uninhabited island" is England.

The Tempest was Shake-speare's redrawing of the Elizabethan map, using *Primaleon* as a set of guideposts. Mislabeled as a romance, *The Tempest* is actually a fantastical and even dangerous satire that recounts the tales of, as noted in Chapter 10, the late Lord Burghley (GONZALO), de Vere's daughter Elizabeth (MIRANDA), and her husband the earl of Derby (FERDINAND). The plotlines these characters follow are hardly controversial–especially that of GONZALO, who represents de Vere's most sentimental recollections of his former guardian and father-in-law.

However, what makes *The Tempest* an explosive play is its burlesque of the Essex Rebellion and its key players. In 1605 the dramatist Samuel Daniel was hauled before the Privy Council to answer for the crime of dramatizing the 1601 uprising. Daniel's colleague Fulke Greville destroyed one of his plays, *Cleopatra,* out of fear that he, too, would be charged with representing the Essex Rebellion onstage.

The Tempest presents Shake-speare's final word on the horrid mistakes that Essex, Southampton, and company had made. To insulate himself from the woes of Daniel and Greville, de Vere turned the uprising into what he probably had seen it as all along: a grotesque.

The ringleader of *The Tempest*'s rebellion is a deformed subhuman named CALIBAN. Just as Essex had once had a rumored tryst with Elizabeth de Vere, so CALIBAN is said to have almost "violated" MIRANDA. CALIBAN's gross and vile nature is in part a manifestation of de Vere's dislike of Essex. But more than mere spite motivates the characterization of CALIBAN. *The Tempest*'s "man–monster" was probably also the author's satirical response to utopian visions of the "noble savage"–as most famously put forward by the sixteenth-century French philosopher Michel de Montaigne.

CALIBAN's coconspirators, in a comic apology for the other participants in the Essex Rebellion, are simple clownish drunkards who are little more than along for the ride. In Shake-speare's version of the 1601 mutiny, CALIBAN and crew try to sneak into PROSPERO's cell and steal some of his magic. But PROSPERO and his puckish muse, ARIEL, hound the rebels into a cage. After the insurgents have been tracked down and imprisoned, the play's puppet master says to ARIEL:

PROSPERO Let them be hunted soundly. At this hour
Lies at my mercy all mine enemies.
Shortly shall all my labors end, and thou
Shalt have the air at freedom. For a little [while]
Follow, and do me service.

The suppression of the rebellion represents the culmination of PROSPERO's career as a magical creator and manipulator.

After arranging for the rebels' pardon (CALIBAN does not face Essex's mortal fate) *The Tempest*'s sorcerer reflects on his tremendous career as resuscitator of long-dead figures, such as the many monarchs and nobles who populate Shake-speare's history plays. Yet PROSPERO also knows that he has little life left in him to continue his art.

PROSPERO Go, release them [*the rebels*], ARIEL.
My charms I'll break, their senses I'll restore. . . .
[T]he strong-bas'd promontory [*cliff*]
Have I made shake, and by the spurs pluck'd up
The pine and cedar. Graves at my command
Have wak'd their sleepers, op'd, and let 'em forth
By my so potent art. But this rough magic
I here abjure [*give up*] . . . I'll break my staff,
Bury it certain fathoms in the earth,
And deeper than did ever plummet sound
I'll drown my book.

The self-silencing theme continues into *The Tempest*'s epilogue, in which PROSPERO walks onstage solus and addresses the audience directly. De Vere knew that the recognition of his authorship of Shake-speare would rely on those eyes and ears yet unborn who would read and watch his plays. PROSPERO's epilogue is Shake-speare's great redemption song–pleading with posterity to take him at his word. He asks for future generations' "indulgence," in both the word's secular usage and in the Catholic sense of escape from Purgatory–in this case, a Purgatory of forced anonymity.

[R]elease me from my bands
With the help of your good hands.
Gentle breath of yours my sails
Must fill, or else my project fails,
Which was to please. Now I want
Spirits to enforce, art to enchant,
And my ending is despair,
Unless I be reliev'd by prayer,

Which pierces so that it assaults
Mercy itself and frees all faults.
As you from crimes would pardon'd be,
Let your indulgence set me free.

The only kind of indulgence that would greet the earl of Oxford in 1603 came from an unexpected source to the north.

On May 7, de Vere sent Cecil (soon to be Robert Lord Cecil, baron of Essendon) a letter arguing for the restoration of the de Vere family's properties of Waltham Forest and Havering House in Essex. De Vere noted that his ancestors had owned the estate "almost sithence [*sic*] the time of William Conqueror." And it was only the pernicious whim of Henry VIII that had stripped his family of Waltham and Havering. Elizabeth had once assured de Vere that Waltham and Havering would be restored to the earldom of Oxford. "But so it was," de Vere told his former brother-in-law, "she was not so ready to perform her word as I was too ready to believe it." Having written numerous similar pleas for offices and appointments in the past, de Vere must have anticipated that his words would fall on deaf ears–just as they had throughout the previous four decades.

Yet, on July 18, King James granted de Vere his wish. Waltham and Havering were now his.

The following week, on July 25, de Vere ceremonially washed the king at the coronation dinner and, "hater of ceremonies" though he was, participated in the coronation service at Westminster.

James kept the benevolence flowing. On August 2, the newly crowned monarch extended de Vere's £1,000 annuity. This was no mere pro forma exercise. Consolidating the account books of two national treasuries to make one impoverished nation, James could just as easily have cut de Vere off. Instead, the king extended his predecessor's benevolence, as if presenting a peace offering. De Vere had never known such swift royal remuneration in his life.

A thank you to this very generous monarch was in order.

During August, James and his court were on an inaugural progress throughout the western and southern counties of England. They'd reached the city of Salisbury on August 26. Tantalizing secondhand evidence exists of a letter from de Vere's friend the dowager countess of Pembroke to her son William Herbert, earl of Pembroke–who was then, presumably, on progress with the king. The literary patroness and poet commanded her son to return home and bring the king with him. *As You Like It,* she noted, was about to be performed on the grounds of Wilton House. And, the dowager countess reportedly assured her son, "we have the man Shakespeare with us."

Sure enough, according to the royal chronicler John Nichols, "On the twenty-ninth and thirtieth of August, the Royal Party were entertained at Wilton." The man *Shakspere* was part of the newly incorporated King's Men

(formerly the Lord Chamberlain's Men), and the King's Men were touring the provinces during the summer of 1603, since the London stages had been closed for the plague. The question remains unanswered, however, whether the dowager countess was referring in her letter to the actor who inspired WILLIAM or the man who created WILLIAM. The Wilton performance of *As You Like It,* in either case, would have been a fitting introduction to Shakespeare for the new king: love put to the test, family feuds, exiled courtiers, high hilarity, and an author's standoff with a country clown.

❧

De Vere's youngest daughter, Susan, was evidently on friendly terms with her lame and impoverished father around this time. She signed a letter dated only "1603" to Cecil from Hackney–presumably King's Place. The girl wrote her uncle to request permission to borrow some money to visit Queen Anne, "knowing my charges [*expenses*] would be more than ordinary." Lady Susan came by her propensity for borrowing naturally.

As de Vere's one remaining single daughter, the sixteen-year-old girl faced the aristocratic marriage market with a distinct disadvantage: Her father had nothing to offer for a dowry. During the previous summer, the poet and pardoned Essex rebel John Davies–who had previously written a masque to celebrate Elizabeth de Vere's wedding–had said as much in considerably more loaded language. Davies had written a masque for a group of noble young ladies, including Susan de Vere, to perform at court during the summer of 1602. As part of the show, each masquer was given a gift accompanied by a witty couplet. Susan was given nothing. Davies's epigram for her read:

> Nothing's your lot. That's more than can be told.
> For Nothing is more precious than gold.

What in the early seventeenth-century was "more than can be told" can today be told in one word: CORDELIA.

As the youngest of de Vere's three daughters, Susan de Vere was a clear prototype for *King Lear*'s dowerless child:

> LEAR What can you say to draw a third more opulent than your sisters?
> Speak.
> CORDELIA Nothing.
> LEAR Nothing?
> COR. Nothing.
> LEAR Nothing will come of nothing. Speak again.
> COR. Unhappy that I am, I cannot heave
> My heart into my mouth. I love Your Majesty
> According to my bond, no more nor less....

> LEAR But goes thy heart with this?
> COR. Ay, my good lord.
> LEAR So young and so untender?
> COR. So young, my lord, and true.
> LEAR Let it be so. Thy truth then be thy dow'r!

CORDELIA's banter with her father plays like a baroque minuet upon the de Vere family motto: Nothing truer than truth.

While CORDELIA's story is well known, the play's EDMUND–EDGAR subplot is underappreciated. Onto the original father–daughter plot of *King Leir*–a Queen's Men's text that no doubt originated with de Vere and his secretaries–de Vere grafted a story from Sir Philip Sidney about a deceiving bastard son who disinherits his legitimate half-brother through treachery. EDMUND and EDGAR's battle for possession of their father's true rights parallels what must have been one truly tempestuous internal struggle going on in de Vere's mind as he prepared himself for the grave–and wondered how his children and, ultimately, posterity would perceive him.

The bastard of *King Lear,* EDMUND, tricks his gullible father (the EARL OF GLOUCESTER) into doubting the truth of GLOUCESTER's own legitimate son (EDGAR) by means of a letter, a written text.

> GLOUCESTER. What paper were you reading?
> EDMUND Nothing, my lord.
> GLO. No?... The quality of nothing hath not such need to hide itself.
> Let's see. Come, if it be nothing, I shall not need spectacles.

Lear's symphony of "nothing" continues.

EDMUND then convinces his trusting brother to flee on the false pretense that EDGAR has somehow acted offensively toward their father. To escape detection, EDGAR disguises himself as a madman.

> EDGAR Whiles I may 'scape
> I will preserve myself and am bethought
> To take the basest and most poorest shape
> That ever penury, in contempt of man,
> Brought near to beast. My face I'll grime with filth,
> Blanket my loins, elf all my hairs in knots,
> And with presented nakedness outface
> The winds and persecutions of the sky....
> That's something yet. EDGAR I nothing am.

EDGAR meets up with the disheveled and distracted LEAR, who becomes convinced that EDGAR is a "philosopher" and a "learned Theban." EDGAR winds

up guiding a blinded GLOUCESTER, who naturally only gains his vision for the truth after he loses his physical sight.

Yet, as the tides begin to turn and EDMUND and his fellow villains begin to lose the power they've usurped, EDGAR casts aside his feigned monstrosity. "Men must endure their going hence even as their coming hither," EDGAR observes. "Ripeness is all."

A letter written by EDGAR issues a challenge to single combat with EDMUND. Finally, as EDGAR and EDMUND meet for their duel, EDGAR conceals his face behind a helmet. When a HERALD instructs EDGAR to identify himself to the crowd, the anonymous combatant replies:

> EDGAR Know, my name is lost.
> By treason's tooth bare-gnawn and canker-bit,
> Yet am I noble as the adversary
> I come to cope.

EDMUND falls, and EDGAR reveals himself to the world. EDGAR the true conquers EDMUND the false, and though his name was "lost," EDGAR is ultimately brought forth into the light.

In January 1604, even as the first steps were being taken for a project that would become the King James Bible, de Vere returned to the work that began when his life effectively began–at the age of twelve, upon the death of his father and his arrival at the lion's den of Cecil House.

The Tempest may have been the last play the author created from start to finish. But *Hamlet* must be another one of the last works de Vere touched: The final scene, if nothing else, appears to date from that brief period, from August 1603 onward, when King James had won over a once-reluctant de Vere. In the person of his Danish prince, de Vere gives an ex post facto nod to the legitimacy of the Scots regime. As HAMLET lies dying, he explains to his confidant HORATIO–in words reminiscent of Beowulf's instructions to his beloved Wiglaf–that the prince from the kingdom to the north (FORTINBRAS) should inherit the throne.

> HAMLET I cannot live to hear the news from England.
> But I do prophesy th' election lights
> On FORTINBRAS. He has my dying voice....
> FORTINBRAS For me, with sorrow, I embrace my fortune.
> I have some rights of memory in this kingdom,
> Which now to claim my vantage doth invite me.

Although the invading warrior FORTINBRAS does not represent King James as HAMLET so thoroughly represents de Vere, the closing lines of Shake-speare's greatest play are de Vere's peace offering to a monarch who had treated him with respect.

On January 30, 1604, de Vere wrote a businesslike letter to James to thank him again for his generosity in restoring Waltham and Havering to his otherwise ruined estate, to report on a survey he'd ordered of the lands, and to advocate for the prosecution of a poacher, Sir John Gray. The simple fact that de Vere could write to the king directly without going through an intermediary on the Privy Council–verboten under the Tudors–was a harbinger of the many changes the Stuarts would be ushering in. Had de Vere lived a few more years into James's regime, his fortunes might well have been better secured.

But that did not happen. Instead, de Vere attended one state function and then simply dropped from sight. On March 15, 1604, de Vere joined a parade of peers escorting the new king through London. A lame, poor, and despised earl of Oxford marched within a pike's length from King James, who was borne aloft, sheltered beneath a canopy. The Earl Marshal–Edward Somerset, earl of Worcester–carried the Sword of State, marching next to de Vere. Four days later, James called his first Parliament. De Vere and his peers were summoned to the House of Lords; de Vere never appeared. More money was owed, this time to a joiner who claimed to have worked on Fisher's Folly and Plaistow House, which went unpaid.

On June 18, de Vere transferred custody of the forest of Essex to his son-in-law Lord Norris and his cousin Sir Francis Vere.

On June 24, the earl of Oxford died of unknown causes–no doubt of the maladies that had long plagued him. De Vere was buried in the churchyard of St. Augustine at Hackney on July 6. De Vere's half-cousin Percival Golding later wrote a brief eulogy to the deceased.

> Edward de Vere, only son of John, born the 12th day of April 1550, earl of Oxenford, high chamberlain, Lord Bolbec, Sandford, and Badlesmere, steward of the forest in Essex, and of the Privy Council to the King's Majesty that now is. [*De Vere was not, so far as can be determined today, a member of King James's Privy Council.*] Of whom I will only speak what all men's voices confirm: He was a man in mind and body absolutely accomplished with honorable endowments.

During the eighteenth century, the Church of St. Augustine at Hackney was razed, and the present St. John-at-Hackney was erected in its place. Golding also reported that "Edward de Veer... lieth buried at Westminster [Abbey]." This curious claim has never been corroborated. De Vere's corpse

appears to have been lost to the ages. De Vere's corpus, on the other hand, still awaits its final verdict.

HAMLET I am dead, HORATIO. Wretched queen, adieu!
You that look pale, and tremble at this chance,
That are but mutes or audience to this act,
Had I but time–as this fell sergeant Death,
Is strict in his arrest–O, I could tell you–
But let it be. HORATIO, I am dead.
Thou livest. Report me and my cause aright
To the unsatisfied. . . .
O God, HORATIO, what a wounded name,
Things standing thus unknown, shall I leave behind me!
If thou didst ever hold me in thy heart,
Absent thee from felicity awhile,
And in this harsh world, draw thy breath in pain
To tell my story.

EPILOGUE

[1604–1623]

AN AIR OF MYSTERY SURROUNDS EDWARD DE VERE'S JUNE 24, 1604, death. He left no will; there is no record of any funeral. But for the elegies referred to in Chapter 11, there were no memorials.

One possible reason for the hush-hush nature of de Vere's passing has been suggested: suicide. Had the ailing earl taken his own life, the law mandated that some of his possessions–including, perhaps, manuscripts–should be forfeited to the crown. A suicide's survivors would thus be ill advised to draw any attention to the deceased. Those with political clout would no doubt pull whatever strings they could to paper over the legal quagmire.

Equally mysterious was the other event that took place on June 24. On the evening of de Vere's death, King James rounded up the earl of Southampton and assorted former Essex Rebellion cohorts. As Nicolo Molin, the Venetian ambassador to England, wrote to his superiors in letters posted June 26 and July 4:

> On Sunday night [June 24], by order of the king and [Privy] Council, the earl of Southampton, Baron Danvers, and five others were arrested and each one confined in a separate house. Yesterday morning [June 25], after undergoing several examinations, they were set at liberty. . . .
>
> [*Molin continues on July 4*]
> The reason for Southampton's arrest was the slanderous charge preferred against him by unknown enemies that he plotted to slay several Scots who were much about the person of the king. On his release, he went to the king and declared that if he knew who the slanderer was he would challenge him to combat. But as he did not, he could only appeal to His Majesty. The king gave him fair words but nothing else as yet.

According to Sir Anthony Weldon's 1650 retrospective history of the Jacobean court, the king acted on the urging of Sir Robert Cecil–now Lord Salisbury–who had "put some jealousies into the king's head."

King Henri IV of France, the former king of Navarre, marveled to his English ambassador in a letter dated July 14:

> I find it strange that [King James] dissatisfies at once the Catholics and Puritans, that he so lightly jailed and then released the earl of Southampton and the other persons designated in your specified letters.

King James's strange behavior–and his malleability at the hands of Cecil and others–would be the subject for much gossip in the years to come.

Sometime during the latter half of 1604 an ornate print edition of *Hamlet* appeared, the title page of which said it was "newly imprinted and enlarged to almost as much again as it was according to the true and perfect copy." A printer's device incorporating the royal coat of arms graced the top of the first page of the play's text. The 1604 "good quarto" of *Hamlet* was to be as regal a funereal send-off for Shake-speare as the closing scene of the Danish tragedy. After the 1604 *Hamlet* quarto was published, the rest was indeed silence.

Excepting a brief spate noted below, no new Shake-speare plays would appear in print between 1604 and the months leading up to the 1623 First Folio. The Shake-speare canon contains no unambiguous references to literary sources or events after 1604. Although Shake-speare waxes poetic about a number of pre-1604 scientific discoveries (including William Gilbert's 1600 theory of geomagnetism and "Tycho's Supernova" of 1572), no new science appears in Shake-speare after de Vere's death (including a supernova that appeared in October 1604 and Johannes Kepler's groundbreaking 1609 study of the orbit of the planet Mars). Although some pre-1604 reprints of Shake-speare plays had advertised that they were "newly corrected" by the author, after 1604 Shake-speare stopped correcting his published works too.

The documentary evidence for post-1604 composition of the Shake-speare canon is vanishingly small–arguably nil. After de Vere's death, the Shake-speare factory had all but closed down. (For more on the multiple layers of post-1604 Shake-spearean silence, see Appendix C, "The 1604 Question.")

The King's Men would continue performing Shake-speare plays through the remainder of the decade and into the next, from *King Lear* and *Julius Caesar* at court to *Cymbeline* and *The Winter's Tale* at the Globe Theatre. But these performance records give no indication when these plays were written. No doubt in a gesture of gratitude for James's kind treatment of the Essex

conspirators, one overnight house arrest notwithstanding, Southampton staged *Love's Labor's Lost* for James and the court during the Christmas revels season of 1604–05.

De Vere's ghost was scarcely allowed a moment's rest. Brokers and play buyers would have been eager to get their hands on the late author's unpublished and unstaged works. Friends of the family and de Vere's professional colleagues were in an ideal position to access the priceless papers to be found at King's Place in Hackney.

In a satire published in 1604, Anthony Munday's friend Thomas Middleton mused over this very scenario. In Middleton's 1604 *Black Book*, Lucifer returns to earth after receiving Pierce Penniless's letters.

> No sooner was *Pierce Penniless* breathed forth, but I, the light-burning sergeant, Lucifer, quenched my fiery shape and whipped into a constable's nightgown, the cunningest habit that could be, to search tipsy taverns, roosting inns, and frothy alehouses.

One of the characters Lucifer runs across in his wanderings is a destitute FALSTAFFian lieutenant married to a prostitute named Audrey. (Recall AUDREY was the name of the country muse whom TOUCHSTONE marries in *As You Like It.*) Lucifer discovers the lieutenant and his dear Audrey sleeping.

Middleton describes the abject and pitiful state of the rogue officer, not unlike HAMLET in his antic disposition: "In a pair of hoary slippers, his stockings dangling about his wrists [*sic*], and his red buttons like foxes out of their holes . . ." The disturbed lieutenant can hardly contain his anger at being raised from what he calls his "first sleep."

> "Why, master constable," [the lieutenant exclaims,] "dare you balk us in our own mansion, ha? What! Is not our house our coal harbor [*sanctuary*], our castle of come-down and lie-down? Must my honest, wedded punk here, my glory-fat Audrey, be taken napping and raised up by the thunder of bill men? Are we disannulled of our first sleep and cheater of our dreams and fantasies? . . .
>
> "Come you to search an honest bawdy-house, this seven and twenty years in fame and shame? [*twenty-seven years before, 1577, marked the first full year of de Vere's post-Italy downward spiral*] Go to, then, you shall search. Nay, my very boots too. Are you well now? The least hole in my house too. Are you pleased now?"

The lieutenant–who expresses his desire to bring his tales of woe and destitution to the stage–ends up trying to borrow money from the devil. Lucifer returns the playwright-lieutenant's rage with interest. The demon from the netherworld exclaims:

> After many such inductions to bring the scene of his poverty upon the stage, he [*the lieutenant*] desired me, in cool terms, to borrow some forty pence of me. I, stuffed with anger at that base and lazy petition... replied to his baseness, "Why, for shame!"

Even the grave could not stop de Vere's friends and colleagues from joking about the literary earl's never-ending need to borrow money.

The first sign of posthumous life in the Shake-speare publishing world came in late 1607. A book publisher named Nathaniel Butter secured a version of the text of *King Lear*. The London Stationer's Office registered *Lear* for publication in November. Sometime the following year, the printer Nicholas Okes ushered Shake-speare's great tragedy onto the London book market.

Leaks often precede a burst, and the 1608 first edition of *Lear* was just such a leak. The dowager countess of Oxford and her fifteen-year-old son, the eighteenth earl of Oxford, no longer needed the suburban isolation from court that King's Place had afforded her late husband. The young earl was like his father as a teenager. Henry de Vere needed to be in the center of the courtly universe, establishing a name for himself and beginning to climb the ladder of royal preferment.

On April 1, 1609, Elizabeth Trentham de Vere was given royal permission to sell the King's Place house and grounds, which included 270 acres of land. In June, she sold King's Place plus two hundred acres for £4,980, making herself a handsome £1,680 profit. The new homeowner of King's Place, Sir Fulke Greville, was a courtier, a scholar and–as if the gods of courtly rivalries had arranged the deal themselves–the fawning biographer of Sir Philip Sidney. Greville would make King's Place his greater London residence, and his heirs would hand the property down the family line for the next two centuries. Greville later renamed his domicile Brooke House, after a barony granted him by King James.

As with any move, a relocating family consolidates and packs some things and jettisons others. The period 1608–09 is both the period during which King's Place was being cleaned and prepared for new owners and the one posthumous window (before the 1622–23 production of the First Folio) during which new Shake-speare works appeared in print.

A pilfered copy of *Pericles* made its way in 1609 into the hands of the publisher and bookseller Henry Gosson, whose quarto of the play became so popular it went through two editions in its first year. During the same year, the printer George Eld came out with a controversial edition of *Troilus and Cressida*. Eld first printed this play with a front-page advertisement that the King's Men had performed the play at the Globe Theatre. Before the year was out, however, Eld had issued a corrected version of the play quarto that disowned any affiliation with any theatrical company–attaching a preface that stated, disingenuously, that the text had never been enacted before. ("Eternal reader, you have here a new play, never staled with the stage, never clapper-clawed with the palms of the vulgar...")

Nevertheless, whatever trouble *Troilus and Cressida* caused, Eld was still having a banner year. In 1609, Eld would also print one of the most pondered-over books in literary history. On May 20, the publisher Thomas Thorpe registered with the Stationer's Company "A Booke called Shake-speares sonnettes."

Here is the title page:

SHAKE-SPEARES

SONNETS.

Neuer before Imprinted.

AT LONDON
By *G. Eld* for *T. T.* and are
to be folde by *John Wright*, dwelling
at Christ Church gate.
1609.

The book dedication, from the book's publisher to a "Mr. W.H." appeared on page two.

The identity of the *Sonnets'* dedicatee–and the meaning of the twelve-line salutation–has puzzled scholars and writers over the centuries. Oscar Wilde's short story, "The Portrait of Mr. W.H.," hypothesizes that the mystery dedicatee was Willie Hughes, "a wonderful boy actor of great beauty." Other candidates put forward have included William Herbert (earl of Pembroke), Henry Wriothesley (earl of Southampton) with the initials reversed, William

Hathaway, William Harte, and Sir William Harvey. The nineteenth-century sleuth D. Barnstorff even suggested "William himself."

Three clues can be gleaned from the dedication and title page above that might identify "Mr. W.H.":

- He is on familiar terms with Thomas Thorpe and/or George Eld and perhaps has worked with one or both of them before.

- He was in 1609 "setting forth" on an "adventure" that inspires Thomas Thorpe to wish him "that eternity promised by our ever-living poet." The eternity *Shake-speare's Sonnets* speaks of, in the first seventeen sonnets especially, is settling down and having children. Mr. W.H., in other words, appears to have recently been married.

- He's the "only begetter" of *Shake-speare's Sonnets*–probably using a now-antiquated sense of the word "beget," meaning "to get or acquire, usually by effort."

The first clue points to a poem written by the duke of Norfolk's eldest son, Philip Howard, *A Four-Fold Meditation* (1606). Howard was convicted for treason in 1589, by a jury on which de Vere sat. Howard was never executed; he died in the Tower of London in 1595. George Eld printed *A Four-Fold Meditation,* which one "W.H." appears to have acquired for him. In a preface to *Four-Fold Meditation,* "W.H." writes that Howard's poems had "long . . . lien in

TO.THE.ONLIE.BEGETTER.OF.
THESE.INSVING.SONNETS.
Mr. W. H. ALL.HAPPINESSE.
AND.THAT.ETERNITIE.
PROMISED.
BY.
OVR.EVER-LIVING.POET.
WISHETH.
THE.WELL-WISHING.
ADVENTVRER.IN.
SETTING.
FORTH.

T. T.

obscurity, and haply [perhaps] had never seen the light, had not a mere accident conveyed them to my hands."

As for the second clue, the Hackney parish registers record the marriage of one William Hall in August of 1608, less than a year before the publication of *Shake-speare's Sonnets.* There was also a William Hall who wrote commendatory verses to his cousin Anthony Munday–de Vere's secretary–in Munday's 1579 book *The Mirror of Mutability.* If these two William Halls were the same, or even simply related, the third clue may solve the riddle.

De Vere and his second wife, as noted in Chapter 10, had heard pleas by Philip Howard's brother Thomas in the early 1590s, no doubt to assist the family in obtaining royal clemency for the convicted Philip. Knowing that poetry provided a fast track to winning de Vere's sympathies, Thomas may well have given a manuscript copy of Philip's poetic lamentations to the literary earl. Thus one suspects *A Four-Fold Meditation* among de Vere's books and papers at the time of his death in 1604.

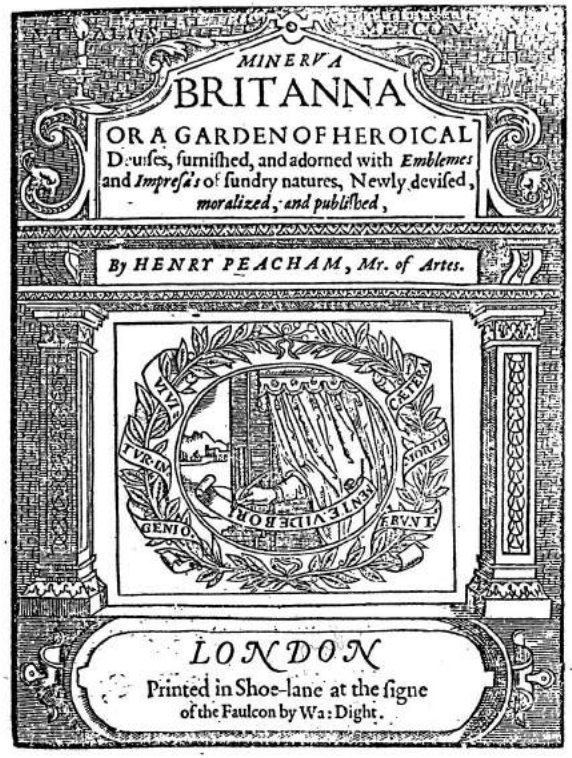
Who better, then, to enjoy the "mere accident" of being handed *A Four-Fold Meditation* than the kinsman of de Vere's private secretary? As the preface to the book would imply, Hall turned around and sold the manuscript to George Eld.

Three years later, a newly married Hall (he's "*Mr.* W.H." now) enjoyed the providence of a far greater "mere accident" as the de Vere family was moving out of King's Place. Munday's kinsman acquired, no doubt with some effort, de Vere's *Sonnets.* The same channels landed the manuscript in Eld's hands, and a publisher grateful beyond measure wrote a gushing preface dedicating the book to Hall, wishing the newlywed "all happinesse" for his nuptial adventures ahead and that Hall's marriage be blessed with many children.

In 1612, another puzzle concerning de Vere's posthumous legacy appeared in the London bookstalls. And this one was unmistakably designed as a puzzle.

The courtly observer Henry Peacham's book *Minerva Britanna* was a multilingual tour de force of Renaissance cryptography. *Minerva* belonged to a genre known as the "emblem book," a collection of allegorical engravings accompanied by explanatory poems. Emblem books used anagrams, pictograms, and other arcane methods of encoding secret messages to conceal everything from secrets of state to bawdy jokes. In the sixteenth century, scores of emblem books were published in Italy, France, Germany, Spain, and The Netherlands. But Peacham was one of the first to introduce the emblem book to English eyes.

Here is the title page:



Four clues identify the subject of Peacham's title page engraving:

- Consider the title: *Minerva of Britain.* Minerva was the Roman counterpart to the spear-shaking Greek goddess Athena. Presented in the context of the rest of Peacham's title page, one might translate *Minerva Britanna* as "England's spear-shaker."
- The Latin inscriptions tell de Vere's story. Two candles burn at the top of the page, surrounded by the words, "I consume myself for others in a similar way." *(Ut aliis me consumo.)* Just as the tapers give of themselves to illuminate their surroundings, the mystery subject dissipates itself. Winding scrolls surrounding the central image read, "One lives by means of his genius. The rest will belong to death." *(Vivitur ingenio. Caetera mortis erunt.)*
- The central engraving features a hidden man's hand writing from behind a theatrical curtain. The title page emblem would appear to be about a disguised playwright.
- Lastly, the hand from behind the curtain writes on a scroll the words "By the mind, I will be seen." *(Mente videbor.)* The hidden playwright appears to be adding the letter *i* to *videbor.* However, there is no Latin word

"videbori." Yet *"videbori"* makes a perfect anagram of the sentence–and would also make sense of the stray period between the two words. Unscramble *"MENTE.VIDEBORI,"* and one Latin phrase makes all the pieces of the puzzle fit together: *TIBI NOM. DE VERE.* Or in English: "Thy name is de Vere."

Peacham knew de Vere's secret, and when Peacham's courtly etiquette book *The Compleat Gentleman* came out years later, the puzzlemaster presented an exhaustive list of the great Elizabethan poets. At the top of Peacham's list was "Edward, earle of Oxford." Nowhere in Peacham's 1622 book–or in any of his revised editions that appeared over the ensuing four decades–does Peacham mention Shake-speare. Peacham must have understood that doing so would be a redundancy.

Minerva Britanna had appeared on the London book market during the midst of a turbulent year. In May of 1612, the forty-eight-year-old Sir Robert Cecil, Baron Salisbury, Viscount Cranbourne, breathed his last. Six months later, the great and celebrated hope for the future of Protestant England, Prince Henry, King James's eighteen-year-old son, unexpectedly died of typhoid fever.

England was in mourning for months. In the nine years since Queen Elizabeth's death, King James I had proved himself to be little more than a place holder for some great monarch to come. By all signs, Henry, Prince of Wales, would have been that monarch: brilliant, erudite, well trained as a military man, an enthusiastic patron of the creative arts, an unrepentant but still accommodating moderate Protestant, a decisive man of high morals. Had Prince Henry lived to assume his place on the throne, it's likely that post–seventeenth–century world history would be unrecognizable today.

Instead, Henry's corrupt younger brother Charles eventually inherited the crown and so enraged Parliament and the population at large in the 1640s as to spark the English Civil War–a conflagration that resulted in Charles's beheading in 1649 and in which Oliver Cromwell's Puritan revolution shut down all the theaters.

This sociopolitical turbulence during the early seventeenth century would be responsible in no small part for continuing the Shake-speare ruse past the lifetimes of the author and his contemporaries.

During these days of funerals and funereal tributes, an ailing dowager countess made out her last will and testament. In her November 1612 will, Elizabeth Trentham de Vere–who had devoted the eight years after her husband's death to restoring the earldom of Oxford to some semblance of solvency–requested that her body be buried "in the Church of Hackney . . . as near unto the body of my said late dear and noble lord and husband as may be." She further willed "that there be in the said Church erected for us a tomb

fitting our degree and of such charge as shall seem good to mine executors hereafter named."

On January 6, 1613, two letters from correspondents at court noted the passing of the dowager countess of Oxford–one of them stating that her fatal malady was "this new disease," probably meaning typhoid fever. The Hackney parish registers record Elizabeth Trentham de Vere's burial on January 3. Her exact date of death is unknown.

One of the countess's greatest accomplishments after her husband's death was the repatriation of Castle Hedingham. Yet Edward's son, Henry de Vere, was to be the last of his lineage to own the ancestral Essex estate, a family seat that had been in the Vere family since the days of William the Conqueror. After the eighteenth earl's death, in 1625, Castle Hedingham would pass to his wife, Diana Cecil–great-granddaughter to William Cecil, Lord Burghley.

During the Christmas revels season of 1612–13, King James celebrated a Protestant marriage match that distracted from the mourning for Prince Henry. On December 27, 1612, a sixteen-year-old princess Elizabeth Stuart accepted a marriage offer made by her contemporary Frederick, elector Palatine–soon to be Frederick V, king of Bohemia. The ensuing months before the couple's April departure, including their February 1613 wedding, featured a stunning twenty court performances by the King's Men. The works of that great Anglican apologist of yesteryear, Shake-speare, served as a centerpiece of the King's Men's repertory for the anti-Catholic crusader and his bride. Works performed included the War of the Henris redux *Julius Caesar,* the Bohemian-flavored opera *The Winter's Tale,* and the post-Elizabethan satire *The Tempest.*

Elizabethan nostalgia had already become a cottage industry. In 1615, one such sentimentalist, the prolific scribbler Richard Brathwait, published a satire *(Strappado for the Devil)* about the glory years of Queen Elizabeth and the inferior literary works being published under King James. Brathwait wrote:

> Yea, this I know I may be bold to say,
> Thames ne'er had swans that sung more sweet than they.
> It's true I may avow it, that ne'er was sung,
> Chanted in any age by swains so young,
> With more delight than was perform'd by them,
> Prettily shadow'd in a borrowed name.
> And long may England's thespian springs be known.

In so many words, Brathwait blew Shake-speare's cover. Translated into contemporary English:

> Let me tell you: London never saw writers more gifted than the ones I saw during the reign of Queen Elizabeth. And never were there more delightful plays than the ones performed by youth [*probably the children's companies*] whose author wrote under a borrowed name.

Sometime around 1613, Will Shakspere is conventionally believed to have retired from London and returned to his hometown to lead a country burgher's life. In 1614, "Mr. Shakspeare" is listed as a landowner in Stratford. In 1616, he drew up his will. He died on his fifty-second birthday, April 23, 1616.

The epitaph on Shakspere's gravestone inside Stratford-upon-Avon's Trinity Church is an embarrassing piece of mock-Gothic doggerel. To quote Mark Twain:

> So far as anyone *knows and can prove,* Shakespeare of Stratford wrote only one poem during his life. This one is authentic. He did write that one–a fact which stands undisputed; he wrote the whole of it; he wrote the whole of it out of his own head. He commanded that this work of art be engraved upon his tomb, and he was obeyed. There it abides to this day. This is it:
>
> Good friend, for Jesus' sake forbear
> To dig the dust enclosed here.
> Blessed be ye man that spares these stones,
> And cursed be he that moves my bones.
>
> ...He was probably dead when he wrote it. Still, this is only conjecture. We have only circumstantial evidence. Internal evidence.

Nearby Shakspere's gravestone, on the north wall of Trinity Church, stands a monument to Shakspere that constitutes–together with the prefatory material to the 1623 First Folio of Shake-speare–the strongest case ever made that Shakspere wrote Shake-speare. No records exist of the construction of the Stratford monument. The first notice of Shakspere's monument appears in 1623, in prefatory verses by Leonard Digges in the Shake-speare Folio ("When that stone is rent/And time dissolves thy Stratford monument...").

The monument contains a cryptic engraved epigram, a reproduction of the Shakspere coat of arms, and two cherublike figures who sit atop a ledge that shelters a bust of Shakspere. Shakspere's likeness rests his arms on a pillow, upon which sits a blank piece of paper. Shakspere grasps at a quill pen with his right hand and gazes emptily out into space. The bust has been the subject of much witty chatter throughout the ages. As Twain wrote:

> The bust too–there in the Stratford Church. The precious bust, the priceless bust, the calm bust, the serene bust, the emotionless bust, with the dandy moustache, and the putty face, unseamed of care–that face which

> has looked passionlessly down upon the awed pilgrim for a hundred and fifty years and will still look down upon the awed pilgrim three hundred more, with the deep, deep, deep, subtle, subtle, subtle expression of a bladder.

The Shakspere monument's eight-line epitaph, at first glance, would appear to support the conclusion that Shakspere was Shake-speare. But the epitaph, like the monument itself, is a red herring. The first line, written in Latin, states that Shakspere was "A Nestor in judgment, a Socrates in genius, a Virgil in art." All three analogies–inapt for Shake-speare–fit the "upstart crow" Shakspere capably. In Homer's *Iliad,* Nestor is both a garrulous storyteller and a self-appointed spokesman for his people. Shakspere, one supposes, manifested the judgment of Nestor in regaling theatergoers with rambling tales of his fictional literary talents. Socrates is never known to have written a word; some of his contemporaries, most notably Plato, wrote *about* him. Praising Shakspere's "Socratic genius" and "Nestor-like judgment" tells the learned admirer that Shakspere was a talker, not a writer. Finally, a "Virgil in art" can just as readily be read as a "Virgil in artifice." Virgil, as previously noted, had an infamous run-in with an impostor (Batillus) who tried to claim credit for one of Virgil's poems. Furthermore, many Renaissance readers believed that Virgil composed his great works possessed by a holy spirit, that Virgil's ghost was the true author of *The Aeneid.*

The English portion of Shakspere's epitaph is more vexing than the Latin. It concludes with a convoluted sentence that contains the only potential reference to Shakspere as a writer: "Sieh [*German: 'look there'*] all that he hath writ leaves living art but page to serve his wit." The phrase "Look there [at] all that he hath writ" sounds more sarcastic than honorific. And the imperative "Look *there*" would seem to point the viewer across the Trinity Church chapel to Shakspere's burial marker with the "Good friend for Jesus sake forebear . . ." verse engraved on it.

What this perplexing sentence, then, says is "Look there at that doggerel Shakespere wrote: All his wit leaves a living corpus of works that adds up to a single page." A second reading turns on the meaning of *art* as "contrivance" or "ruse," *page* as "servant," and *wit* as "a witty person": "Look there at the one thing Shakspere wrote: The rest lives on as the ruse that is but a servant to the wit whom Shakspere stood for."

The English section of Shakspere's epitaph–the authorship of which is unattributed–famously begins, "Stay, passenger. Why goest thou by so fast? Read if thou canst, whom envious death hath placed within this monument Shakespeare." These three sentences, in fact, point to the obscurantist handiwork of the same Latinate satirist who crafted the scandalous *Isle of Dogs* with Thomas Nashe and who would in 1623 oversee the Shake-speare First Folio. Ben Jonson's known epitaphs written in memory of other notables of his day include such lines as "Wouldst thou hear what man can say in a little? Reader, stay," and "If, passenger, thou canst but read, stay," and "Stay, view this stone; and if thou beest not such, read here a little, that thou mayst know much."

What remained was the myth. De Vere had left behind a corpus of work that now rested in the hands of his progeny. And as *King Lear* had prophesied, the youngest daughter proved true to her father's life and legacy.

In December of 1604, six months after her father's death, Susan de Vere had married into the Herbert family–headed up by the literary legend Mary Sidney Herbert, dowager countess of Pembroke. Edward de Vere had tried and failed to marry his second daughter, Bridget, into the Herbert clan. But, soon after Susan's father passed away, Susan made the family tie her father could not. Two days after Christmas of 1604, the seventeen-year-old Susan married Sir Philip Herbert (later earl of Montgomery) in an elaborate wedding.

The Herberts were the premier literary aristocratic family in the early seventeenth century. And in this great English Renaissance household, young Susan (b. 1587) revealed how much of her father's love of letters and learning she'd inherited. Susan had performed in Jacobean courtly masques and had been the subject of literary tributes by leading writers such as Nathaniel Baxter, John Ford, Aemilia Lanyer, and Joshua Sylvester. Susan admired John Donne's preaching and once requested a copy of his sermons for further study. Anthony Munday, in his ongoing project to translate the Palmerin–Amadis de Gaule romances into English, sought out the latter-day CORDELIA for her assistance in tracking down obscure literary sources. She found for him, he later wrote, "such books as were of the best editions." One dedication to Susan and her husband stands out in particular. In 1619, the London printer and bookseller William Jaggard dedicated to the noble couple a book called *The Ancient Treasury (Archaio-Ploutus)*, an anthology of folklore and customs of the English, Italian, Spanish, and Gallic cultures.

Also in 1619, Jaggard had been hurriedly issuing a series of ten Shake-speare reprints–two of which, *The Yorkshire Tragedy* and *Sir John Oldcastle,* were falsely advertised as being written by Shake-speare. Jaggard was an ambitious man who by 1619 was evidently positioning himself to become the de facto printer of Shake-speare's works. To do this, Jaggard needed access to the vault of unpublished Shake-speare plays. Susan de Vere Herbert, countess of Montgomery, would be the solution to Jaggard's problem.

Here is where Jaggard turned on the charm. His florid dedication to *The Ancient Treasury* began:

> To the most Noble and Twin-like pair of truly honorable and complete perfection: Sir Philip Herbert . . . earl of Montgomery . . .

> As also to the truly vertuous and noble countess his wife, the lady Susan, daughter to the Right Honorable Edward Vere, earle of Oxenford, Viscount Bolbvec, Lord Sandford and of Baldesmere and Lord High Chamberlain of England, &c.

Jaggard dedicated almost as much ink listing Susan's father's titles and offices as he did those of either of his dedicatees. Already, one senses his agenda. He invited his patrons to "enter into a spacious forest," where he said Lady Susan

> . . . may meet with a fair bevy of queens and ladies, at diverse turnings as you walk. And every one will tell you the history of her life and fortune (rare examples of virtue and honor) as themselves can best, truly and plainly discourse unto you. Some other also you shall see, sadly sitting under yew and cypress trees, with garlands of those leaves wreathed about their heads, sighing out their divers disasters: whom your noble nature cannot choose but commiserate, as grieving to see a scratch in a clear skin and a body beautified by nature, to be blemished by unkind destiny.

Jaggard's words offer up a simple first layer of meaning: *Please, my lord and lady, enjoy reading this book.* But Jaggard was also making a secondary and far more important appeal. He noted:

> . . . an orchard stands wide open to welcome you, richly abounding in the fairest fruitages: not to feed the eye only, but likewise to refresh the heart, inviting you to pluck where and while you please and to bestow how and when you list.

The fruits of the orchard that Jaggard appealed to his dedicatees to "bestow how and when you list" was not money or political influence, it was manuscripts.

For the next couple of years, Jaggard's pleas would lie unanswered. But, as the independent American researcher Peter W. Dickson recently discovered, international religious politics soon changed the equation.

Since assuming the throne, King James had proven himself a protector of the Anglican faith–from sponsoring a confrontational 1604 religious conference that resulted seven years later in the King James Bible, to stubbornly driving a congregation of Puritan nonconformists to found a colony at Plymouth, Massachusetts, in 1620. Yet, the king once confessed, he had a "cunning for to make dispute." Since 1604, James had also entertained offers for a marriage alliance with Spain.

The unapologetically Protestant prince Henry would not consent to any such surrender of his nation's faith. (The offered terms of marriage inevitably had involved some form of England's reconciliation with Catholicism.) However, now that a more corruptible Prince Charles carried the title of prince of Wales, James listened more closely to the overtures of the underhanded and charming Spanish ambassador Don Diego Sarmiento de Anuña, Count Gondomar.

Gondomar had enjoyed a close friendship with James's homosexual lover, George Villiers, marquis (later duke) of Buckingham. (In letters to James, Buckingham made no pretense about his evidently rapturous intimacy with royalty, signing one letter "Your Majesty's humble slave and dog," threatening in another to grab "hold of your bedpost . . . never to quit it," longing in yet another to have "my dear dad and master's legs soon in my arms.") Buckingham and Gondomar made a formidable team at court. Buckingham, as the sexual favorite of the sovereign, had become the Jacobean equivalent of the earl of Leicester in Queen Elizabeth's court. Gondomar, with his friend Buckingham sharing the most intimate pillow talk with the king, had a perfect messenger for unfettered access to the royal ear.

Soon after James had dismissed Parliament in 1621, the king, Buckingham, and Gondomar moved forward with the resolve of marrying Prince Charles to the Spanish Infanta Doña María. But just because James and his entourage were working to turn Protestant England into Rome's slave and dog didn't mean that the rest of the court was about to roll over. The faction opposed to the Spanish Marriage was headed by four earls, all of whom were affiliated by blood, marriage, or authorial fascination to the seventeenth earl of Oxford. The anti–Spanish Marriage coalition would transform English politics circa 1621–23 into the kind of nasty partisanship not seen since the Essex–Cecil split at the end of Elizabeth's reign. Leading the charge were the eighteenth earl of Oxford, Susan de Vere's husband the earl of Montgomery, her brother-in-law the fourth earl of Pembroke, and the "fair youth" of Shake-speare's *Sonnets*, the third earl of Southampton.

Both sides in this war would be using the printed word as weapons of mass propaganda. On the king's side was the power of state censorship–His Majesty had previously warned Parliament that he would tolerate no "meddl[ing] with any thing concerning . . . our dearest Son's match with the Daughter of Spain." The king's supporters also had a few propagandistic arrows that they would loose before the whole affair was over. But the anti–Spanish Marriage alliance had one item that gave them the advantage in firepower: Shake-speare.

The first shot was fired in 1621.

In March, Southampton had nearly come to blows with Buckingham on the floor of the House of Lords. Ostensibly, they were only squabbling over matters of parliamentary procedure. But the bitter enmity between these two

foes was thinly veiled. The forty-seven-year-old Southampton hated Buckingham for his unmatched royal influence and for his toady obeisance to Ambassador Gondomar and to Spanish national interests.

Forces of the Holy Roman Empire had recently ousted James's daughter, Elizabeth, and her husband, King Frederick V, from Bohemia, and James and Buckingham displayed no interest in returning these Protestant heroes to power. Both Southampton and the eighteenth earl of Oxford had fought in Germany and the Lowlands for the Protestants, and now that Catholic forces had won a major victory, the two Henries were not about to give up the battle.

But Buckingham was powerful enough to ensure that Southampton and the eighteenth earl did not get their way and, moreover, that they cooled their heels. In June, Southampton was arrested for plotting mischief with members of the House of Commons and was placed in the custody of the dean of Westminster. The following month, after the eighteenth earl had vociferously expressed his hatred of the proposed Spanish Marriage, he was thrown in the Tower of London.

In the fall of 1621, after both prisoners had been released, the first new Shake-speare play in fourteen years was registered for publication. It was *Othello,* the story of an insecure leader who is played like a marionette by a sinister villain, IAGO–whose name happens to be identical with that of the patron saint of Spain. Although the seventeenth earl of Oxford had written the play decades earlier to vent his frustrations over a completely different situation in a completely different court, the contemporary relevance was hard to miss. As OTHELLO says of IAGO, so might the Protestant patriots have hoped their king would say of the Spanish ambassador: "Demand [of] that demidevil/Why he hath thus ensnar'd my soul and body."

The title page of the first edition of *Othello* (1622) states it was "written by William Shakespeare." De Vere's family stuck with the cover story they'd inherited. Too much of their own lives hung in the balance to play games with their father's compromised identity.

In December, probably as a token gesture, Buckingham gave Henry de Vere command of *The Assurance,* a patrol boat that guarded English shores from Dutch and Spanish pirates. *The Assurance* soon intercepted a Dutch frigate, and Oxford was dressed down for interfering with Dutch commerce. With characteristic de Vere lip, the twenty-eight-year-old lord Henry uttered his contempt for Buckingham, saying he wished that someday justice might actually flow from a king, not from his errand boy.

By April of 1622, Henry de Vere was back in the Tower of London. And this time the stakes were high. In May Gondomar wrote back to his Spanish sovereign, "I told King James to arrest this man and put him in the Tower in a narrow cell so that no one can speak to him. I have a strong desire to cut off his head, because he is an extremely malicious person and has followers."

One fourth of the anti–Spanish Marriage coalition was, if Gondomar could have his way, effectively now on death row. Southampton, Edward de Vere's son-in-law the earl of Montgomery, and Montgomery's brother the earl of Pembroke knew they had to take action. By the end of 1622, Prince Charles and Buckingham were preparing to go to Spain and finalize the marriage deal.

Edward de Vere had written practically nothing that treated Catholicism or Spain kindly. Once he'd been played for a sucker by his Catholic coconspirators, Henry Howard and Charles Arundell in 1580, de Vere no longer had a problem putting Elizabethan church and state above his erstwhile interest in Catholicism. With the exception of *Romeo and Juliet*'s FRIAR LAURENCE–who was himself based on de Vere's strongly Protestant tutors Sir Thomas Smith and Laurence Nowell–no papist authority figure in Shake-speare is treated with respect or dignity.

If the Spanish Marriage went through, Protestant England could have become as much a historical curio as Mary Tudor's brief reintroduction of Catholicism in 1553–58. The royal policy of publication under a Catholic regime would necessarily have changed to reflect the new religious order; a pro-Anglican, anti-Spanish, Tudor apologist playwright of old would have had no place in this world. Under a Spanish-controlled puppet state, *The Tragoedy of Othello, The Moore of Venice* (1622) [*sic*] would probably have been the last work of Shake-speare that London booksellers could have offered to the buying public.

Still unpublished in any form, pirated or not, were *The Comedy of Errors; The Taming of the Shrew; The Two Gentlemen of Verona; As You Like It; Twelfth Night; All's Well That Ends Well; Measure for Measure; Henry VI, Part 1; King John; Henry VIII; Julius Caesar; Macbeth; Antony and Cleopatra; Coriolanus; Timon of Athens; Cymbeline; The Winter's Tale; The Two Noble Kinsmen;* and *The Tempest.*

William Jaggard's 1619 appeal to Susan de Vere Herbert and her husband, the earl of Montgomery, began to look more and more attractive. She probably felt that as the most literary sister of de Vere's three daughters, it was up to her to do something about her father's works. And if Prince Charles's marriage went through, Susan de Vere Herbert might never have such a chance again.

Around the same time Henry de Vere was thrown in the Tower, Jaggard's presses started rolling with the first quires of what would become the "First Folio of Shakespeare." Jaggard undertook this monumental project without registering the previously unpublished plays with the Stationer's Company, the state's censors.

With Gondomar's vendetta hanging over the eighteenth earl of Oxford and with the future of English Protestantism in the balance, the Folio's masters treaded lightly. The unveiling of the author's identity would have to wait

for less politically tumultuous times. Jaggard's collection would not be the *Comedies, Histories and Tragedies of Edward de Vere.* Susan's husband and her brother-in-law served as patrons to what was to be entitled *Mr. William Shakespeares Comedies, Histories & Tragedies, Published according to the True Originall Copies.*

The King's Men's playwright Ben Jonson, a friend to the Herberts and to Henry de Vere, was hired to edit and oversee the Folio. Jonson would write two prefatory poems attached to the Folio as well as, some scholars have concluded, the Folio's dedication to Pembroke and Montgomery and a preface "To the great variety of readers"–two prose tracts that are signed by the King's Men's players John Heminges and Henry Condell. One suspects that around this time the family also hired Jonson to write the quizzical epitaph engraved onto Shakspere's Trinity Church monument in Stratford-upon-Avon.

The First Folio of Shake-speare would stand as nostalgic testimony to the immortal brilliance of the reign of Queen Elizabeth–a period celebrated for its relative peace and prosperity and for its Protestant defiance of Catholic Spain. King James, who loved the Shake-speare plays and often had his King's Men perform them for him at court, should by all rights have been front and center in the First Folio. Yet in the Folio's prefatory materials, the king is practically a nonentity–there is only one passing mention of "our James." Instead, the Folio heaps praise upon the earls of Pembroke and Montgomery, two courtiers who at the time were vociferous opponents of the crown and the Spanish marriage.

The Folio's dedicatory epistle to Pembroke and Montgomery reads:

> To the most noble and incomparable pair of brethren ...
>
> There is a great difference [of opinion] whether any book choose his patrons or [his patrons] find them. This hath done both. For so much were Your L[ordships] likings of the several parts when they were acted, as before they were published, the volume asked to be yours. We have but collected them and done an office to the dead, to procure his orphans guardians.

As the first months of 1623 thawed into a spring of grave uncertainty, James's minions must have gotten wind of the earls of Pembroke and Montgomery's pet project. In April, a history of the Roman emperor Nero was registered, as the Stationer's Office scribe noted, "by His Majesty's special command." Edmund Bolton's *Nero Caesar* was to be the pro–Spanish Marriage propaganda in presumptive response to the Shake-speare Folio.

Nero Caesar was a rewrite of ancient history that, contrary to historical evidence, claimed that English civilization had never flourished more than

when ancient Rome had ruled during the first four centuries of the Christian era. (Roman historians such as Tacitus actually stated just the opposite, that Rome had corrupted the ancient Britons. But historical accuracy was not *Nero Caesar*'s intent.) The book, dedicated to Buckingham, was a shoddy attempt at preempting the Protestant agitprop that would be coming out beneath the "Shakespeare" byline. English subjects, *Nero Caesar* implied, needn't worry about Rome (read: Spain) returning to its shores. A period of even greater prosperity, under King Charles and his Spanish queen, was just around the corner.

In May and June of 1623, new papist-inspired chapels were being designed at St. James's Palace, and roads from the port town of Southampton were being repaired to ease the transit of the presumptive new Anglo-Spanish princess. But in Madrid, despite all the feasting and feting, the negotiations stalled. Each side demanded too many conciliations; neither was ready to compromise. By September, it was clear to the negotiators in Madrid that a marriage alliance between England and Spain was simply not going to happen. A broken and unsuccessful prince Charles and the duke of Buckingham returned to English shores in October.

The vast majority of Londoners celebrated the collapse of the marriage deal as a victory. Bonfires were lit in the streets, and Londoners reveled as if the Spanish Armada had been defeated again. Broadsides and pamphlets rushed into print praising the return of an empty-handed prince. Oxford and Cambridge Universities printed collections of poems and orations celebrating the prince's repatriation, sans Spaniard alliance.

On November 8, once the entire Shakespeare Folio had been printed, William Jaggard finally presented the book to the London Stationer's Company to be registered. The First Folio of Shakespeare, priced at £1 ($165 in today's currency), had a press run of approximately 750 copies. The first recorded purchase was on December 5. Over the next nine years, it sold well enough to justify a second edition, the 1632 Second Folio of Shakespeare. Some 238 copies of the First Folio survive to this day.

On December 30, Henry de Vere was released from the Tower. Within a matter of days he married the Elizabethan lord Burghley's great-granddaughter Diana Cecil and staged a public reconciliation scene with Buckingham. As a Florentine correspondent, Amerigo Salvetti, reported of the détente between the earl of Oxford and the duke of Buckingham, "All's well that ends well."

Within two years, Southampton and his son James, Lord Wriothesley, would be dead. The eighteenth earl of Oxford would be dead. All three served their country to the last, fighting with their Protestant allies on the battlefields of the Lowlands. In 1625, the king of England succumbed too. A Scots physician to James later circulated a scurrilous tract alleging that Buckingham and his mother had poisoned the king. And so Charles I embarked on a twenty-four-year voyage that would result in the English Civil War.

"This figure that thou see'st here put, It was for gentle Shakespeare cut," Ben Jonson wrote in his preface "To the Reader" on the first page of the 1623 First Folio of Shakespeare. Jonson's "To the Reader" poem appears opposite Martin Droeshaut's famous engraving, pictured on the first page of the Introduction.

But Jonson's poem says that no engraving, no matter how perfectly executed, could contain the "wit" and "life" found in Shakespeare's works printed within. To understand Shakespeare, Jonson says, pay no mind to the superficial, the image, the cover story. The author's words tell all.

> . . . [T]he [En]graver had a strife
> With nature to outdo the life.
> O, could he but have drawn [Shake-speare's] wit
> As well in brass, as he hath hit
> His face, the print would then surpass
> All that ever was writ in brass.
> But since he cannot, reader, look:
> Not on his picture but his book.

So what becomes of the Shake-speare canon with Edward de Vere as its author? How does the experience of Shake-speare change for a reader, a performer, a director, and an audience member?

First, the plays and poems become more integrated. The works of Shake-speare become the *work* of Shake-speare. *All's Well That Ends Well* is no longer a single, enigmatic "problem comedy" but rather more of a darkly comic prelude to *Hamlet*–one that branches into *Measure for Measure* and *Richard II* as well. *Much Ado About Nothing* becomes a failed apology for de Vere's misdeeds chronicled in *Romeo and Juliet* and *The Winter's Tale*. The jealousy of OTHELLO represents the tragic extreme of a wide spectrum that terminates in MASTER FORD of the comedy *The Merry Wives of Windsor*; KING LEAR's anxiety echoes de Vere's over his three daughters, while *As You Like It* ponders the fate of de Vere's cousin's children–the three sons of the executed duke of Norfolk. De Vere's expression of bemusement and fascination with Will Shakspere in *Love's Labor's Lost* becomes a tempest of fury in *As You Like It*.

Second, the boundaries between comedy, history, and tragedy become more porous. TOUCHSTONE's rage at the country clown WILLIAM in *As You Like It* is not so much comedy as bitter tragedy–brought about by the angst of an author who realizes his name will be lost. *Coriolanus* is not so much tragedy as bitter comedy–understanding that the same historical figure (the earl of Essex) inspired CORIOLANUS as inspired the "Rival Poet" of the *Sonnets*. *King John* and *Macbeth* become two sides of the same royal conundrum that

de Vere and Queen Elizabeth faced in the execution of Mary, Queen of Scots. PROSPERO's final plea to be released from his bonds, although often performed today with a smile and a curtsy, is one of the most tragic scenes in the whole of the Shake-speare canon.

Third, Shake-speare becomes a venturesome cosmopolitan and a true citizen of western Renaissance Europe. No longer does a jaunt to London and a bus ride to Stratford-upon-Avon suffice in apprehending the terrain and cultures that directly inspired Shake-speare. From the north-country shires de Vere explored in the Northern Rebellion campaign of 1570 to the East Anglian lands of his childhood and ancestry to the royal castles and estates surrounding London to the Oxbridge academic settings of his youth to the Channel-side sites of his departures for Spanish Armada campaigns and continental adventures . . . Shake-speare's England is practically the whole of England. And England isn't even the half of it. Shake-speare's continental European settings derive from de Vere's own travels: the regal surroundings of the Louvre and Rheims, the magnificent bustle of Venice's Rialto and St. Mark's Square, the sheltered Alpine gorges of the Rhine, the ancient halls of the universities of Strasbourg and Padua, the Tuscan byways of Siena and Medici-era Florence.

Fourth, the artistic arc of Shake-speare's career charts a course from preening and prancing young champion to a betrayed and jealous middle-aged skeptic to a resigned and bitter old man. Early Shake-speare is like early Mozart: precocious in the extreme, ostentatious in his genius, and unstoppable in his inventiveness. But late Shake-speare is more like late Beethoven: angry and intransigent, alienated and disturbed. Beethoven, banished from his art because of his deafness, had by the end of his career become what one musicologist described as a "lonely prince of a realm of spirits." These words also fit an ailing Edward de Vere as he pondered the dimming candle of his life knowing his epitaph would effectively be, in the words of Sonnet 72, "My name be buried where my body is."

Finally, it may be said that Shake-speare's development as a writer traced his development as a human being–stripping away the snobbish trappings of his blue-blood upbringing and outgrowing his spoiled, egomaniacal behavior as a youth. The literary by-products of his personal development, littered along the highway of his life, provide milestones. *The Comedy of Errors* and *Much Ado About Nothing* reveal an overgrown adolescent unwilling to shoulder responsibility for his own actions. *Twelfth Night* and *The Taming of the Shrew* present a keen observer gaining his foothold on humanity by charting the foibles and follies of the Elizabethan courtly "reptilia," a class to which he knew he belonged.

Writing ultimately became a cathartic exercise performed not for his sovereign or for his peers but rather for himself–his own mechanism for psychological and spiritual salvation. De Vere vented his jealous rage against

his first wife in *Othello* and *The Winter's Tale;* he may have tamed his inner demons and acknowledged his wary acceptance of her only after her death, as expressed in HAMLET's graveside lamentations over OPHELIA's stony corpse. What had once been a green-eyed monster then became a strange satyr–half adoration, half admiration–that he loosed upon his second wife, Elizabeth Trentham de Vere (PORTIA) and his eldest daughter's onetime fiancé the earl of Southampton (the "Fair Youth" of the *Sonnets* and BASSANIO of *Merchant of Venice,* among others). And as suggested by Sonnets 40–42, the anonymous 1594 poem *Willobie His Avisa* (*not* written by de Vere) and *The Merchant of Venice* (wherein ANTONIO enables his fair youth BASSANIO to woo PORTIA), de Vere may even have countenanced a romantic affair between his second wife and his dashing "Fair Youth."

Lacking a satisfactory chronology of Shake-speare–so much of which is now, without more definitive evidence, thrown into a temporal limbo involving early drafts in de Vere's twenties and thirties and final drafts in his forties and early fifties–one cannot say for certain which plays constitute the true "end point" of Shake-speare. Final drafts of *King Lear* and *Hamlet,* for instance, surely date from de Vere's closing years. And *The Tempest* is one of the few plays–perhaps the only one–that appear to have been wholly conceived and composed during the fifteen-month period between Queen Elizabeth's death and de Vere's own.

The "late style" of artistic development, as defined by the critics Theodor Adorno and Edward Said, may provide a valuable guideline for reassessing Shake-speare's ultimate accomplishments as an artist. For it was the more humanized, humbled, and unfettered de Vere of his forties and fifties who revised much, if not all, of his youthful canon–the entirety of which was then published in the quartos of the 1590s and 1600s and, posthumously, in the First Folio of 1623. Traces of "late style" may yet be found in bits and patches in much of Shake-speare. As Said noted, an artist in his or her "late style"

> has the power exactly to render disenchantment and pleasure without resolving the contradiction between them. What holds them in tension, as equal forces, straining in opposite directions, is the artist's mature subjectivity, stripped of hubris and pomposity, unashamed either of its fallibility or of the modest assurance it has gained as a result of age and exile.

In the final analysis, repatriating Edward de Vere's life to the Shake-speare canon provides motivation behind the characters and plots, charts an artistic path intrinsic to the flawed but fascinating life of the artist, uncovers new levels of autobiographical meaning in the greatest works of English literature, and replaces the incomprehensible mystery of a deified genius with a comprehensible–if still incomparable–man who, for all his failures, became the very breath and soul of the English-speaking world.

APPENDIX A

EDWARD DE VERE'S GENEVA BIBLE AND SHAKE-SPEARE

THE THESIS OF THIS BOOK, THE "OXFORDIAN" PROPOSITION THAT Edward de Vere was Shake-speare, is a theory built upon circumstantial evidence. There is no single "smoking gun" document that leads one inexorably to the conclusion that de Vere wrote *Hamlet, King Lear,* the *Sonnets,* etc. Instead, one builds the case upon a series of facts and observations that, when put together like pieces of a puzzle, produce an overall picture that becomes difficult to deny.

The most important single new piece of Oxfordian evidence is Edward de Vere's copy of the English translation of the Bible produced and printed in 1569–70 by English exiles based in Geneva. De Vere's "Geneva Bible"–now in possession of the Folger Shakespeare Library in Washington, D.C.–is sumptuously bound in a crimson velvet cover with silver medallions on the front and back bearing heraldic images from de Vere's family crest of a boar capped with a coronet and a quartered shield with a star in the upper left quadrant. The Bible contains 1,028 handwritten underlinings and marginal notes. Expert handwriting analysis of the marginal notes supports the reasonable conclusion that not only did de Vere own and read this Bible, he wrote the marginalia in it too.

Between 1990 and 2000, Roger Stritmatter–now an assistant professor of English at Coppin State College in Baltimore, Maryland–conducted a study of the marginal notes in de Vere's Bible that formed the basis of Stritmatter's Ph.D. dissertation at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst. Of the 1,028 markings in the de Vere Bible, 568 appear in the Old Testament, 156 appear in the New Testament, 15 appear in a hymnal of Psalms appended to de Vere's copy of the Geneva Bible, and 289 appear in a set of marginally canonical biblical texts–rarely studied or read by most laypeople today–called the Apocrypha.

Stritmatter discovered that approximately one out of every four of the

marked passages in de Vere's Bible appears in Shake-speare. The parallels range from the thematic–sharing a motif, idea, or trope–to the verbal–using names, phrases, or wordings that suggest a specific biblical passage.

While the Shake-speare canon as a whole contains hundreds of biblical allusions, there are only eighty-one biblical verses referenced four or more times in Shake-speare. These eighty-one biblical excerpts comprise what Stritmatter calls the "Shakespeare Diagnostic" set of verses. Shake-speare knew and evidently loved these passages from Scripture more than any others. He probably took note of many if not all of these verses somewhere in his collection of Bibles.

Shake-speare clearly knew more than one edition of the Bible, too. Shake-speare's plays and poems contain language that points to verses from an earlier edition of the Geneva Bible, from the Bishop's Bible of 1568, and from one or more other English, Latin, and other vernacular translations as well.

De Vere's letters reveal his familiarity with the Italian Bible, when he wrote to his guardian and father-in-law Lord Burghley that "I see it is but vain *calcitrare contra li busi*"–quoting an Italian translation of Acts 9:5. De Vere also bought and shipped home a Greek edition of the New Testament during his tour of Italy in 1575–76.

De Vere's 1569–70 Geneva Bible thus appears to have been just one of his multiple copies of the Good Book. So one would not reasonably expect the markings in de Vere's 1569–70 Geneva Bible to subsume the whole of de Vere's biblical consciousness.

Nevertheless, the overlap between the "Shakespeare Diagnostics" and the de Vere Bible markings is substantial. De Vere marked 30 of the 81 Shake-speare Diagnostic verses (37 percent) in his 1569–70 Geneva Bible.

For comparison, Stritmatter also assembled a control set of Diagnostic verses for three of Shake-speare's contemporaries: Francis Bacon, Christopher Marlowe, and Edmund Spenser. The same rules applied. The works of Francis Bacon refer to 101 biblical verses four or more times. Just two of those Bacon Diagnostic verses are marked in de Vere's Bible (2 percent). The overlap between Spenser's Diagnostic verses and the markings in de Vere's Geneva Bible is 5.4 percent. The overlap between Marlowe's Diagnostic verses and the de Vere Bible is 6.8 percent.

Statistics, however, tell only a small part of the story to be found within those crimson velvet covers bearing the arms of the earls of Oxford. The markings in de Vere's Geneva Bible also exhibit a continued interest in a series of themes, six of which will be briefly considered below.

1) The primacy of an anointed king. Four of the historical books of the Old Testament (I and II Samuel, I and II Kings) recite the central Judeo-Christian

precedent underlying the divine right of kings: The grace of God alone gives the monarch the mandate to rule a nation. In Protestant England, the scriptural basis for monarchy had an important corollary. The selection and coronation of a king or queen by birthright stood in contrast to the practice in Catholic countries, where the pope–the "bishop of Rome" as Protestant polemicists called him–often intervened to pick a leader most compatible with Roman interests. According to the founding doctrine of the Anglican Church, just as God chose David to rule Israel, so God chose the Tudors to rule England. Any pope who said otherwise (such as Pius V in 1570) was contravening God's will.

The signifier of God's political choice was the anointing of a monarch. Once the archbishop of Canterbury dabbed holy oil on the head of a king or queen during the coronation ceremony, the Lord's vote had effectively been cast. Regicide–the killing of God's anointed–was considered a crime against heaven itself.

David's story, again, set the precedent. The prophet Samuel had chosen and anointed David to become the next king of Israel. But Saul, the sitting king at the time, grew jealous. The faltering Saul tried and failed to kill David. David later happened upon a sleeping Saul. A spear stood nearby. Israel's future king had the opportunity to bury the spear in Saul's heart. David, however, did not do so. (Each of the biblical passages below contains a facsimile of de Vere's original underlining.)

> 11 "Behold, this day thine eyes have seen that the Lord had delivered thee this day into mine hand in the cave and come bade me kill thee," [David states.] "But I had compassion on thee and said, 'I will not lay mine hand on my master [Saul]: For he is the Lord's Anointed.'"
>
> *–I Samuel 24:11*

Later, after a servant had helped a terminally wounded Saul to commit suicide, David ordered the servant to be executed.

> 14 And David said unto him, "How wast you not afraid to put forth thine hand to destroy the Anointed of the Lord?"
>
> *–II Samuel 1:14*

One finds in Shake-speare the same fascination with the divine primacy that anointment confers upon a prince. When RICHARD II is stripped of his crown, he reminds the rebels who depose him that

> RICHARD Not all the water in the rough rude sea
> Can wash the balm off from an anointed king.

When King DUNCAN's body is discovered in *Macbeth,* MACDUFF exclaims:

> MACDUFF Most sacrilegious murder hath broke ope
> The Lord's anointed temple!

And when a corrupt LEONTES instructs his henchman CAMILLO to poison the King of Sicilia, POLIXENES, in *The Winter's Tale,* CAMILLO takes the high road originally traveled by David:

> CAMILLO I must be the poisoner
> Of good POLIXENES, and my ground to do't
> Is the obedience to a master; one
> Who, in rebellion with himself, will have
> All that are his [*in rebellion*] too. To do this deed,
> Promotion follows. [*Even*] If I could find examples
> Of thousands that had struck anointed kings
> And flourished after, I'd [*still*] not do't.

2) The Neoplatonic cluster. During the Italian Renaissance, authors and thinkers such as Marsilio Ficino and Pico della Mirandola revived and expanded upon the philosophy of Plato. These "Neoplatonists"–and their pre-Christian predecessors–upheld a series of propositions, three of which are reflected in the markings in de Vere's Bible: that all things and events in the cosmos follow ideal patterns and precedents that provide the answers to life and the universe; that even the smallest things contain within them a microcosm of all other things; and that the human senses can only perceive fallen and outward appearances–a subject's inner quintessence always contains the greater beauty.

As an example of what Stritmatter calls de Vere's "Neoplatonic cluster" of markings, consider the final item on the above list: inner truth versus outward show. The discrepancy between appearance and reality is probably the greatest unifying theme in the entire Shake-speare canon. De Vere, whose body was short and feeble, lighted upon one manifestation of the don't-judge-a-book-by-its-cover precept in the first book of Samuel:

> 7 But the Lord said unto Samuel, "Look not on his countenance nor on the height of his stature, because I have refused him. For God seeth not as man seeth. For man looketh on the outward appearance, but the Lord beholdeth the heart."
>
> *–I Samuel 16:7*

De Vere also underlined a set of Neoplatonic passages in Paul's letters to the Corinthians:

> 18 Flee fornication. Every sin that a man doeth is without [*outside*] the body. But he that commiteth fornication sinneth against his own body.
> 19 Know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost, which is in you, whom ye have of God? And ye are not your own.
> 20 For ye are bought for a price. Therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit. For they are Gods.
>
> *–I Corinthians 6:18–20*

> 16 Therefore we faint not, but though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed daily–
> 17 For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, causeth unto us a far [more] excellent and eternal weight of glory,
> 18 While we look not on the things which are seen but on the things which are not seen, for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal.
>
> *–II Corinthians 4:16–18*

Instances of the same Neoplatonic ideal in Shake-speare include GLOUCESTER's admonition to the PRINCE OF WALES in *Richard III:*

> Nor more can you distinguish of a man
> Than of his outward show, which, God he knows,
> Seldom or never jumpeth [*accords*] with the heart;

TROILUS's description of CRESSIDA as one

> Outliving beauty's outward with a mind
> That doth renew swifter than blood decays;

and FALSTAFF's inquisition of SHALLOW in *Henry IV, Part 2:*

> Will you tell me, Master SHALLOW, how to choose a man? Care I for the limb, the thews [*strength*], the stature, bulk, and big assemblance of a man? Give me the spirit, Master SHALLOW.

Ultimately, though, enumerating a list of Neoplatonic quotations does a disservice to the concept itself. The most prominent example of the "hidden inner truth" substrate in Shake-speare *is* Shake-speare. Four centuries have shined their light on the Bard's outward show–Will Shakspere of Stratford. De Vere must have taken some solace in the Apostle's assurance that someday, "though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed daily."

3) Sin. The Greek word used for *sin* in the New Testament, *hamartia*, is also the word Aristotle uses in his *Poetics* to describe the fatal flaw of a character that drives the action of a tragedy forward. Edward de Vere was fascinated with sin. He marked fifty-three verses in his Bible concerning the subject and wrote the index word *sinne* an additional eight times in the margin.

De Vere marked a passage in Ezekiel, for instance, on the noninheritability of sin:

> 20 The same soul that sinneth shall die. The son shall not bear the iniquity of the father, neither shall the father bear the iniquity of the son. But the righteousness of the righteous shall be upon him, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon himself.
>
> *–Ezekiel 18:20*

Both MACDUFF (in *Macbeth*) and LUCRECE flip Ezekiel's words upside down:

> MACDUFF ... Sinful MACDUFF!
> They [*his children*] were all struck for thee. Naught that I am:
> Not for their own demerits, but for mine,
> Fell slaughter on their souls.

> [LUCRECE] ... [H]ere in Troy, for trespass of thine eye,
> The sire, the son, the dame and daughter, die.
> Why should the private pleasure of some one
> Become the public plague of many moe?
> Let sin alone committed, light alone
> Upon his head that transgressed so.

De Vere underlined another verse in Ezekiel on the sins of the ancient city of Sodom:

> 49 Behold, this was the iniquity of thy sister Sodom: Pride, fullness of bread [*gluttony*] and abundance of idleness was in her and in her daughters. Neither did she strengthen the hand of the poor and needy.
>
> *–Ezekiel 16:49*

HAMLET seizes upon Ezekiel's language in describing the state of his father, KING HAMLET, at the time of KING HAMLET's death:

> HAMLET [CLAUDIUS] took my father grossly, full of bread.

In the Genevan book of Paul's Letter to the Romans, de Vere corrected a

typographical error by inserting a missing pronoun–suggesting more than a passing interest in the Apostle Paul's Neoplatonic conception of sin:

> 20 Now if ^I do that I would not, it is no more I that do it but the sin that dwelleth in me.

HAMLET emends the Apostle's words by suggesting that HAMLET was not the party responsible for his own actions. It was his "sin," his feigned madness.

> HAMLET Was't HAMLET [who] wrong'd LAERTES? Never HAMLET!
> ... Who does it, then? His madness. If 't be so,
> HAMLET is of the faction that is wronged.
> His madness is poor HAMLET's enemy.

4) The weapons in God's armory. De Vere highlighted a series of passages in his Geneva Bible revealing a Neoplatonic belief in the superiority of spiritual munitions over mere matériel such as swords and shields. "[The] weapon of [the] godly is praier" de Vere wrote in the margin adjacent to the Apocryphal verse Wisdom 18:21.

QUEEN MARGARET in *Henry VI, Part 2,* and BOLINGBROKE in *Richard II* voice the same belief:

> MARGARET [KING HENRY's] champions are the prophets and the apostles,
> His weapons, the holy saws of sacred writ,
> His study is his tilt-yard. ...

> BOLINGBROKE To reach at victory above my head,
> Add proof unto mine armor with thy prayers,
> And with thy blessings steel my lance's point,
> That it may enter MOWBRAY's waxen coat.

The spiritual-armor theme continues in another set of verses in Wisdom, in which de Vere underlined the final passage:

> 17 He shall take his jealousy for armor and shall arm the creatures to be revenged of the enemies.
> 18 He shall put on righteousness for a breastplate and take true judgment instead of an helmet.
> 19 He will take holiness for an invincible shield.
> 20 He will sharpen his fierce wrath for a sword and the world shall fight with him against the unwise.
>
> *–Wisdom 5:16–20*

And again in Paul's first epistle to the Thessalonians:

> 5 Ye are all the children of light and the children of day. We are not of the night, neither of the darkness.
> 6 Therefore, let us not sleep as do others. But let us watch and be sober.
> 7 For they that sleep, sleep in the night. And they that be drunken are drunken in the night.
> 8 But let us [who] are of the day be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love and of the hope of salvation for an helmet.
>
> *–I Thessalonians 5:5–8*

Both de Vere's personal letters and the works of Shake-speare reveal the sentiment expressed in the above biblical markings: embracing the ability to arm or adorn oneself with abstract qualities such as righteousness or justice or holiness. As de Vere wrote in his 1573 preface to the book *Cardanus's Comfort*:

> In mine opinion as it beautifieth a fair woman to be decked with pearls and precious stones, so much more it ornifieth a gentleman to be furnished in mind with glittering virtues.

Thirty years later, de Vere wrote his brother-in-law Robert Cecil:

> Nothing adorns a king more than justice, nor in anything doth a king more resemble God than in justice. . . .

Such extended Neoplatonic metaphors appear frequently in Shake-speare, from KING HENRY VI's observation

> KING What stronger breastplate than a heart untainted!
> Thrice is he arm'd that hath his quarrel just;
> And he but naked, though lock'd up in steel,
> Whose conscience with injustice is corrupted.

. . . To ISABELLA's reminder in *Measure for Measure*

> ISABELLA Not the king's crown, nor the deputed sword,
> The marshal's truncheon, nor the judge's robe
> Become them with one half so good a grace
> As mercy does.

On the other hand, anyone familiar with de Vere's militaristic pretensions from the 1560s through the '80s knows that there's another side to the transcendent qualities being celebrated in the above words.

De Vere was no holy pacifist. He was, rather, a wolfish earl born and bred, with a lifetime of unfulfilled yearnings for military glory and honor. In classic Shake-spearean contradiction, de Vere's biblical notes also reveal an abiding interest in the worldly details of physical weaponry from biblical battles.

In King David's later years, the Israelite army faced the Philistines and their allies in a series of minor battles–chronicled in II Samuel 21. De Vere underlined seemingly trivial details about the weapons of Israel's adversaries. A Hittite giant named Ishbi-Benob wanted to fight David one-on-one but was instead killed by one of David's officers. Ishbi-Benob was armed with a spear with a head that "weighed 300 shekels of brass." De Vere underlined the weight of Ishbi-Benob's spearhead.

Another warrior David's army faced was "Goliath the Hittite" (not to be confused with the Hittite's infamous gargantuan brother of the same name whom David had slain years before). Goliath the Hittite, according to the account in II Samuel, carried a spear "the staff . . . [of which] was like a weaver's beam." De Vere underlined the dimensions of Goliath the Hittite's weapon too. One of David's soldiers, named Elhanan, killed Goliath the Hittite.

Note that in both cases, the armament on which de Vere fixated was the spear.

FALSTAFF seizes upon the confusion between the Geneva Bible's two Goliaths when, in *The Merry Wives of Windsor,* he brags, "I fear not Goliath with a weaver's beam!" The joke here is that, to those who don't know their biblical history exceptionally well, FALSTAFF seems to brag that he is so valiant that he would face off against the very same giant whom David famously killed. But those who know their Old Testament trivia–or at least have access to de Vere's Geneva Bible, which highlights such trivia–understand that the cowardly FALSTAFF is just cleverly sneaking through a biblical loophole. In fact, Shake-speare's rotund braggart is simply saying that he's not afraid to battle the *other* Goliath, the same pipsqueak who was killed off in the span of less than a sentence by one of King David's foot soldiers.

5) The heavenly duty of mercy. In the gutter straddling the fiftieth chapter of the Old Testament book of Jeremiah, de Vere wrote the index word *mercy.* The story de Vere annotated concerns an angry God rebuking the kingdom of Israel's oppressors. The king of Babylon and his country will be punished, God says. And when that glorious day comes, He adds, even the sinful will ultimately be forgiven. In *The Merchant of Venice,* PORTIA calls out to SHYLOCK for such heavenly mercy, becoming of kings and God alike, in her immortal plea

> The quality of mercy is not strained.
> It droppeth as the gentle rain from heaven
> Upon the place beneath. It is twice blest:
> It blesseth him that gives and him that takes.

'Tis mightiest in the mightiest, it becomes
The throned monarch better than his crown. . . .
It is an attribute to God himself;
And earthly power doth then show likest God's
When mercy seasons justice. Therefore, Jew,
Though justice be thy plea, consider this,
That in the course of justice, none of us
Should see salvation. We do pray for mercy,
And that same prayer doth teach us all to render
The deeds of mercy.

PORTIA's pleading also borrows from a scriptural source marked in de Vere's Bible. In the Apocryphal book of Ecclesiasticus, de Vere underlined the verse numbers attached to the following words:

1 He that seeketh vengeance shall find vengeance of the Lord–and he will surely keep his sins.
2 Forgive thy neighbor the hurt that he hath done to thee, [and] so shalt thy sins be forgiven also, when thou prayest.
3 Should a man bear hatred against man and desire forgiveness of the Lord?

–Ecclesiasticus 28:1–3

The act of praying for forgiveness, PORTIA says, guides us to be forgiving as well. In drawing her lesson from the above verses, PORTIA is also proving herself an adept biblical scholar. Ecclesiasticus 28:1–3 is a key pre-Christian teaching–one that SHYLOCK would be most amenable to–that calls for the kind of unconditional and reciprocal mercy that the defendant ANTONIO needs in his legal case against the Jew.

PROSPERO also draws upon Ecclesiasticus's call for prayer as a precondition for mercy and redemption. In his closing remarks to the audience, *The Tempest*'s great magician asks for the audience to pray for his freedom–a plea from an exiled author to restore him to his greatest dukedom, the canon of his own writings.

EPILOGUE
PROSPERO [R]elease me from my bands
With the help of your good hands!
Gentle breath of yours my sails
Must fill or else my project fails,
Which was to please. Now I want
Spirits to enforce, art to enchant,
And my ending is despair,

Unless I be reliev'd by prayer,
Which pierces so that it assaults
Mercy itself and frees all faults.
As you from crimes would pardon'd be,
Let your indulgence set me free.

6) The scriptural precedent for the discovery of a man's secret works. As discussed in Chapter 11, a cluster of verses in de Vere's Bible yearn for the day a neglected and forgotten sinner can be finally brought forth into the light.

9 I will bear the wrath of the Lord because I have sinned against him, until he plead my cause and execute judgment for me. Then will he bring me forth into the light, and I shall see his righteousness.

–Micah 7:9

11 Though men mourn for their body, yet the wicked name of the ungodly shall be put out.

–Ecclesiasticus 41:11

c. As the hope of the daylight causeth us not to be offended with the darkness of the night, so ought we patiently to trust that God will clear our cause and restore us to our right.

–Psalm 38, footnote c (Geneva ed.)

1 Take heed that ye give not your alms before men, to be seen of them–or else ye shall have no reward of your Father which is in heaven.
2 Therefore when thou givest thine alms, thou shalt not make a trumpet to be blown before thee, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, to be praised of men. Verily I say unto you, they have their reward.
3 But when thou doest thine alms, let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth.
4 That thine alms may be in secret–and thy Father that seeth in secret, he will reward thee openly.

–Matthew 6:1–4

10 For God is not [so] unrighteous that he should forget your work and labor of love. . . .

–Hebrews 6:10

14 Do all things without murmuring and reasonings
15 That ye may be blameless and pure and the sons of God without

rebuke, in the midst of a naughty and crooked nation, among whom ye shine as lights in the world.

–Philippians 2:14–15

5 He that overcometh shall be clothed in white array and I will not put his name out of the Book of Life. But I will confess his name before my Father and before his Angels.

–Revelations 3:5

13 Then I heard a voice from Heaven saying unto me, "Write. Blessed are the dead, which hereafter die in the Lord. Even so," saith the Spirit. "For they rest from their labors, and their works follow them."

–Revelations 14:13

The image derived from this collection of de Vere Bible markings is that of a time capsule–involving an identity that must be buried for a time with the promise of eventually being rediscovered and brought back into the world.

De Vere knew he was no saint. As HAMLET says, "I could accuse me of such things that it were better my mother had not borne me." According to de Vere's underlined verses in Micah and Ecclesiasticus, the sinner's identity will be subsumed. But even the acerbic Micah allows for the fact that after one has endured God's wrath–however long the ordeal–God will then bring a sinner back "into the light." The underlined Genevan footnote to Psalm 37 stresses the patience and trust in God's divine plans and that in due time He will "clear our cause and restore us to our right."

The New Testament's view about secret works is more reassuring. There Christ himself, as part of his Sermon on the Mount, says that the path of the godly is to do one's great service to mankind in secret.

The anonymous Epistle to the Hebrews adds that God "is not so unjust that he should forget your work and labor of love." In the founding documents of the Anglican Church, in fact, these words so flew in the face of prevailing dogma–that works are insufficient by themselves in impressing the Lord–that church members were specifically enjoined to "pay no attention" to them. Anyone who matriculated at Cambridge or Oxford University, as de Vere did, would have had to sign his name to such a prohibition.

De Vere's "secret works" eschatology concludes in two underlined passages from the book of Revelations. John the Divine assures posterity that a man's name will *not* be blotted from the "Book of Life." Later, a voice from heaven tells John to write–as the voice of HAMLET's ghost tells his son to write. To combine the prophetic words of Micah with those of John, the dead's "works" will one day follow them into the light. The "indulgence" PROSPERO seeks–the long-overdue recognition of an author alienated from his own canon–cannot be far behind.

APPENDIX B

THE SHAKE-SPEARE APOCRYPHA

THE FOLLOWING NON-SHAKE-SPEARE PLAYS, POEMS, AND MISCELlaneous tracts were all, so far as can be determined, written during the lifetime of Edward de Vere, earl of Oxford (1550–1604), and all reveal at least the possibility of de Vere's hand in their authorship. Some are anonymous or dubiously or tenuously attributed to another author and, for biographical or stylistic reasons, appear "de Verean" in character and form; some are attributed to authors close to de Vere's orbit (such as his secretaries John Lyly or Anthony Munday) and may either be wholly the product of de Vere's pen and simply published under the other man's name or instead may be the collaborative by-product of de Vere and one or more associates.

In nearly every case, the background scholarship and attribution studies necessary to prove or disprove de Vere's authorship are either incomplete or have simply not been undertaken yet. As with the Shake-speare canon itself, no single "smoking gun" connects these works with de Vere. Instead, the same process of aggregating circumstantial evidence awaits the scholar hoping to add to the Shake-speare canon.

If current scholarly awareness and interest in de Vere provides any prediction of future activity, within the next decade one can imagine that the Complete Works of Shake-speare will resemble a broad and polyglot array of texts–poetic, dramatic, and otherwise–that reveal the complete life cycle of an author from precocious schoolboy to courtly poet-playwright-patron to conscience-catching court dramatist to masked and anonymous man subsumed by the Shake-speare myth.

In the coming years, further study will no doubt reveal that some of the following texts were, in fact, not written by de Vere. On the other hand, as a starting point for further investigation, this list will just as certainly be found to

contain at least a few new streams of nectar flowing from the pen of the man who was Shake-speare.

Plays

[Publication dates below do not indicate composition dates, which more likely are from the 1570s or '80s.]

Edmund Ironside (n.d.)
Thomas of Woodstock (n.d.)
The Troublesome Raigne of John King of England (1591)
The Chronicle History of King Leir (1605)
The Famous Victories of Henry V (1600)
The True Tragedy of Richard III (1594)
The Taming of A Shrew (1594)
The Boke of Sir Thomas More (n.d.)

Poetry Collections and Short Verse

Anthony Munday, *The Paine of Pleasure* (1580)
George Gascoigne, *Hundreth Sundrie Flowers* (1575–76) [portions thereof?]
"Phaeton" sonnet in John Florio's *Second Fruits* (1591)
"Trentame" poem in *Brittons Bowre of Delights* (1591)
Poems by "Ignoto" in *England's Helicon* (1600)
"Praise of a Contented Mind" poem appended to *Willobie His Avisa* (1594)

Fictional or Historical Prose

John Lyly's *Euphues* novels (1580, 1588), Anthony Munday's *Zelauto* (1580) [possible collaborations with de Vere's secretaries]

Translations

Ovid's *Metamorphoses,* tr. Arthur Golding (1562–63) [student–teacher collaboration?]
Apuleius's *Golden Asse,* tr. William Adlington (1566)
English translations by "Lazarus Piot" [collaboration with Anthony Munday?]: *Amadis de Gaule* (1596); *The Orator* (1596)

Misc.

Prose introductions to the sonnets in Thomas Watson's *Hekatompathia* (1581)

Some of the sample letters in Angel Day's *The English Secretary* (1586)
The Homily on Disobedience and Willful Rebellion (1571)
"Pasquill Caviliero" pamphleteering replies to "Martin Marprelate": *A Countercuffe Given to Martin Junior*... (1589); *The Returne of the Renowned Cavaliero*... (1589); *The First Part of Pasquils Apologie* (1590)

APPENDIX C

"THE 1604 QUESTION"

IT IS OFTEN OBJECTED THAT EDWARD DE VERE, EARL OF OXFORD, could not have written the works of Shake-speare because many Shake-speare plays were allegedly written after 1604, the year de Vere died. However, upon closer examination, chronological evidence supports rather than refutes the theory that de Vere wrote Shake-speare. After 1604, the London stages and bookstalls appear to have been reviving bits and patches of a *posthumous* Shake-speare canon.

Because no original Shake-speare manuscripts exist, and because no other records provide an unequivocal date of composition of the Shake-speare works, what remains is a host of scholarly suppositions–some better founded in historical fact than others. Will Shakspere (1564–1616) is conventionally assumed to have written the Shake-speare canon from his late twenties through the end of his forties (c. 1592–1613). The progression of Shake-speare plays from stylistically "early" (such as *The Comedy of Errors*) to "late" (such as *The Tempest*) is thus folded into the span of Will Shakspere's assumed career as liquid plastic is poured into a mold. Orthodox scholars then point to the assorted plays that convention places after 1604, which in turn, they claim, present conclusive proof that de Vere could not have been Shake-speare. This is circular reasoning.

There is no such thing as a "standard" chronology of Shake-speare. *The Riverside Shakespeare,* a textbook used in many classrooms today, dates eleven plays to sometime after 1604: *King Lear, Macbeth, Antony and Cleopatra, Coriolanus, Timon of Athens, Pericles, Cymbeline, The Winter's Tale, The Tempest, Henry VIII,* and *The Two Noble Kinsmen.* On the other hand, some orthodox scholarship yields the now-heretical conclusion that Shake-speare stopped writing in 1604. Alfred Harbage's Pelican/Viking editions of Shake-speare (1969; 1977)

provide a range of dates for the likely composition of each of the plays: Only *The Tempest* and *Henry VIII* fall beyond 1604. And the nineteenth-century German literary historian Karl Elze dated both of these plays to the period 1603–04, theorizing that *Henry VIII* was originally written in early 1603 to celebrate the seventieth birthday that Queen Elizabeth never lived to see, while *The Tempest,* Elze concluded, "would at latest fall to the year 1604."

One eighteenth-century scholar, unaware of the significance of the year 1604, flatly stated what the above amalgam of scholarship implies. In *Memoirs of the Life and Writings of Ben Jonson* (1756), W. R. Chetwood concludes on the basis of performance records that "at the end of that year [1603] or the beginning of the next, 'tis supposed that [Shake-speare] took his farewell of the stage, both as author and actor."

Below are the methods scholars use to determine the dates of Shake-speare works, followed by an examination of the three strongest cases for post-1604 composition: *Macbeth, Henry VIII,* and *The Tempest.* Each play and each method, in fact, reinforce the conclusion Chetwood innocently put forward in 1756 and that has been ignored–in orthodox scholarly circles, at least–ever since.

One unassailable fact establishes the latest possible date by which a Shake-speare play must have been written: the year of first publication.

The 1593 epic poem *Venus and Adonis* was Shake-speare's print debut. During the ensuing decade, new Shake-speare plays and poems appeared in print, on average, twice per year. Then, in 1604, Shake-speare fell silent.

The silence was broken twice. The first break came in 1608–09 when de Vere's widow, Elizabeth Trentham de Vere, was preparing to move out of King's Place in Hackney, the house that she had shared with her late husband during his final years. Four new Shake-speare works (*Pericles, King Lear, Troilus and Cressida,* and the *Sonnets*) were printed during this period. The second window began with the publication in 1622 of the debut edition of *Othello* and culminated the following year in the publication of the thirty-seven plays (eighteen of which had never been printed before) that constitute the 1623 "Shakespeare First Folio."

The early history of *reprints* of Shake-speare plays and poems also points to 1604 as a watershed year. Some Shake-speare texts appear, by their shoddy nature, to have been cobbled-together versions of actors' playscripts or transcriptions from live performances by an audience member, Elizabethan equivalents of a video camcorder smuggled into a movie theater. Other Shake-speare texts–responding to these pirated editions–appear genuine, boasting on their title pages that they contain the author's revisions and corrections.

The title page of the second edition of *Romeo and Juliet* (1599), for instance, states that it has been "newly corrected, augmented, and emended," while the

third edition of *Richard III* (1602) notes that it has been "newly augmented." The title page of the second edition of *Hamlet* (1604) states that the ensuing text has been "newly imprinted and enlarged to almost as much again as it was, according to the true and perfect copy."

After 1604, the "newly correct[ing]" and "augment[ing]" stops. Once again, the Shake-speare enterprise appears to have shut down.

Shake-speare draws upon contemporary scientific events and discoveries through the end of the sixteenth century. Yet Shake-speare is mute about science that appeared after de Vere's June 1604 death. A 1572 supernova in the constellation Cassiopeia becomes in *Hamlet* "... yond same star that's westward from the pole [making] his course to illume that part of heaven." William Gilbert's theory of geomagnetism (published in 1600) inspires a geomagnetic metaphor in *Troilus and Cressida* ("As true ... as iron to adamant, as earth to the center"). Yet a spectacular supernova in October 1604–appearing nearby a celestial conjunction of Mars, Saturn, and Jupiter–occasions no mention in Shake-speare, nor does Johannes Kepler's revolutionary 1609 study of planetary orbits.

Shake-speare's source texts are also consistent with the proposition that the author was born in 1550 and died in 1604. Shake-speare's chief source texts appear at a frequency of seven to eight per decade from the 1560s through the end of the 1590s. Then, excepting two publications in 1603, the final curtain rings down. In Geoffrey Bullough's eight-volume *Narrative and Dramatic Sources of Shakespeare,* the twentieth-century literary scholar locates only one post-1604 Shake-speare source text that Bullough claims had more than just a "possible" or "probable" influence on the Bard. Bullough's single post-1604 "source," for *The Tempest,* will be discussed below.

The spotty record of Shake-speare performances provides less reliable conclusions about dates of composition. Shake-speare plays were performed for private audiences such as the students at Gray's Inn in 1594 *(The Comedy of Errors)* or Middle Temple Hall in 1602 *(Twelfth Night).* In November 1611, *The Winter's Tale* was enacted for King James at court. None of these recorded performances, however, indicate the plays were newly written at the time. Yet scholars today assume as much in all three cases.

As this book proposes, the first version of *The Comedy of Errors* probably dates to 1577, when the Children of Paul's performed an otherwise lost courtly interlude for Queen Elizabeth called *A History of Error.* The first version of *Twelfth Night* was likely the manuscript cataloged during the eighteenth century as "[a] pleasant conceit of Vere, earl of Oxford, discontented at the rising of a mean gentleman in the English court circa 1580"–and, subsequently, lost. *The Winter's Tale,* which presents de Vere's self-flagellating reflections over his jealous mistreatment of his first wife, would appear upon internal evidence to stem from the period after her 1588 death. But de Vere probably never intended the searing autobiographical portrait of *The Winter's Tale* to be performed

during his lifetime–not unlike the restrictions Eugene O'Neill placed upon his uncompromising family exposé *Long Day's Journey into Night.*

One performance record does point to 1604 as a speechless moment in Shake-spearean history. When the King's Men appeared at court during the winter of 1604–05, Queen Anne requested that the company perform some Shake-speare that she hadn't already seen. They told her they could not fulfill her request. So the King's Men staged the old standby *Love's Labor's Lost* instead.

Shake-speare's alleged references to seventeenth-century historical events as well as seventeenth-century Londoners' references to Shake-speare provide a hotly contested set of clues about dates of composition. Three plays in particular have been the site of pitched scholarly battles over whether the man who was Shake-speare died in 1616 or 1604.

Macbeth: The first recorded performance of Shake-speare's Scots tragedy was at the Globe Theatre in 1611. (The next known staging of *Macbeth* after that was in 1664.) However, for once, conventional scholarship supposes an earlier date of composition than what the scattershot performance records might imply. In Act 2, Scene 3, a drunken PORTER answers the knocking at MACBETH's castle door with the line

> Faith, here's an equivocator, that could swear in both the scales against either scale; who committed treason enough for God's sake, yet could not equivocate to heaven. O, come in, equivocator!

These words, along with other references to equivocating throughout *Macbeth,* led historians to a controversial Catholic policy of church-sanctioned duplicity, known as the Doctrine of Equivocation. Equivocations and equivocators gained notoriety around London in March 1606 during the celebrated trial of Father Henry Garnett, when he cited the Doctrine of Equivocation against an accusation of trying to blow up Parliament. (The defeat of the "Gunpowder Plot" is celebrated to this day in England on Guy Fawkes Day, November 5.) Because of the play's multiple allusions to equivocation, *Macbeth* is thus conventionally dated to c. 1606.

However, equivocation was hardly a novel concept in 1606. In a 1583 tract, *A Declaration of the Favorable Dealing of Her Majesty's Commission Approved for the Examination of Certain Traitors and of Tortures Unjustly Reported To Be Done Upon Them For Matters of Religion,* Edward de Vere's father-in-law, Lord Burghley, mused over Catholics who, when tortured, used "hypocritical and sophistical speech" to evade their torturers' questions. In 1584, a Spanish prelate named Martin Azpilcueta first formally laid out the Doctrine of Equivocation, which was disseminated across the Continent and into England. A 1595 trial of the English Catholic martyr Robert Southwell raised the issues central to Azpilcueta's thesis: that God-fearing papists could with clear conscience lie to Protestant inquisitors. While it is true that Garnett popularized the topic of equivocation in London in 1606, *Macbeth* makes no allusions to equivocation that can be tied to the Gunpowder Plot trial specifically.

This book hypothesizes that the regicidal anxiety expressed in *Macbeth* stems from de Vere's role as a juror who condemned Mary, Queen of Scots, to death in 1586. So, in fact, the wider context of the play would suggest that Burghley's 1583 treatise and Azpilcueta's 1584 formulation of the Doctrine of Equivocation were the more likely wellspring for the jestings of *Macbeth*'s PORTER scene.

Henry VIII: On June 29, 1613, the Globe Theatre burned to the ground during a performance of Shake-speare's *Henry VIII.* At least six independent eyewitness accounts of the fire exist. Two of these six–July 1613 letters written by the poet Sir Henry Wotton and the London merchant Henry Bluett–refer to the play as being "new."

It is indeed possible that in 1613 *Henry VIII* was new to the general theatergoing public. De Vere may well have left an incomplete *Henry VIII* manuscript behind at the time of his death only to be touched up in 1613 by other hands and debuted on the Globe stage.

Yet there's also no reason to treat the audience members Wotton and Bluett as expert witnesses either. In December 1663 the London diarist Samuel Pepys also referred to *Henry VIII* as being "new."

Before the twentieth century, when the Oxfordian theory forced the 1604 Question, many of the leading lights of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Shake-speare scholarship placed the composition of *Henry VIII* to before 1604. Scholars such as Samuel Johnson, Lewis Theobald, George Steevens, Edmund Malone, and James Orchard Halliwell-Phillipps recognized the absurdity of dating such a Tudor apologist play as *Henry VIII* to the reign of King James, who never forgave the Tudors for having beheaded his mother. With characteristic polite understatement, Malone wrote of *Henry VIII:*

> It is more likely that Shakspeare [*sic*] should have written a play, the chief subject of which is the disgrace of Queen Catharine, the aggrandizement of Anne Boleyn, and the birth of her daughter [Elizabeth] in the lifetime of that daughter, than after her death: at a time when the subject must have been highly pleasing at court, rather than at a period when it must have been less interesting.

The Tempest is often portrayed as the silver bullet that kills the Oxfordian theory–because of parallels alleged between *The Tempest* and accounts of a

1609 wreck of the English ship the *Sea-Venture* off the Bermuda coast. PROSPERO's sprite ARIEL notes how he had once traveled "at midnight to fetch dew from the still vex'd Bermoothes"–interpreted, somehow, to mean that the shipwreck must have been in the Bermudas. Yet the Bermudas were not just a string of islands in the Atlantic Ocean; "The Bermudas" was also the nickname of a neighborhood in Westminster near Charing Cross. If, as proposed earlier, *The Tempest*'s "uninhabited island" is a grotesque of England, PROSPERO's servant recalling an errand he'd once made to fetch "dew from the still vex'd Bermoothes" could simply be the author's jesting recollection of a favorite part of town in which to buy distilled liquor.

Regardless, the 1609 Bermuda shipwreck produced a flood of recollections written by the survivors (circulated in a manuscript written by William Strachey and published in a 1610 pamphlet by Sylvester Jourdan) that orthodox scholars compare at length to the plot and dialogue of *The Tempest.* Strachey writes of "great strokes of thunder," while two characters in *The Tempest* use the term *thunder-stroke;* Strachey writes that his crewmates "purposed to have cut down the main mast"; *The Tempest*'s BOATSWAIN cries out, "Down with the topmast!"; Strachey's account of the survivors has them splitting into two parties; *The Tempest* has two parties of survivors plus FERDINAND.

Those without an a priori need to dash Edward de Vere on the rocks, however, have found the Strachey-*Tempest* parallels less than overwhelming. In *The Sources of Shakespeare's Plays* (1978), the literary scholar Kenneth Muir notes:

> The extent of verbal echoes of [the Bermuda] pamphlets has, I think, been exaggerated. There is hardly a shipwreck in history or fiction which does not mention splitting, in which the ship is not lightened of its cargo, in which the passengers do not give themselves up for lost, in which the north winds are not sharp, and in which no one gets to shore by clinging to wreckage.

Muir also points to thirteen thematic and verbal parallels between *The Tempest* and St. Paul's account of his shipwreck at Malta in the Acts of the Apostles chapters 27–28–and this over just two pages of Scripture compared to the 114 pages of Strachey and Jourdan.

Perhaps the single most impressive Strachey-*Tempest* similarity is Strachey's detailed account of St. Elmo's fire and ARIEL's description of the heavenly light-show he provided for the storm-tossed mariners

> . . . now on the beak,
> Now in the waist, the deck, in every cabin,
> I flam'd amazement: Sometime I'd divide,
> And burn in many places; on the topmast,
> The yards and boresprit, would I flame distinctly
> Then meet and join.

Yet Strachey was not the only seaman of his day to marvel at St. Elmo's fire, a continuous electric spark often seen in thunderstorms around ships' masts and church spires–essentially a neon light without the glass. In 1600, in a collection of nautical tales and discoveries published in London, the voyager Robert Tomson noted:

> . . . in the night, there came upon the top of our mainyard and mainmast, a certain little light, much like unto the light of a little candle . . . this light continued aboard our ship about three hours, flying from mast to mast and from top to top. And sometime it would be in two or three places at once.

And if de Vere had himself endured the stormy adventures of the pre-Armada reconnaissance expeditions in June of 1588, as discussed in Chapter 8, he would probably have needed no reference texts to write convincingly about such a phantasm, such a thing as dreams are made on.