

Edward de Vere v.s. Shakespeare

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In the last decade of the sixteenth century (1590-1600), and the first decade of the seventeenth (1600-1610 or 1613) William Shakespeare wrote 37 plays, 154 sonnets, some major poems and some minor ones. In their own time, the plays were successful, and even today, Shakespeare continues to enjoy fame and acclaim. Scholars estimate that Shakespeare used 25,000 different words, 2000 of which he invented. Long speeches such as Hamlet's "To be or not to be" and Macbeth's "Tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow" are famous. His shorter quotes are commonly used; sometimes without one recognizing that they are Shakespeare's. Examples are vanishing into thin air, playing fast and loose, insisting on fair play, making virtue of necessity, living in a fool's paradise, sleeping not a wink, giving the devil his due, being an eyesore, a laughing stock, a blinking fool or a stony-hearted villain. Though this is not the long and short of it, it is high time that I stop quoting.

Many books, articles and university theses have been written about some aspect of the man's work. Knowledge of Shakespeare is regarded as a sign of education. Few high-school students escape reading his plays. In college, some students focus on studying him. Shakespeare's influence on English culture is unequalled.

And, he has been translated to other languages. An Arab named Kamil Gaylani translated the stories of some of Shakespeare's plays into a language, simple enough for children, and published them. That's how I came to reading the Tempest at age ten. Mr. Gaylani wrote the story of the play in prose, but would occasionally use short, simple poetry:

The Tempest is about Prospero, Duke of Milan who busies himself with the pursuit of knowledge; leaving state affairs to his brother Antonio, who takes over, and banishes Prospero and his daughter Miranda to a remote island. Prospero uses his intellectual powers to control the creatures that island. One creature is Caliban who is bad and ugly; the other Ariel is good and fair. The first scene of the play presents the King of Naples, his son Ferdinand and the treacherous Antonio on a ship being wrecked by a fierce tempest, near Prospero's island. In the next scene Ferdinand is alone on the island and thinks the others dead. Ariel appears and whispers to him:

Abooka ya Ferdinando.....etc

These lines translate: Ferdinand, your father is submerged in a deep sea. His eyes are now pearls, and his bones are coral. Recently, I read the original Tempest, and in Act I Sc 2, Ariel talks to Ferdinand about five **fathoms**. A fathom is a unit of depth that equals six feet. So Ariel is saying that the father is thirty feet under the sea:

Full fathom five, thy father lies,
Of his bones are coral made,
These are pearls that were his eyes
Nothing of him that doth fade
But doth suffer a sea change
Into something rich and strange.

During my teens, I learned English at an American high school in Baghdad, and in the freshman year, our class read Julius Caesar under the tutelage of Father Paul Reagan. Shakespeare's words were difficult to understand, until Father Reagan explained them. And then they were impressive. More impressive was the *drama* in Shakespeare: In Act III scene 1, a man named Cimber asks Caesar to reverse a verdict of banishment issued against Cimber's brother. Caesar declines and proclaims that he would not be moved (i.e. made to change his mind), simulating himself to the North Star which is constant i.e. unmoving, when compared to the other stars in the firmament, i.e. the sky:

I could be well moved, if I were as you
If I could pray to move, prayers would move me
But I am as constant as the northern star
Of whose true fixed and resting quality
There is no fellow in the firmament.
The skies are painted with unnumbered stars
They are all fire, and everyone doth shine
But there is but one in all doth hold his place.
So in the world, tis furnished well with men
And men are flesh and blood, and apprehensive
But in the number I do know but one
That unassailable holds on his rank
Unshaked by motion, and that I am he.

WOW the megalomania.

That play was my first glimpse of Shakespeare's *way with words* AND his skill as a dramatist. In Act I Sc 2, he adeptly shows the envious Cassius manipulating the idealistic Brutus into killing the arrogant Caesar, by using the metaphor of Colossus. Colossus was a statue built at the entrance to Rhodes harbor and made so huge that ships sailed in and out under the statue's legs. Cassius describes Caesar to Brutus

Why man, he doth bestride the narrow world like a Colossus
And we petty men, walk under his huge legs
And peep about, to find ourselves dishonorable graves.
Men at some time are masters of their fate
The fault dear Brutus, is not in our stars,
But in ourselves, that we are underlings.

As you know, Cassius' maneuvering succeeds in convincing Brutus to kill Caesar.

That play was when Father Reagan gave us the most accurate advice about Shakespeare. "Boys, remember that when Shakespeare wrote his work, he was not trying to write masterpieces. He was simply writing plays for his theatre group."

Shakespeare's unique quality, which made his work unique, was his poetic talent, his *way with words*.

I have continued to read Shakespeare. With the help of the Folgers library or Professor Dave Bevington, I understand the work, so I enjoy it and recite it repeatedly, often when I am alone.

In 2007, I read a book titled "Shakespeare by Another Name" written by an American Journalist called Mark Anderson It introduced me to the theory that William Shakespeare did not write the works attributed to him. Instead, Edward de Vere did.

DeVere was a contemporary of Shakespeare, though 14 years older, being born in 1550 to Shakespeare's birth-year of 1564. DeVere died in 1604 followed 12 years later by Shakespeare's death in 1616. But Shakespeare was middle class, whereas DeVere was an Earl, the highest rank of English nobility. He was the 17th Earl of Oxford, so those who believe him to be the author of Shakespeare's work are called the Oxfordians. That is in distinction from the Stradfordians who say Willaim Shakespeare of Stratford-upon-Avon is the true author.

Mr. Anderson had many arguments that cast serious doubts on Shakespeare's authorship. Anderson's book also made me see how ignorant I was of Shakespeare's time and the events of his life; facts that are crucial in evaluating who the true author was. So I spent several months reading seven books about Shakespeare's time and his contemporaries, then went back and read Anderson's book again.

The most remarkable fact I learned about Shakespeare's time is the scarcity of record keeping. That's why it is easy NOW to shed doubt on the authorship. We have no record of Shakespeare's birth; but there's a church record of his baptism on 4-26-1564, his marriage on 11-28-1582 and the baptism of his twins in 1585. But then for 7 years we have nothing on him until 1592 when a London author wrote a pamphlet criticizing him. These are Shakespeare's Seven Lost Years and it is assumed that he spent them as an actor in a touring company that landed him in London about 1587. Luckily there is proof of this in a man called Phillip Henslowe who ran a competing theatre to Shakespeare and kept detailed records. From Phillip Henslowe diaries we know which plays were performed and when; and that actors costumes were the most costly item in the business and that a playwright got 5 pounds for a play. We also know that Shakespeare was an actor in various plays even some that were not his.

Another fact of life then is that theatre was one of the few forms of entertainment of the time, beside bear baiting cock-fighting and public executions. But all these were scorned. Theatre would not have flourished, had it not been for Queen Elizabeth I who reigned for 45 years and put her stamp on English life. She liked plays, and protected the theatre that still could not operate within city limits. So the Globe and Henslowe's the Rose were located in Bankside, an area of ill-repute south of the Thames.

I also found evidence in support of Father Reagan's advice. Shakespeare was writing and actin for the financial success of his theatre group. He came to London as a poor lad around 1587, and retired back to Stratford a rich man in 1613. He viewed the plays as means for money and never published any of them. But he did publish a long poem in 1593 and another in 1594 when theaters were closed by the plague.

The Oxfordian Anderson points out this: Shakespeare's works are difficult to understand without help. They often indicate a learned person; maybe someone with university tenure. But Shakespeare never went to college, whereas DeVere spent 2 years in college. This argument did fool me until I learned the crucial fact that colleges in that time **did not teach English**. They taught Latin and Greek. The English of Shakespeare, though is high class to us, was in that time, the English of the streets. In contrast, English nobility of that time spoke a mixture of French, Latin and English. Notably, **Church and legal records** of the time were kept in **Latin!!!**

Another Oxfordian point is that about half of Shakespeare's plays dealt with kings and took place in royal courts. Shakespeare was a common man whereas DeVere, the 17th Earl of Oxford, was the Lord Great Chamberlain of England, so he was very intimate

with court life. Right? The response to this lies in Father Reagan's words: Shakespeare's plays were intended for his audience: tradesmen, apprentices, prostitutes and laborers. The plays had to meet **these people's** concept of court life, to be popular. And why should the popular concept about court life be very different from the "real" concept. Take a current example in the successful TV series the West Wing which is popular among millions, none of whom has set foot in the white House; nor have the writers of the series been members of any recent Administration.

Another Anderson argument "Studies of Shakespeare's canon by lawyers, physicians, theologians, philosophers, linguists, botanists, sailors, musicians, classicists and military technicians, reveal a knowledge in these fields that varies from competent to expert. How can a country lad who seems to have drifted into London, know all that?" The implication here is that deVere with his 2years in colege *had* that "competent to expert knowledge". My take is that Shakespeare's work shows linguistic and dramatic cleverness, but certainly no medical expertise when I compare it to the medical knowledge of the time. In Macbeth for example, Lady Macbeth urges her husband to kill the King and usurp the throne but then goes mad and Macbeth is sorry and depressed. So in Act V scene 2, Macbeth asks a doctor:

Canst thou not minister to a mind diseased
Pluck from the memory rooted sorrow
Raze out the written troubles of the brain
And with some sweet oblivious antidote
Cleanse the stuffed bosom of that perilous stuff
Which weighs upon the heart?

But the doctor is no help, so Macbeth shouts "Throw physic to the dogs; I'll none of it" As you know, a physic is a bowel softener. So Shakespeare's medical expertise equals the inducement of diarrhea.

Another Anderson question: Shakespeare wrote 37 plays, the shortest, *Comedy of Errors* has 2000 lines, and the longest *Hamlet* has 4000. Yet no sheets of paper survive that have these plays in Shakespeare's handwriting. How can a prolific writer leave nothing written? My answer is to ask if there is any of that work available in deVere's handwriting? The more serious answer is that Shakespeare's work was part of a theatric effort. Neither Shakespeare's scripts nor the actors' costumes, which were much more costly, have survived.

A related item; again from Anderson: "In Shakespeare's will, he detailed his worldly possessions down to his silver gilt bowl and second best bed, plus money left to three of his actor friends. But nowhere does he mention any literary or theatrical properties. No books, no manuscripts, no plays- the most precious things in a dramatist's life." Here is where Anderson neglects to tell us the most important fact about Shakespeare's time. In those days, a playwright sold his play to the theatre group, and from then on the play was the group's, not the author's property. And again, deVere did not bequeath "books, manuscripts or plays" either!!!

Also, Anderson points out that several Shakespeare's plays occur in Italy and France. But Shakespeare never left England, whereas de Vere lived in Italy and France for a whole year, during the 1570's. Here is another Anderson omission. In Shakespeare time the concept of copy rights & intellectual property did not exist. Shakespeare took the

story of more than one of his plays from a pre-existing play or story, a common practice at the time.

All these issues try to muddy the waters and cast doubt on Shakespeare's authorship, in preparation for the next step which is to say "deVere is a more likely author"

What is noteworthy about doubting Shakespeare is that it did not start until around 1785, some 160 years after his death; when all witnesses were dead and evidence buried. And it would have been OK if Indisputable Evidence had surfaced. But none had. Compare the belated doubt, to events **during** Shakespeare's lifetime. Two examples: One was a pamphlet titled "Greene's Groatsworth of Wit" written in 1592 by a playwright named Robert Greene who criticized Shakespeare's plays as being not as all cracked out to be; yet Greene never said that Shakespeare was not the real author. Another example is a 1598 book called *Palladis Tamia* written by Frances Meres who brags about English authors being as good as most of the famous old Italian & Greek authors. Prominent among these Englishmen, Meres mentions Shakespeare and several of the plays he had written by then plus his long poem of *Venus and Adonis* which was published in 1593. Both the praise and the detraction of Shakespeare over his work, appeared in the lifetime of Shakespeare and deVere without any protest from the latter.

The bulk of Anderson's book is a biography of deVere; at every step of which Anderson points out similarities between events and persons in deVere's life (especially his year in Europe) with events and persons in Shakespeare's work. But these similarities are weak, each weaker than the next. I will give 2 examples: One is Anderson's mention of deVere's trip from Venice to Florence early in 1576. "De Vere had to have passed thru Ferrara where he did not tarry. Ferrara does not appear in Shakespeare's work, but a son of Ferrara, Giraldo Cinthio, had written a collection of stories called *Gli Hecatommithi* ten years earlier. One of the stories is about a "Moor suspecting infidelity from his wife, named *Disdemona*." So we are to believe that when deVere passed by Ferrara in 1576, he "assimilated" its cultural heritage of the preceding ten years.

My second example of Anderson's weak links is his trying to link deVere with Jacques's famous speech from Act II scene 7 in Shakespeare's play *As You Like It*. The speech has 2 themes: one is that life is like a theatre in which we each have roles that we play over and over. The second theme in Jacques's speech is to divide the life of each of us into seven stages: 1) Infant, 2) School boy, 3) Teen-ager, 4) Young Adult, 5) Mature Adult, 6) Old & Retired- called *Pantaloon* meaning fool, 7) Senile, Sans eyes.....

All the world is a stage.....etc

Anderson wants us to think that deVere got the notion for Jacques's speech from paintings in a church in Sienna Italy, thru which "deVere must have passed" in 1576. The church "has seven paintings of Man's Seven Ages". They are

1. *Infantia* rides a hobby horse
2. *Pueritia* is a schoolboy
3. *Adolescentia* is an older scholar in a long cloak
4. *Juventus* has a falcon on his wrist
5. *Virilitas* in dignified robes, carrying a book
6. *Senectus* leans upon a staff, holding a rosary
7. *Decrepitas* leans on 2 staffs, looking into his tomb

Compare to stronger association suggested by the Stratfordians. Stratford is located in Warwickshire County. In Shakespeare's work we find Warwickshire slang and the Warwickshire names of birds & plants.

Another credible association between Shakespeare's work and his life: In 1596 he was grief stricken over the death of Hamnet, his only son. In that year he wrote the play King John in which the widow Constance loses Arthur, her teenage son. In Act III, scene 4, the French King suggests that her grief over that loss may be excessive. So she replies:

Grief fills the room up of my absent child
Stays in his bed, walks up and down with me
Puts on his pretty looks, repeats his words
Remembers me of all his gracious parts
Stuffs out his vacant garments with his form
Then have I reason to be fond of grief?
Oh Lord my boy, my Arthur, my fair son
My life, my joy, my food, my all the world
My widow comfort, and my sorrow's cure.

The more I learn about Shakespeare's life and time and work, the more convinced I am that HE was the most appropriate author, because he was an actor and a partner in the midst of the world of theatre, which, thanks to Queen Elizabeth I, was thriving. In that world, he used his Dramatic Talent and his Way with Words, and achieved the BUSINESS success that he was after, not the literary success *we* are awed by.

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