

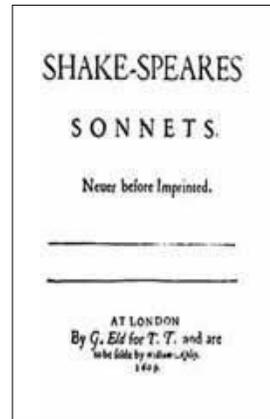
Reasons 52 and 53: Why Shake-speare was Oxford

By Hank Whittemore

To celebrate the publication of Hank Whittemore's new book, '100 Reasons Shake-speare was the Earl of Oxford,' and his being named as 'Oxfordian of the Year,' the De Vere Society Newsletter continues its serialisation of extracts with his Reasons No 52 and No. 53. The full '100 Reasons' are available from Amazon and Forever Press!

Reason 52 – Oxford in the Sonnets

Edward de Vere was in the best position of anyone in England to be the author of the sequence of 154 consecutively numbered sonnets published in 1609 as *Shake-speares Sonnets*. The known facts about the Oxford's childhood, upbringing, education, and family all interconnect with the sonnets' language and imagery. Oxford was nephew to Henry Howard, Earl of Surrey (1517-1547), who, with Sir Thomas Wyatt, wrote the first English sonnets in the form to be used later by Shakespeare. Oxford himself wrote an early sonnet in that form; entitled *Love Thy Choice*, it



expressed his devotion to Queen Elizabeth with the same themes of “constancy” and “truth” that “Shakespeare” would express in the same words:

In constant truth to bide so firm and sure – Oxford’s sonnet to Queen Elizabeth
Oaths of thy love, thy truth, thy constancy – Sonnet 152 to the “Dark Lady”

The Shakespeare sonnets are plainly autobiographical, the author using the personal pronoun “I” to refer to himself, telling his own story in his own voice; so it’s only natural that he expresses himself with references to the life he experienced since childhood. Much of that experience is captured in Sonnet 91:

Some glory in their birth, some in their skill,
 Some in their wealth, some in their body's force,
 Some in their garments, though new-fangled ill,
 Some in their Hawks and Hounds, some in their Horse

Oxford was born into England's highest-ranking earldom, inheriting vast wealth in the form of many estates. He was a skilled horseman and champion of two great jousting tournaments at the Whitehall tiltyard. He was the "Italianate Englishman" who wore new-fangled clothing from the Continent. An expert falconer, he wrote poetry comparing women to hawks "that fly from man to man."

And every humor hath his adjunct pleasure,
 Wherein it finds a joy above the rest,
 But these particulars are not my measure,
 All these I better in one general best.
 Thy love is better than high birth to me,

Only someone who was of high birth, and was willing to give it up, could make such a declaration to another nobleman of high birth and make it meaningful; if written to Southampton by a man who was not high-born, the statement would be an insulting joke.

Richer than wealth, prouder than garments' cost,
 Of more delight than Hawks or Hounds be,
 And having thee, of all men's pride I boast.
 Wretched in this alone, that thou mayst take
 All this away, and me most wretched make.

Oxford also left his footprints throughout:

Sonnet 2: "When forty winters shall besiege thy brow"

He was forty in 1590, when most commentators believe the opening sonnets were written.

Sonnet 8: "Music to hear, why hear'st thou music sadly"

He was an accomplished musician, writing for the lute, and patronized the composer John Farmer, who dedicated two songbooks to him, praising his musical knowledge and skill.

Sonnet 14: "And yet methinks I have astronomy"

He was well acquainted with the "astronomy," or astrology, of Dr. John Dee and was praised for his knowledge of the subject.

Sonnet 33: “Gilding pale streams with heavenly alchemy”

He studied with Dee, who experimented with alchemy, and both men invested in the Frobisher voyages.

Sonnet 49: “To guard the lawful reasons on thy part”

He studied law at Gray’s Inn and served as a judge at the treason trials of Norfolk and Mary Stuart and later at the treason trial of Essex and Southampton; his personal letters are filled with intimate knowledge of the law.

Sonnet 72: “My name be buried where my body is”

In his early poetry he wrote, “The only loss of my good name is of these griefs the ground.”

Sonnet 89: “Speak of my lameness, and I straight will halt”

He was lamed by a sword during a street fight in 1582.

Sonnet 107: “And thou in this shalt find thy monument”

He wrote to Thomas Bedingfield in 1573 that “I shall erect you such a monument.....”

Sonnet 114: “And to his palate doth prepare the cup”

His ceremonial role as Lord Great Chamberlain included bringing the “tasting cup” to the monarch.

Sonnet 116: “O no, it is an *ever*-fixed mark

That looks on tempests and is *never* shaken /

If this be error and upon me proved, /

I *never* writ nor no man *ever* loved”

He wrote: “Who was the first that gave the wound whose fear I wear forever? *Vere*.” (Emphases added)

Sonnet 121: “No, I am that I am. ”

He wrote to Burghley using the same words in the same tone (the words of God to Moses in the Bible) to protest his spying on him.

Sonnet 125: “Were’t aught to me I bore the canopy”

He was reported to have been one of six nobles bearing a “golden canopy” over the queen in the procession on 24 November 1588 celebrating England’s recent victory over the Spanish Armada. (But Sonnet 125, I believe, refers to the canopy held over Elizabeth’s effigy and coffin in the funeral procession on 28 April 1603.)

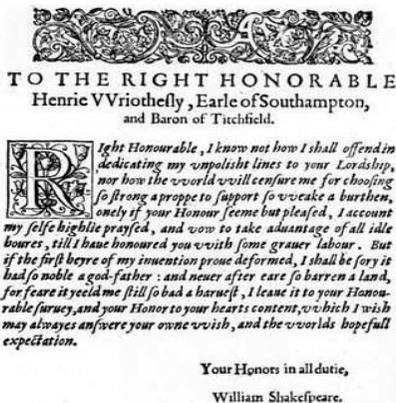
The Sonnets of Shakespeare amount to the autobiographical diary of de Vere. The allusions to his life as a high-born nobleman and courtier, appearing throughout the sequence, come forth naturally and spontaneously. In effect, he left his signature for all to see.

Reason 53 – Oxford and Southampton

One of the most compelling reasons to believe de Vere was ‘Shakespeare’ is the central role in the Shakespeare story played by Henry Wriothesley, third earl of Southampton. The grand entrance of “William Shakespeare” onto the published page took place in 1593, as the printed signature on the dedication to Southampton of *Venus and Adonis*, a 1200-line poem that the poet called “the first heir of my invention” in his dedication. The second appearance of

‘William Shakespeare’ in print came a year later, with the publication of an 1800-line poem, *Lucrece*, again dedicated to Southampton. The *Lucrece* dedication was an extraordinary declaration of personal commitment to the twenty-year-old earl: “The love I dedicate to your Lordship is without end . . . What I have done is yours, what I have to do is yours, being part in all I have, devoted yours . . . Your Lordship’s in all duty, William Shakespeare.” “There is no other dedication like this in Elizabethan literature,” Nichol Smith wrote in 1916, and because the great author never dedicated another work to anyone else, he uniquely linked himself to Southampton for all time. Most scholars agree that the “Fair Youth” of *Shakespeare’s Sonnets*, the sequence of 154 consecutively numbered poems printed in 1609, is also Southampton, even though he is not identified by name. Most further agree that, in the first seventeen sonnets, the poet is urging Southampton to beget

a child to continue his bloodline – demanding it in a way that would ordinarily have been highly offensive: “Make thee another self, for love of me.” The trouble is that there’s not a scrap of evidence that Shaksperer and Henry Wriothesley ever met each other, much less that they might have had any kind of personal relationship allowing the author to command a high-ranking peer of the realm to



“make thee another self, for love of me”!

“It is certain that the Earl of Southampton and the poet we know as Shakespeare were on intimate terms,” Ogburn Jr. writes, “but Charlotte G. Stopes, Southampton’s pioneer biographer (1922), spent seven years or more combing the records of the Earl and his family without turning up a single indication that the fashionable young lord had ever had any contact with a Shakespeare, and for that reason deemed the great work of her life a failure.” “Oxford was a nobleman of the same high rank as Southampton and just a generation older,” Looney writes, adding that “the peculiar circumstances of the youth to whom the Sonnets were addressed were strikingly analogous to his own.”

De Vere became the first royal ward of Elizabeth in 1562, under the guardianship of William Cecil, and in 1571 he entered into an arranged marriage with the chief minister’s fifteen-year-old daughter, Anne Cecil.

Henry Wriothesley became the eighth and last child of state as a boy in 1581-82, also in the chief minister’s custody, and during 1590-91 he resisted intense pressure to enter into an arranged marriage with Cecil’s fifteen-year-old granddaughter, Elizabeth Vere.

The young lady was also Oxford’s daughter, making the elder earl, in fact, the prospective father-in-law. Scholars generally agree that in the seventeen “procreation” sonnets Shakespeare’s tone sounds much like that of a prospective father-in-law or father urging Southampton to accept Burghley’s choice of a wife for him, although the poet never identifies or describes any specific young woman. J. Dover Wilson writes in 1964: “What man in the whole world, except a father or a potential father-in-law, cares whether any other man gets married?” Obviously, de Vere and Wriothesley both had an extremely important personal stake in the outcome of this marriage proposal coming from the most powerful man in England, who must have had the full blessing of his sovereign Mistress.

Looney noted that both Oxford and Southampton “had been left orphans and royal wards at an early age, both had been brought up under the same guardian, both had the same kind of literary tastes and interests, and later the young man followed exactly the same course as the elder as a patron of literature and drama.” The separate entries for Oxford and Southampton in the *Dictionary of National Biography*, written before the twentieth century, revealed that “in many of its leading features the life of the younger man is a reproduction of the life of the elder,” Looney noted, adding it was “difficult to resist the feeling that Wriothesley had made a

hero of De Vere, and had attempted to model his life on that of his predecessor as royal ward.”

By the time Southampton came to court at age sixteen or seventeen, Oxford had removed himself from active attendance. It seems that the two shared some kind of hidden story that tied them together:

- As royal wards, both Oxford and Southampton had Queen Elizabeth as their official mother. Even though their respective biological mothers were alive when their fathers died, under English law they became wards of the state, and the queen became their mother in a legal sense.
- Tradition has it that Shakespeare wrote *Love's Labour's Lost* in the early 1590s for Southampton to entertain college friends at his country house, but given its sophisticated wordplay of this court comedy and its intended aristocratic audience, it is difficult to see how Will of Stratford could have written it.
- Oxford in the early 1590s was Southampton's prospective father-in-law.
- After the failed Essex Rebellion in February 1601, Oxford sat as highest ranking earl on the tribunal for the treason trial of Essex and Southampton. The peers had no choice but to render a unanimous guilty verdict; there is evidence that Oxford then worked behind the scenes to save.
- Southampton's life and gain his eventual liberation, as in Sonnet 35: "Thy adverse party is thy Advocate."
- On the night of Oxford's reported death on 24 June 1604, agents of the Crown arrested Southampton and returned him to the Tower, where he was interrogated all night until his release the following day.
- Henry Wriothesley and Henry de Vere, eighteenth Earl of Oxford (born in February 1593 to Oxford and his second wife, Elizabeth Trentham), became close friends during the reign of James; the earls were known as the "Two Henries." As members of the House of Lords, they often took sides against the king and were imprisoned for doing so.

On the eve of the failed rebellion led by Essex and Southampton in 1601, some of the conspirators engaged the Lord Chamberlain's Company to perform Shakespeare's royal history play *Richard II* at the Globe; many historians assume, perhaps correctly, that Southampton himself secured permission from 'Shakespeare' to use the play with its scene of the deposing of the king. On the other hand, it is possible that Robert Cecil himself arranged for it, so he could then summon Essex to court and trigger the

rebellion, which had actually been scheduled for a week later. Once the rebellion failed and Southampton was imprisoned in the Tower on the night of 8 February 1601, all authorized printings of heretofore unpublished Shakespeare plays abruptly ceased for several years.

After Southampton was released on 10 April 1603, the poet 'Shakespeare' wrote Sonnet 107 celebrating his liberation after being "supposed as forfeit to a confined doom," that is, subjected to a sentence of life imprisonment. When Oxford reportedly died on 24 June 1604, a complete text of *Hamlet* was published.

As part of Christmas and New Year's celebrations surrounding the wedding of Philip Herbert, Earl of Montgomery and Oxford's daughter Susan Vere in December of 1604, the Court of King James held a veritable Shakespeare festival. In the days before and after the wedding, seven performances of the Bard's plays were given. (The royal performances appear to be a memorial tribute to the playwright, rather than a tribute to a living author). One performance was a revival of *Love's Labour's Lost*, for King James and Queen Anne, hosted by Southampton at his house in London.

After *Hamlet*, in 1604 all publications again ceased for four years. (*King Lear* was printed in 1608; *Troilus and Cressida* was issued in two editions during 1608-1609; and *Pericles* appeared in 1609.) Then the silence resumed, for thirteen more years, until a quarto of *Othello* appeared in 1622; and finally the *First Folio* of thirty-six Shakespeare plays was published in 1623. Fully half of these stage works were printed for the first time; the *Folio* included none of the Shakespeare poetry, nor any mention of Southampton or the *Sonnets*.

The connections between Oxford and Southampton are numerous and significant; the link between the two earls is crucial for the quest to determine the real Shakespeare.