

Who was “Our English Terence Will: Shake-speare”? Could it have been William Stanley, 6th Earl of Derby?

By Amanda Hinds and Alexander Waugh



This presentation will not propose that William Stanley, 6th Earl of Derby was the sole or even main author of the works of Shakespeare but will attempt to explain why a number of highly intelligent people thought he was: James Greenstreet (1891), Robert Frazer (1915), Abel Lefranc (1918), RM Lucas (1937), AW Titherley (1952), AJ Evans (1956), John Raithel (2009) and an Oxfordian defector John Rollett (2015).

This will be the first of a series of DVS sessions investigating how the so-called authorship candidates fit into the story. Those proposing other candidates tend to ignore (or decry) Oxford – just as Oxfordians ignore

Derby: William Leahy, in *My Shakespeare*, doesn't even mention him. AJ Evans, in *Shakespeare's Magic Circle*, aims to do what we are doing – but ends up (influenced by Titherley) favouring Derby.

Evidence for one candidate should not negate evidence for another. Although there may have been many hands actually writing the complete works, someone had to be the brilliant mind behind it all: The Soul of the Age.



Amanda Hinds sets out the case for Derby:

William Stanley was born in 1561 as the younger brother of Ferdinando, Lord Strange, later the 5th Earl of Derby. Their mother Margaret Clifford was a great granddaughter of Henry VII giving her sons a claim to the throne validated in Henry VIII's Act of Succession. Both brothers seem to have been more interested in their family troupe of actors and acrobats than their claim to the throne. Lord Strange's Men (later Derby's Men) incorporated Leicester's Men (after Leicester died in 1588) and were taken into the Chamberlain's Men in 1594 after Ferdinando was assassinated (probably because he shopped some Catholics who wanted to promote his claim to the throne). William, by then the 6th Earl of Derby, married Oxford's eldest daughter Elizabeth de Vere in 1595. Letters from George Fenner in 1599 said, "The Earle of Derby is busied only penning comedies for the common players" – in a cottage at Hedingham. Derby and Oxford had similar attributes as potential authors of the works of Shakespeare: they were both aristocrats, interested in theatre and plays, widely travelled, trained in law and related to each other as well as to other members of Shakespeare's Magic Circle. The presentation will focus on the following evidence:

- i. Contemporary Shakespeare allusions that fit Derby better than Oxford: *Colin Clouts Come Home Again* (Spenser 1595), *Strange News* (Thomas Nashe 1592), *Our English Terence* (John Davies of Hereford 1611) and six Holy Sonnets (John Donne 1618).
- ii. Places and events that Derby rather than Oxford may have witnessed as reflected in *Love's Labours Lost* and *Measure for Measure*.
- iii. The prominence of the Stanley family in the Henry VI/Richard III plays.
- iv. Derby's friendship with John Dee and his (and his mother's) interest in alchemy and magic.

Is there evidence enough to suggest that Derby was Shakespeare? Or did he help Oxford or contribute to his plays during the 1590s? Furthermore, JT Looney firmly believed that Shakespeare did not write *The Tempest* and, according to John Michell, Looney allowed “Lefranc to annex it to his case for the Earl of Derby”.

In her presentation, Hinds thanked Heward Wilkinson for sending her *Bardgate* (by Peter W. Dickson), thus introducing her to William Stanley, 6th Earl of Derby. She drew attention to the website of John Raithel, who was keeping the Derby theory of authorship alive. The following were among ‘allusions’ that suggest William Stanley at least being a poet and author:

Colin Clouts Come Home Again (Edmund Spenser 1595)

There also is (ah no, he is not now!)
 But since I said he is, he quite is gone,
 Amyntas quite is gone and lies full low,
 Having his Amarillis left to mone.
 Help, O ye Shepherds, help ye all in this,
 Help Amarillis this her Loss to mourn;
 Her Loss is yours, your Loss Amyntas is,
 Amyntas, Flower of Shepherd's Pride forlorn.
 He, whilst he lived, was the noblest Swain,
 That ever piped on an oaten Quill:
 Both did he other, which could pipe, maintain,
 And eke could pipe himself with passing Skill.
 And there, though last, not least is Action,
 A gentler Shepherd may no where be found;
 Whose Muse full of high Thoughts Invention,
 Doth like himself heroically sound.

Amyntas was clearly Ferdinando, killed in 1594 when he had become 5th Earl of Derby

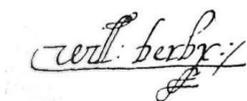
Amarillis refers to his widow Alice Spencer, who Edmund Spenser thought he was related to

Who else could Action be, in the same poem, but Ferdinando's brother the 6th Earl?

Action (eagle) refers to the Eagle and Child on the Derby Coat of Arms

Edmund Spenser was well-known to the Derby family, and he had dedicated poems including *Tears of the Muses* to Alice Spencer

Our English Terence, Will: Shake-speare by John Davies of Hereford, an 'intimate' of the Derby family who tutored Ferdinando's daughters. The use of a colon reproduces Derby's curious signature:



To our English Terence, Mr. Will: Shake-speare:
Some say good Will (which I in sport do sing)
Had'st thou not plaid some Kingly parts in sport
Thou had'st bin a companion for a King;
And beene a King among the meaner sort.
Some others raile; but, raile as they think fit,
Thou hast no rayling, but a raigning Wit;
And honesty thou sow'st which they do reape;
So, to increase their Stocke which they do keep

The hyphen denotes a pseudonym as also implied by 'Terence'

William Stanley was said to have acted on the stage and, if not, to have been considered as a consort for Elizabeth I

He could have been a King among the 'meaner sort' because his claim to the throne was through a female (his mother). Furthermore, the final four lines are in the present tense, suggesting W.S. was alive in 1610 when the epigram was published in *Scourge of Folly*.

Strange News by Thomas Nashe in 1592 was written when he was staying with Ferdinando's brother-in-law. Why 'Strange'? The degree of familiarity suggests it was written to a younger man (Stanely was not yet an Earl) and suggests he was known to be a prolific writer (copious carminist). Apis Lapis can be translated as a 'lazy bee' reflected in Spenser's *Tears of the Muses*:

‘Doth rather choose to sit in idle Cell
Than so himself to Mockery to sell’.

John Donne’s Holy Sonnets (1618)

Reproduced from *Shakespeare’s Magic Circle* by A J Evans

John Donne’s Holy Sonnets

(13) About 1618 the celebrated poet John Donne, a protégé and friend of the Derby family, dedicated six “Holy Sonnets” to E. of D. in the following terms :

See, Sir, how as the Sun’s hot Masculine flame
Begets strange creatures on Nile’s dirty slime ¹
In me, your fatherly yet lusty Rhyme
(For, these songs are their fruits) have wrought the same ;
But though the engendering force from whence they came
Bee strong enough, and nature doe admit
Seaven to be born at once, I send as yet
But six ; they say the seaventh wave hath still some maine ;
I choose your judgement, wch the same degree
Doth with her sister, your invention, hold
As fire these drossie Rymes to purifie
Or an Elixir, to change them to gold.
You are that Alchemist wch always had
Wit, whose one spark could make good things of bad.

John Donne was a protégé and friend of the Derby family

E. of D. has not convincingly been attributed to any other author or poet

The final four lines indicate a poet and author with a keen sense of humour

Summary of evidence for William Stanley 6th Earl of Derby

- Derby had many of the attributes of Oxford: aristocrat, well educated, trained in law, travelled widely
- Claim to the throne added to his need for a pseudonym if he wrote plays or poems
- Some ‘Shakespeare allusions’ by associates of Derby’s family suit him better than Oxford
- Situations and characters in some of the plays have parallels with the Derby family and William’s personal life; and suggest an association with Wales and Warwickshire
- Stylistic analysis of Derby’s letters said by Titherley and Rollett to be more like Shakespeare’s works than are those of Oxford

- Derby may have worked with and influenced Oxford while he was writing up his plays for publication in the 1590s

A contemporary article by JT Looney reprinted in the *Shakespeare Oxford Newsletter* Vol 53 No.2 Spring 2017 explains his opinion, largely based on chronology, as to why Derby could not have been the main author of the works. More recent evidence including early versions of Shakespeare plays and the cessation of new plays after 1604 reinforces his opinion.

And Alexander Waugh responds: ‘No, it was Edward de Vere 17th Earl of Oxford’

The DVS Chairman emphatically dismissed the idea that Derby had anything whatsoever to do with writing Shakespeare’s poems and plays. Eloquently rubbishising every point raised in Derby’s defence, he proceeded:

1. **‘George Fenner’** (if that was his real name) was a shady spy who went by the names of ‘Anthony Rivers’, ‘Francis Cordale’, Thomas Neeveill and Ortelio Renzo. He is not a reliable source and yet he provides the only evidence that Derby ever had anything to do with writing plays. His two statements (sent in two letters on the same day) are identical and say nothing whatsoever about his being ‘Shakespeare’ the most famous author of comedies, tragedies, histories and poems of his day:

‘Therle of Darby is busyed only in penning comedies for the comoun players’

& ‘Our Earle of Darby is busye in penning commodyes for the commoun players’.

2. **Spenser** Considering the ‘Shakespeare Allusions’ quoted above from *Colin Clouts Come Home Again* (Edmund Spenser 1595):

AETION

And there, though last, not least is Aetion,
A gentler Shepherd may no where be found;

Whose Muse full of high Thoughts Invention,
Doth like himself heroically sound.

Spenser derives the poet’s name, ‘Aetion’, either from the Greek ἄιτιον (‘origin’ or ‘cause’) or ἄιτιον (‘eagle’), with the suffix of diminution (‘-ιον’) making ἄιτιον (‘an eaglet’).

Shakespeare was famous for *Venus and Adonis* and *Rape of Lucrece*, neither of which can be described as ‘heroic’ verse, so even if Derby had been Shakespeare these lines were not referring to him.

Michell (1996) incorrectly asserts that “no other noble family had an eagle crest. It was the unique badge of the Stanleys’ (194).” Brazil (2006), however, points out that the 17th Earl of Oxford’s heraldic devices also feature an eagle: “The prominence of the eagle crest in the heraldic iconography of the Earls of Oxford is not merely an exercise in antiquarian speculation...it allows us to reinterpret Spenser’s famous (but cryptic) Shakespearean allusion to ‘Aetion’ as a reference to the Earl of Oxford, and not the Stratford man, Drayton, or the Earl of Derby” (22). Waugh, however, went on to show that the families of Brown, Hutton and Roper all bore eagles on their arms, as did Oxford at this time.

Feldman (2011) suggests Thomas Sackville, Lord Buckhurst and Earl of Dorset (1536-1606) as ‘Action’ because he enjoyed a considerable reputation as a poet as early as 1560, thus appearing as a prime mover in the poetical group referred to, and was of noble descent (126-127). The name Sackville (as ‘sack’ – ‘ville’) might suggest heroic action, while the heroic sound of ‘Action’s’ verses finds a parallel in Spenser’s praise of Sackville’s ‘loftie numbers and heroicke stile” in *The Faerie Queene* (1593).

3. “E of D” Donne’s *Holy Sonnets* Pub. 1633 but written 1608; ‘E of D’ could refer to the Earl of Derby, Earl of Dorset (Lord Buckhurst) or Earl of Danby. The Earl of Dorset appointed Donne vicar of St Dunstan’s in the West (1624). Donne was full of praise for the Countess of Dorset (Lady Ann Clifford)

Your fatherly yet lusty rhymes

You are that Alchemist which alwaies had

Wit, whose one spark could make good things of bad.

Therefore “E of D” is clearly used by Donne to denote Earl of Dorset, not Earl of Derby, with whom he has no literary, familial or domestic connection.

4. NASHE STRANGE NEWS

The historical person behind the name ‘Apis lapis’ has to be:

- a. A noble patron who has been infinitely generous and hospitable to scholars;
- b. Someone who by 1592 is no longer rich enough to continue his hospitality towards scholars;

- c. A ‘copious carminist’ who, by 1592, was known to have been a prodigious poet;
- d. Someone personally known to Nashe and appreciated for his ‘pleasant witty humour’;
- e. A nobleman/lord who keeps company with ‘lewd persons’ like Nashe.
- f. One who is among doctors (i.e. scholars) and lawyers every day.

a. A patron who has been ‘infinitely’ generous and hospitable to scholars.

Nashe describes him as ‘an infinite Maecenas to Learned Men’ (ll. 18-19). Gervase Markham (1624) wrote of Oxford in the days before his financial crisis: “It were infinite to speak of his infinite expense, the infinite number of his attendants, or the infinite house he kept to feed all people... the almes he gave (which at this day would not only feede the poore but the great mans family also) and the bountie which Religion and Learning daily took from him are Trumpets so loude, that all eares know them” (17).

Angel Day, in *The English Secretary* (1586), confirms the “generous estate and surpassing bounty” that Oxford showed to scholars and the “many things of greater science” that “pass under [his] honorable countenance” (3). The royal surgeon George Baker in his 1599 *Practice of the New and Old Physic* praises Oxford’s assistance to “all those who excel in worthy vertues.... Neither doth your honor suffer them to pass unrewarded, as may appear by the most part of them which Your Honor hath entertained into your service.”

Among the scholars and artists attested as receivers of Oxford’s bounty when he was rich were Thomas Underdown, Arthur Golding,

Edmund Elvidon, Thomas Bedingfield, Thomas Churchill, Thomas Twyne, George Baker, John Brooke. Anthony Mundy, John Lyly, Thomas Stocker, Thomas Watson, Thomas Churchyard, Robert Greene, John Southern, Angel Day, the composers John Farmer, Henry Litchfield, William Byrd, etc. Orthodox scholar Stephen May astutely concludes that

the range of Oxford's patronage is as remarkable as its substance. Beginning about 1580 he was the nominal patron of a variety of dramatic troupes, including a band of tumblers as well as companies of adult and boy actors. Among the thirty-three works dedicated to the Earl, six deal with religion and philosophy, two with music, and three with medicine. But the focus of this patronage was literary, for thirteen of the books presented to him were original or translated works of literature (9).

In *Pierce's Supererogation* (1593) Harvey described Oxford as “the godfather of writers, the superintendent of the presse, the muster-maister of innumerable bands, the Generall of the great feilde: hee, and Nashe will confute the world” (79).

b. Someone who by 1592 was no longer rich enough to continue financing his hospitality to scholars.

Nashe explains that although ‘Apis’ was once an ‘infinite Maecenas’ (i.e., a patron of limitless generosity), he is now in financial distress, wishing him “new strings to his old tawny purse” and asking for nothing in return for his dedication, but payment in “jests” rather than in cash. In the previous year Oxford had failed to pay a small sum of money to Julia

Penn, the mother-in-law of Lord Burghley's private secretary, to cover the lodging, food and drink expenses of the "old poet," Thomas Churchyard, Nashe and others in his retinue. Nashe twice refers to his landlady, as "My hostess Penia" (*Strange Newes*). Details of this debt scandal, which echo Falstaff's failure to pay the lodging bills of Mistress Quickly (*1 Henry IV*), are preserved in the documentary record (Lansdowne MSS 68 & 113). Churchyard sought sanctuary in a church, forcing the matter to be dealt under the more lenient jurisdiction of the Archdeacon's Court.

In 1592 Oxford was, therefore, like Nashe's dedicatee, no longer able to continue supporting scholars. Hence Nashe's remark that 'Apis' was a "famous pottlepot patron to old poets in your days." Due to the avarice of the Court of Wards and Oxford's extravagance, Oxford was forced to sell his house, Fisher's Folly, in 1591 and to be bailed out by his brother-in-law, Francis Trentham. Nashe was shortly to find a new patron in George Carey.

c. **A 'copious carminist' who, by 1592, was known to have written many poems.**

Nashe describes his dedicatee as a "copious carminist" in 1592, a term mocked by Gabriel Harvey as a mannered way of saying a prolific poet. Harvey himself was, however, one of several contemporaries who left transparent and unambiguous testimony to Oxford's prolific accomplishments as a poet. In *Gratulationes Valdeninenses* (1578) he writes of Oxford: *Iampridem Phoebus Apollo / Artibus excoluit mentem: Britannica metra / Sunt cantata satis; testatur Epistula, quantum / Excellas literis, ipso mage Castiglione / Aulica, compta magis: vidi tua plura Latina: / Anglica plura extant* ("for a long time past Phoebus Apollo has cultivated thy mind in the arts. English poetical measures have been sung by thee long enough.

You excel even in the sage himself, the Courtly Castiglione, in letters. I have seen many Latin verses of thine, yea, even more English verses are extant”) (4).

d. Someone known personally to Nashe by 1592 who is appreciated for his “pleasant witty humour”

The content and tone of Nashe’s letter make it clear that he is personally acquainted with his dedicatee, whom he describes as his drinking companion. Elsewhere Nashe writes of Oxford as ‘my Lord’ (i.e., the Lord whom he serves) and defends him vigorously against Harvey’s libels. In *Four Letters* (1592), Harvey attacks the writer Robert Greene, asking: “Where should Conny-catchers [i.e., swindlers] have gotten such a secretary?” and here Nashe defends his dedicatee (i.e., his and Greene’s employer) against this slur.

The “witty humour” of ‘Apis Lapis’ points also to Oxford. In 1581 Charles Arundell described Oxford’s riotous telling of a 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. So hath my Lord Charles Howard and the rest” (SP 12/151/45, ff. 100-102, as cited by Anderson, 162). George Baker wrote of Oxford (1599) that “your wit, learning and authority hath great force and strength in repressing the curious crakes of the envious” (Chiljan 95).

e. A nobleman/lord who disports with ‘lewd persons’ like Nashe

While Burghley complained of Oxford’s keeping company with “lewd friends who rule him by flatteries” (SP Eliza. 201.16, cited by Ward 286),

Nashe praises the hospitality, support and “high countenance” that his dedicatee “shews unto scholars” and describes him as being “amongst graue Doctors, and men of iudgement in both Lawes euerie daie” (ll. 65-66). Among the scholars of Oxford’s entourage were Thomas Watson, a student of both Canon and Civil law, and the doctors George Baker and Thomas Twyne. In *Four Letters* Harvey had accused Nashe of “obscure lurking in basest corners” to which Nashe responded:

I lurke in no corners but conuerse in a house of credit as well gouerned as any Colledge, where there bee more rare quallified men, and selected good Schollers than in any Noblemans house that I knowe in England. If I had committed *such abhominable villanies, or were a base shifting companion*, it stode not with my Lords honour to keepe me. (I, 329)

‘ My Lord’ who runs this rare house of scholars is evidently the same person as ‘Apis Lapis’, of whom Nashe, a few pages earlier, had written: “Verilie, verilie [verily in Latin is *vere*] all poore Schollers acknowledge you as their patron, prouiditore, and supporter.’ Elsewhere Nashe calls Oxford ‘My Lord of Oxford.’”

Further connections between Nashe’s ‘Apis’ and Oxford (including the allusion to Oxford’s livery badge, the “Blew Bore” and the “three maides” kept under ‘Apis’s’ roof (Oxford’s three daughters) are noted by Barrell (1944). Nelson (2003) finds evidence of Oxford’s experimentation with “the durt of wisdom called Alchumie” (62), as well as his unregulated passion for wine (275).

Our English Terence, Will: Shake-speare by John Davies of Hereford

(Original text reproduced above) Waugh paraphrased it thus:

I say write lightly and with goodwill: it is said of you that had you not played a king in sport you could have been a knight companion, and been regarded as a king among the players too. Some have railed against you, but let them rail, you have nothing to complain about, for you have a reigning wit, while the fruit of your liberal mind is now harvested by those exploiting it for their own benefit.

Davies also wrote **Speculum Proditori** “I knew a man:” These verses neatly reflect the essential theme of Oxford’s most celebrated poem, “My Mind to Me a Kingdom is,” in which the poet explains that he is “content” to rule as king of his own mind, and to enjoy all the advantages of sovereignty without the fuss of “princely pomp, nor wealthy store, nor force to win the victory...To none of these I yield as thrall, or why? My mind doth serve for all.” Oxford’s celebrated poem seems to link both sets of verses by Davies, who in the first (“To Our English Terence”) describes Shakespeare’s mind as possessed of “rainging wit.”

It is wrong to suppose that the present tense address to Shakespeare (“thou hast no rayling,” etc.) means that Shakespeare had to have been alive when the poem was published in 1611. It was conventional to address dead poets in the present tense. Sir John Denham wrote “Virgil thou hast no wit and Naso is more short of Will.” Another contemporary wrote: “Petrarch doth call Rome covetous Babylon,” and another: “Away fond rhiming Ouid, lest thou write:

Of Prognos murther, or Lucretias rape' and another: "Sidney and Spencer be you Aye renowned, No time hath power your pastorals to confound."

All writers address dead authors in the present tense as though they still were living.

Eddi Jolly, as chairman of the session, said that both speakers had done their homework and presented the for and against arguments well, with good supporting evidence. There was little time for discussion, which could continue over lunch, but it should be noted that neither speaker believed that Derby had written the works attributed to Shakespeare: the debate was about whether he had a role in writing those works.

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