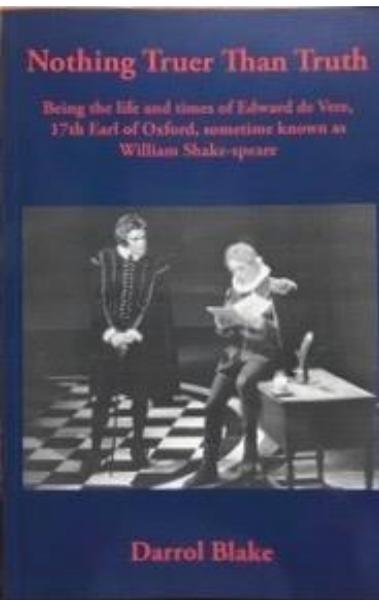


Nothing Truer than Truth

by Darrol Blake

Review by Eddi Jolly



There's more than one way to introduce the authorship question, and for Darrol Blake, a freelance drama director in the 1970s, 'the play's the thing.' He researched Edward de Vere, and created this pacey, Elizabethan style blend of facts about de Vere's life, also using his poems and extracts from the Shakespeare canon.

Nothing Truer than Truth was put on at the Overground Theatre, Kingston, in May/ June 1977. It was reviewed by several papers: for example, *The Times* – “an entertaining thesis;” *The Guardian* – “the staging is deft and the costuming convincing ... Damien Thomas plays the lead with remarkable authority and

“Elizabethan dash,” and *The Financial Times* – “a theatrical caprice... it is fun picking up the Shakespeare allusions.”

Now *Nothing Truer than Truth* has been edited and published, a joint venture between Darrol Blake himself and Oliver Kinsey. They have contributed appendices: illustrations from the 1977 performances, details of the borrowings from de Vere and from Shakespeare, and notes upon the plays which are most influential here. Kinsey's postscript describes

relevant events after the play ends in 1593/4 and suggests the circumstances and manner in which the *First Folio* was brought to publication in 1623.

It is the play itself which gives most pleasure. Meet de Vere, a pupil and ward in Cecil's house, confident in speaking to the Queen. Be amused by Blake's cheeky borrowing from *1 Henry IV* and from history to create the Gad's Hill episode. Smile wryly at Cecil and de Vere's conversation about money (remembering how rich the former became, and how poor the latter). In this play, the audience will encounter many of the main players, good and bad, in de Vere's life, from the early 1570s until well into the 1590s: John Lyly, Philip Sidney, Anne Cecil and Ann Vavasour, Arundel and Henry Wriothesley, for instance.

Many who have read de Vere's life story will have been disconcerted by elements of *All's Well*, which seem to echo parts of de Vere's life. Blake's play is closer, of course, and while he must speculate about some aspects, he does create a lively, provocative and coherent version of the life of the possible author. Would it be outrageous to suggest this play's more convincing than Ben Elton's *Upstart Crow*?

The edition is handsomely presented. Readers can play 'spot the quotatio', and find the answers. Traditionalists can gasp at its audacity. It's now published (in plenty of time for Christmas), and next year there'll be a reading of it to celebrate the centenary of Looney's *Shakespeare Identified*. Watch out for that!