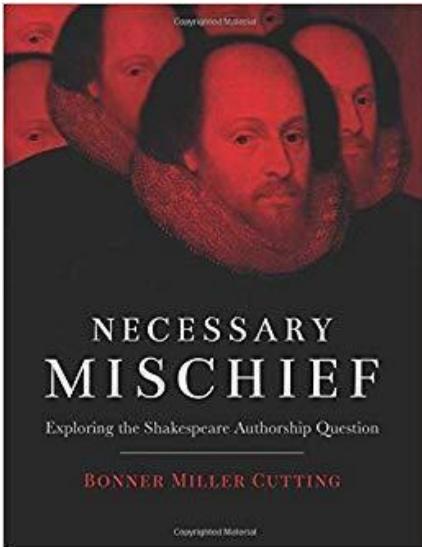


# Necessary Mischief: Exploring the Shakespeare Authorship Question

By Bonner Miller Cutting

Review by Richard Malim



Bonner Miller Cutting: *Necessary Mischief: Exploring the Shakespeare Authorship Question*  
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This book should appear on every Oxfordian's bookshelf if only for the superb comprehensive dissection of William Shackspere's Will. It also presents leads into other fields of the Shakespeare Authorship. In particular I want to study the evidence for a decline in support for Oxford as Shakespeare in the 1630s.

By Oxford's death, although the general Court social climate was dead against the revelation that the premier Earl of England was the playwright, the bar against the publication of the works had been partially lifted by the appearance of works by "William Shake-speare" and similar from 1598 on when Burghley died. The cultural world was divided between Oxford's supporters, Jonson, Guilpin and Marston joined by Beaumont and Chapman and, lined up against them, Harvey, Greville and the remnants of the Philip Sidney group under the 'leadership' of the formidable Mary Sidney Countess of Pembroke. She

had carried on the critical war against Oxford after Sir Philip's death at Zutphen in 1636. In 1598 she caused to be published her edition of her brother's *Arcadia*, has an engraving by her secretary Hugh Sanford of a sow backing away from a (rose? – Wriothesley = Roseley = Southampton) bush curled with the motto *spiro non tibi* (i.e. "I breathe sweet things but not to you" [the sow]). That Oxford was the target ("sow") is confirmed by Nashe's speedy denunciation of H.S. in the introduction to his *Lenten Stuff* 1599. However, with the collapse of the Essex faction Oxford was at a high point of cultural appreciation with eight of his plays being performed at the Shakespeare-fest at the Court Christmas Revels 1604-05 six months after his death.

In spite of Oxford's death further credit accrued to the Oxford circle when James I the new king became mightily attracted to young Philip Herbert Mary Sidney's second son. He fell in love with Oxford's daughter Susan de Vere and married her at a sumptuous ceremony in 1604 with the king making lavish gifts and giving the bride away in the absence of her deceased father. The logic of the situation would seem to indicate that Susan was or became a formidable advocate for the reputation of her father and his works and allied to Jonson she was as time went on at last able to take advantage of the current political situation to ensure the publication of the *First Folio* in 1623.

The Folio evidences the political situation in that *The Tempest* is the first play with its devastating commentary on Spanish political practices and morals, which is the one the "Most Noble and Incomparable Pair" of brothers Philip now first Earl of Montgomery and his elder brother William Earl of Pembroke would want especially read. The last play is Cymbeline which concludes with the king declaring a glorious peace with

Rome, definitely not in the brothers' agenda and put last in hopefully the most ignorable position.

The importance of Susan is indicated by what happens afterwards. She died in 1629 and her husband succeeded his brother to the Pembroke title the same year and shortly afterwards married Anne Clifford. The marriage was childless and the couple speedily parted. Bonner Cutting devotes two chapters arising as a result.

The first deals with the portrait of Anne Clifford's portrait in the Appleby Castle triptych, a vast work of art celebrating Anne Clifford's final triumph in endless family estates litigation and herself generally particularly as a lady of scholarship and cultural magnificence with a large library around her. A spread of English authors from Golding (translation of Ovid's *Metamorphoses* – actually Oxford's) to the date of the painting c. 1646 is represented. There is however one glaring exception not play or poem of Shakespeare is shown, and this can be only a matter of policy.

It is not difficult to imagine a scenario whereby the works of the father of the much-loved deceased first wife are to be relegated to oblivion by the less impressive matrimonially second wife. Those unsympathetic to Oxford appear: Sydney, Greville, Daniel and Joseph Hall, but only Jonson of modern playwrights. It may be that comparison with "Shakespeare's" daughter would be enough to turn her against a proper display of modern playwrights generally.



Bonner Cutting's next chapter is devoted to the Van Dyck's vast picture of the Pembroke family c.1636 at Wilton House near Salisbury where the central figure is Philip the fourth Earl and his children and their wives. It also includes a seated female figure clothed all in black whom twentieth century cataloguers say represents his second wife even though they had been separated for perhaps two years. A procession of earlier commentators had no doubt that the figure even down to physical likeness was intended to show the deceased first wife Susan Vere.



Susan, Countess of Pembroke

With the loss of Susan, we can see that Philip Herbert fourth Earl of Pembroke effectively went over (or back) to the anti-Oxford camp or became less attached, let alone to back his late wife's views. The evidence may indicate that of the brothers it was William the third Earl dying in 1630 was the principal patron of Jonson and therefore the supporter of Jonson's advocacy of Shakespeare and Philip (whose cultural interests were not marked) was less concerned. The second folio is published in 1632: from the literature point of view it

may be there was not much point. Holland's, Digges' and I.M.'s poems are omitted and

replaced two new poems and the famous one by Milton. It may be, again, that Jonson was concerned by the prospect of Oxford's reputation being seriously eroded. The influence of the new Queen Henrietta Maria brought over a new appreciation of French stage conventions and may appear to relegate the liberal Shakespearean approaches in the view of the high cultural Court set. While in the 1620s it seems that Peacham,

Vicars and Drayton could praise Shakespeare openly enough, the courtier Sir Robert Naunton wrote his *Fragmenta Regalia* c.1630 which is a study of twenty-two “servants of Queen Elizabeth’s state and favour”:

Modesty in me forbids defacement of men departed whose posterity yet remaining enjoys the merit of their virtues and do still live in their honour.

And I had rather incur the censure of abruption [criticism for omission], than to be conscious and taken in a manner of eruption, and trampling on the graves of persons at rest, *which living we durst not look in the face, nor make our addresses to them otherwise than with due regard in their honours and renown of their virtues.*”

*Translation:* he was leant on or deemed it wise to leave Oxford out: the italicised portion indicates the status of one (perhaps the only one) of the omitted “servants”. With the indoor theatres now prohibitively expensive for all but the very rich, their taste was the one to cater for, and so the popular decline of Oxford/ Shakespeare began to gather speed, and the near final blotting out of even Oxford’s name draws closer and is accelerated by the social effects of the Civil War.

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*My thanks are due to Bonner Cutting, Sean Lamb for the Sanford engraving and Alexander Waugh for the Naunton quotation*