

Proofs of Oxfordian Authorship in the Shakespearean Apocrypha by WJ Ray

With appreciation for Katherine Chiljan's analysis of 'A Lover's Complaint' (Chiljan3,1) as Oxfordian, I should like to extend the discussion of Shakespearean apocrypha, and establish a like conclusion, that two more of the minor poems are traceable to Oxford—certainly not to a provincial commoner—and are linguistically consistent with the accepted Shakespearean canon.

Indeed “Sweet Cytherea, sitting by a brook” (‘The Passionate Pilgrim’, IV) and “Sonnets to Sundry Notes of Music’, (IV) go some distance to show the academy’s judgment--that they are not Shakespearean ignores plain literary evidence to the contrary.

The 1927 edition of ‘The Yale Shakespeare’ includes a volume of short ballads, lyrics, and narratives edited by Albert Feuillerat. His commentary states without much elaboration, "Out of the twenty poems only five are indisputably by Shakespeare. These are numbers I, II, III, V of ‘The Passionate Pilgrim’ and II of ‘Sonnets to Sundry Notes’". (Feuillerat, ed., 185)

He does say about the others, “It should be also be noted that IV (our subject), VI, and IX [of ‘The Passionate Pilgrim’] are remarkable for their lack of imagery; they scarcely contain any simile and metaphor. The man who wrote them was singularly devoid of imagination, a thing which cannot be said of Shakespeare ”¹ (Feuillerat, 186)

Stephen Greenblatt in his relatively recent 'Will in the World' repeats Feuillerat’s language without attribution or detail: "(Of the twenty poems in the collection, only five are actually by Shakespeare.)" (Greenblatt, 235) Dunton-Downer and Riding similarly comment in the 2004 volume, “Essential Shakespeare Handbook’: “In fact, only five of its 20 poems are Shakespeare’s.” (Dunton-Downer and Riding, 458)

¹ Although I will discuss only Sonnet IV below, Sonnets VI and IX are Oxfordian/Shakespearean for the same reasons. The reader is invited to study them as a unit.

Greenblatt off-handedly communicates to the lay reader via the parentheses that his unsupported—and plagiaristic—assertion may be granted on authority alone and needs no further inquiry. We have been facilely led from the ground of scholarship into the valuative domain of ‘actuality’ with no logical bridge between. "Only five are indisputably" has been abandoned; the unconditional "only five are actually" substitutes. Feuillerat allowed there once may have been a dispute but it was resolved for five poems. Greenblatt erases any dispute by dismissing disputation. The others re-accept accepted views as facts.

None of the scholars take into consideration that “Sweet Cytherea” is allegory, i.e., a device employed doubly to narrate surface events and covertly tell another tale. This oversight betrays unexamined class prejudice. They couldn’t imagine their man as autobiographically complex enough to ply poetic disguise, since the broad broom of ‘Genius’ seemingly sweeps all personal detail aside. Accordingly and contrary to human nature and creativity, the works exist marvelously free of motivation. But all artistic creation begins with someone’s personal experience in a social frame. If I am right that Edward de Vere, 17th earl of Oxford, wrote this poem, ‘Venus and Adonis’, and the rest, it makes sense that his primary narrative method were allegory. Oxford had much to conceal and yet much more will to tell the truth.

I “Sweet Cytherea, sitting by a brook”

Let us set aside past judgments and go to the text of the purged Number IV Sonnet in 'The Passionate Pilgrim':

Sweet Cytherea, sitting by a brook
With young Adonis, lovely, fresh, and green,
Did court the lad with many a lovely look,
Such looks as none could look but beauty's queen,
She told him stories to delight his ear;
She show'd him favours to allure his eye;
To win his heart, she touch'd him here and there,--
Touches so soft still conquer chastity.
But whether unripe years did want conceit,

Or he refus'd to take her figur'd proffer,
The tender nibbler would not touch the bait,
But smile and jest at every gentle offer:
Then fell she on her back, fair queen, and toward:
He rose and ran away; ah! fool too froward. (Feuillerat,116)

From the point of view favoring an historical affair between Oxford and Elizabeth I, this is as blatant a Mrs. Robinson-like failed seduction as could be packed into the Shakespearean sonnet format.

Comparing the historical Queen (Elizabeth) and youth (Oxford) to the verbal alchemy shown in "Sweet Cytherea", we find remarkable fidelity between what we know of the affair and its artistic depiction. Fiction feigns more than fact can say.

Sweet Cytherea, named after one of the mythological erotic deities, symbolically equivalent with Venus, refers the reader back to the Spartan island Cythera, known for its purple dye, murex, a color sanctified since antiquity as royal. (Smith, 101) We are not left in doubt, reading the poem, which level of royalty Cytherea represents. From beginning to end, the tale's moving party is "beauty's queen", and she, "fair queen", falls finally on her back, postured toward her young interlocutor, as he bolts and runs like the wind.

Cythera according to Greek myth was the birthplace of Aphrodite, goddess of love. In this poem the archetypal lover, "beauty's queen", sits by a BROOK. Lord Ox-FORD therein embeds his personal signature, as Alfred Hitchcock cinematically presents his comic rotundity, in the first entry of the drama. An early pseudonym of Oxford was Arthur Brooke.

In further self-description, the youth is "young Adonis, lovely, fresh, and green". The French equivalent for 'green' is vert, the Spanish, verde. The latter word is a clever reverse anagram of de Vere. Both Oxford and Elizabeth spoke Spanish. As another name clue, "fresh" in Dutch is "vers", and the adjective 'lovely' shares with the Sonnets' vocabulary the sense of high and royal rank, someone worthy of allegiance. Oxford was a linguistic virtuoso. Double-meanings became his trademark.

The poem's reluctant hero is named after Adonis, traditionally the Hunter beloved of Venus and later slain by a boar, the Vere totemic animal. Working from my assumption that Oxford later lowered his visor and masked himself Shake-speare, the poet here adumbrates key elements of the 1593 epic, 'Venus and Adonis', prefiguring the hero's hunting avocation, the tryst's conjugal dynamic of older woman and younger man, and, most significantly, the surrounding world, wild and perfect Nature.

The Greek word 'therios', from which is derived Cytherea, indicates the animal universe. Sweet Cytherea is a passionate creature. She abandons herself to her chosen love. Both the early poem and later epic rely upon the book of Venus and Adonis in Ovid's 'The Metamorphoses' wherein Venus was so smitten she had "forgotten Cythera's flowery island,"—in other words her purple robed majesty. (Hughes, 130)

In the poem's two-veiled reference to Elizabeth I, who received frequent allusions during her reign as the moon goddess Cynthia, Cytherea, first, is nearly homonymic with Cynthia, an allusion which in turn grants her mythic status, like Cynthia and Diana, as simultaneously the goddess of the moon and the chase. The moon votary in the poem encounters the short-living sun god Adonis, relying for metaphorical power upon the bond between those two celestial archetypes.

Prince Oxford continued to couch his life experience in mythological terms when in 'Venus and Adonis' he expanded into epic form the dramatic features of his experiment in the Shakespearean sonnet.

We see a distinctive Oxfordian writing feature as well, the repetition of an ending phrase in the beginning of the following line, a personal technique linking together the obscure poem, Oxford as its author, and the pseudonymous cypher Shake-speare. Note that the words "look" and "touch" repeat in this poem: lines 3-4 and 7-8. The same repeat style also occurs in 'Grief of Mind', attributed to Oxford: "What plague is greater than the grief of mind?/ The grief of mind that eat in every vein..." (Miller, v. 1, 599) It occurs somewhere else, in the early Shake-spearean 'Comedy of Errors' (I,ii): "She is so hot because the meat is cold/ The meat is cold because you come not home " No other poet of the era but Oxford took on the challenge of echoing phrases end to end.

In a single rarely read poem with no reputation we have encountered a master of evocation: evoking identity clues, foreign language meanings, mythological analogies, and stylistic cues. To conclude the sonnet, before the youth (Oxford) physically breaks away, in the thirteenth written line his patronymic, Vere, (properly pronounced Vair) scripturally mates with the royal love-goddess. The word “fair” as a near homonym to Vere and “queen” conjoin into a phrase. Then Cytherea falls on her back and Adonis flees.

The verbal ambiguity of fair/vair no doubt had more evocative power to the author’s original courtly audience than it does in today’s predisposition toward a rural superman as the author. We can’t understand the words’ meaning if we ignore what they say about him, his class, his social frame, his experience. Certain words mean so much to a writer they must reappear. “Fair” was such a word for Oxford/Shake-speare. As Hank Whittemore demonstrated, “fair” did reappear--again in subtle code--in the Sonnets’ reference to the Fair Youth, de Vere’s son Henry by Elizabeth. (Whittemore, 820) Very early, “fair” had become a possessive, evocative of someone Vere held dear. “Fair queen” takes on the meaning that she is his, not only that she is compelling.

As the brilliant but forgotten classicist Frederick W. Locke asked, “Can any reader of poetry deny that evocation is one of the prime creators of metaphor?” (Locke, 304) And can any writer evoke meaningful cues and references without a receptive audience able to read them? There is no evidence whatever that Shakspeare of Stratford moved in Elizabethan court circles or knew of Elizabeth’s and Oxford’s mutual past.

The cleverly planted epistemologies and allusions in ‘Sweet Cytherea’ may escape the first-time reader or incurious scholar. (Hence Feuillerat’s rejection.) True, one can argue the poem is not high Shakespeare: it has a felicitous rather than profound narrative style. It manifests, regardless of that conceit, masterly command of language and of a poetic form first used by Oxford’s uncle Henry Howard, and so effortless a familiarity with the courtly romantic tradition that “Sweet Cytherea” appeared in the poetic miscellany entitled ‘THE Passionate Pilgrime/By W. Shakespeare’ in 1599. (Feuillerat, 185)

Dating the poem is a matter of deduction, as we have no record. Something that indicates its general time-span is the poem's post-youthful tone. The hero both lives and fears the power of his carnal vitality, a youthful trait. He impulsively runs away from his tryst as the youthful Oxford escaped Elizabeth's court to Europe in 1573. This would place the affair in the early 1570's, and the poetic representation some time later but before 'Venus and Adonis' (1592-3). As to why the late publication in 1599 after 1576, only three of Oxford's poems were published under his name during his lifetime. (Miller, 553) The identity of the poem's author, like that of the plays', lay hidden in plain sight.

Only in 'Venus and Adonis' did the force of Adonis'/Oxford's animal nature become explicit. There Adonis' beloved (and valuable) steed received a testimonial not matched since Virgil and Alexander the Great. And there the Boar, Oxford's ancestral totem, personified the moral danger of his own animal desire. The theme of animal desire reappeared in the late Shakespearean canon, notably in 'Othello', where it became as inexorable and lethal as the demonic Boar of classical myth.

For our present discussion though, we see recurring clues that an aristocrat, self-coded in the poem as both Vere and Oxford, wrote Sonnet IV of 'The Passionate Pilgrim'. Furthermore, its narrative is consistent with Oxford's station, his love affair with Elizabeth I, and his worship of Nature. The poem's thematic features and dramatis personae are identical to those of Shakespeare's first heir of his invention: 'Venus and Adonis'.

II "Whenas thine eye hath chose the dame,"

To take another example, Feuillerat rejected Sonnet IV in 'Sonnets to Sundry Notes of Music', and the criticism is brief:

"The other poems in the book with the exception of VII, X, XIII, XIV [of 'The Passionate Pilgrim',] and I, III, IV of 'Sonnets to Sundry Notes', which have nothing Shakespearean about them have been restored to their owners" (Feuillerat, 186)

The referenced Number IV poem is not a sonnet but, taking the title of the cycle literally--“Sonnets to Sundry Notes of Music’--it is a musical interlude, elegant instruction to young courtiers about the high ritual of wooing. By the meter and stanza length, it was meant to be sung, perhaps accompanied by a lute.

Oxford was recognized early and late as a highly skilled musician. The sweet melodies scattered through the plays are explainable on this basis. There has never been any documented connection between the grain merchant Shakspeare and the English ballad tradition. The passage discussing music in 'The Merchant of Venice' remains the most articulate statement of music's effect on character written in English. (Phelps, ed., Merchant of Venice, V.i.69-88) John Farmer praised Oxford. William Byrd collaborated with him Number IV begins:

Whenas thine eye hath chose the dame,
And stall'd the deer that thou should'st strike,
Let reason rule things worthy blame,
As well as fancy, partial wight:
Take counsel of some wiser head,
Neither too young nor yet unwed (Feuillerat, ed., 126)

The song is high Renaissance fare, light-heartedly conceived by someone “neither too young nor yet unwed” and offered in the context of a court of rich barbarism: "Spare not to spend, and chiefly there / Where thy desert may merit praise, / By ringing in thy lady's ear: / The strongest castle, tower, and town, / The golden bullet beats it down."

The golden bullet refers to the then modern missile, a rifle ball, compared to Cupid's golden arrow of love. Modern weaponry was available only to the upper class, and only its members could pursue large game.

The instruction though light is not trivial. It aims, like Messer Pietro Bembo in Castiglione's 'The Book of the Courtier', (Simpson, 78) to cultivate the virtue of the courtier:

Serve always with assured trust,
And in thy suit be humble true;
Unless thy lady prove unjust,

Seek never thou to choose anew.
When time shall serve, be thou not slack
To proffer, though she put thee back. (Feuillerat, 127)

Further on in the lesson sex appears without prudish constraint, reminiscent of Chaucer: "Were kisses all the joys in bed,/ One woman would another wed."

The author displays comprehensive knowledge of an idealized courtesan's tempestuousness, inclination to be courted by flattery, wish to be pursued, voluptuous lust, and charming hypocrisy. The ballad is a musical equivalent, or perhaps a whimsical variation of "If women would be fair and never fond", attributed by Chiljan to the composer William Byrd, and by Looney to the early de Vere. (Chiljan4, 172; Miller, v. 1, 595)

I am inclined to attribute the latter piece to Oxford, because of the narrator's closing reference to himself as a fool: "To play with fools, oh what a fool was I," It is kin to the ending mood of 'Sweet Cytherea': "He rose and ran away; ah! Fool too froward." Since Shakespearean language shows up in numerous contemporary authors' works, authors whom Oxford supported, and for which they paid him dedicatory tribute in return, the parallelisms can be likened to collaborative creation, as occurred in medieval guilds other than the then relatively new writing circles.

Turberville, Munday, Lyly, Whetstone, Googe, Brooke, and Golding for example were authors associated with Oxford and to whom are attributed literature stylistically parallel with Shakespeare texts. (see Brame & Popova, 'Shakespeare's Fingerprints') . A comparable example of the transitional literary guild would be Mary Sidney's country Circle at Wilton: Spenser, Greville, Daniel, Drayton, Breton, Watson, and Fraunce. (Williams, 36)

Corporate or guild circles revolving around a wealthy brilliant aristocrat—as a plausibility—appears more feasible and persuasive explaining linguistic parallelism than the self-defeating conjecture that great master Shakespeare was, at one and the same time, Western literature's most blatant copy-catter.

Returning to our theme, "Whenas thine eye hath chose the dame," is Shakespearean in its distinct musicality, its depth of understanding courtly ritual, joined to ease at the ballad form, and in an underplayed paideiac

commitment to human perfectability. The latter vocation appeared very soon in Oxford's literary career, first expressed in the 1573 introduction to Bedingfield's translation of 'Cardanus Comforte': "lift up the base-minded man to achieve to any true sum or grade of virtue" (Anderson, 65)

III The Cornwallis Apocrypha

But the credibility of Feuillerat's exclusion of "Whenas thine eye hath chose the dame," fails not so much from textual as from detective evidence. Before its publication in 1599, the poem was in Anne Cornwallis' commonplace book, a bound volume with the title, 'MSS POEMS BY VERE EARL OF OXFORD, etc.' Mark Anderson in 'Shakespeare By Another Name' stated that the Cornwallises moved in 1588 into Fisher's Folly, where previously Oxford had housed and trained numerous writers. Thomas Watson, Oxford's employee, stayed on to tutor the adolescent Anne. (Anderson, 231-3) We infer he was the source of her practice poetry texts, which included Sidney, Raleigh, Dyer, Bentley, and Edwards, in addition to Oxford.

Circumstantial evidence does not prove Oxford wrote a poem later attributed to or at least included with the Shakespearean canon in virtually every edition. It most certainly reveals the social context of the late 1580's English Renaissance in London, that of master and men. Maybe once Athena burst full-grown from the head of Zeus, but no free agent walked in and took London by storm. The Cornwallis commonplace book logically excludes any claim of authorship by the erstwhile hostler and loan shark called Gulielmus Shakspere. He hadn't arrived in London then, so was not known as the author of anything, nor was it his poem copied out into the bound volume belonging to Anne Cornwallis.

IV Oxford's Echo Early and Late

The "echo" verses are attributed to Anne Vavasour in the Cornwallis commonplace book. (Miller, v. II, 380) However, "Sitting alone upon my thought in melancholy mood" is laced with echoes of Vere, his anagram, 'ever', and his initials.

The image of sound re-sounding to all Nature's ears through all times, which begins humbly in the heart's breath, must have been a profound metaphor to Oxford as well as a hint of the civilized future. Books would convey to the writer spiritual immortality. If the written Word echoes onward in another's breath, truth carries on forever. Even the word EchO [Edward earl of Oxford] bespoke a benediction on his own identity.

In "Sitting alone upon my thought in melancholy mood", (Chiljan4,183; Miller, v. 1, 560), Oxford once again communicated his identity by means of encoding key words. The E-O first-and-last initialing letters of "echo" manifest one of his literary signatures. An elongated repeated "you" and "youth" also echo back to the pining lady in the poem, "ee-oo" (ee-you) acoustically expressing the author's initials. Vocalized, E-O resembles the Italian first person singular pronoun, "io": I. We are reminded again of his declaration to Lord Burghley upon returning from Europe: "I am that I am." Throughout his life he sought proof this "io", or self, was absolute and eternal.

As a climax of embedded self-identification, the last verse of the narrative compresses Oxford's persona in a triple entendre.

And I, that knew this lady well,
Said, Lord, how great a miracle,
To her how echo told the truth,
As true as Phoebus oracle.

The key word "echo" derives from the name of a mythological figure, Echo, a nymph who spent her days in rocky hills calling for love. Oxford's uncle Arthur Golding first used "echo" as a noun, according to the OED, in a Calvinist text.

"Echo" also bears a resemblance to the common German word "echt", meaning genuine or true. Oxford communicated with Sturmius, the German seer, at various points of his life, including a personal visit in 1575-6. We may assume he knew the German equivalent, echt, for his own Latin-derived name, Vere/= truth. There is an attenuated form of echt in "Reason and Affection". (Chiljan4 165=eche; Miller, v. 1, 592=ech)

Thus, echo>echt=true/=Vere contains a triple entendre implying his name, bounded by his initials, E-O. The rest of the line, “told the truth”, again indicates Oxford’s personal identity (Vere) wedded to his life mission (truth). The verbal construction is Kabbalistic in its economy. Truth must echo truth. Or to quote the House of Vere motto: nothing truer than truth.

And the simile, “As true as Phoebus oracle”, in the last line cues us to how much he (true/Vere) identified with Truth as his mystical calling: Phoebus’ oracle was at Delphi, where the gods themselves voiced prophetic truth. Phoebus, like Oxford’s literary alter-ego Adonis in the Cytherea poem and “Venus and Adonis”, was god of the Sun.

V Calling to the Future

The metaphors of echoing and resonance that characterized Oxford’s early poetic style deepened in his maturity to the spiritual level. Suffering the fate of Artist before that calling had social sanction, he had been forced to stealthily silence any personal projection of his life’s work. His appeal for posthumous justice in this regard occurred in ‘Hamlet’ when Hamlet gasps to his warrior cousin Horatio/ Horace de Vere: “report [i.e., re-carry] my cause aright to the unsatisfied.” He had thus embedded into the play a last echo motif, the cry to re-sound his spiritual testament into future time. Oxfordians aim to honorably reply.

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