

The Use of State Power In the Effort To Hide Edward de Vere's Authorship Of the Works Attributed to 'William Shake-speare'



by James A. Warren

A presentation drawn from this article was given at the
Shakespeare Oxford Fellowship Conference,
Madison, Wisconsin, September 11-14, 2014

Syllabus Abstract

This paper addresses the question of why no direct evidence exists today in support of Edward de Vere, 17th Earl of Oxford (or any other specific individual) as the author of the works attributed to ‘William Shake-speare.’ The author concludes that the effort to hide Oxford’s authorship was so extensive, so systematic, so comprehensive and so successful that it could have been conducted only through the use of state power at the highest levels during and shortly after Oxford’s lifetime. He then shows that those who controlled state power used it to cut the connection between Oxford and the plays in order to cut the connection between the plays and the court – something that became necessary, in their eyes, once the plays began appearing on the public stage. Hiding the fact that the plays were written by a courtier would make it less likely, they believed, that public audiences would realize that contemporary events, issues and individuals from the court and government were portrayed in them – including the ultra sensitive issue of succession, a subject addressed in many of the later plays even though public discussion of it was banned.

But those who controlled state power used it not only to destroy evidence of Oxford’s literary activities, but also to airbrush him from much of the historical record. The only explanation weighty enough to account for the use of state power for that extraordinary purpose was Oxford’s bodily involvement in the succession issue in some way – as described in the so-called Prince Tudor or Tudor Heir theories – an involvement that could have affected Queen Elizabeth’s reputation and provided a possible challenge to the legitimacy of King James’s reign. Focusing on the authorship question from the point of view of the use of state power makes it possible to see the effort to hide Oxford’s authorship of Shake-speare’s works in the proper context, as one part of the larger effort to remove him from the historical record for non-literary reasons, and thus provides an explanation for how and why Oxford became Shake-speare that is in accordance with those provided by Hank Whittemore and Charles Beauclerk.

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PART 1: STATE POWER WAS USED TO HIDE OXFORD'S AUTHORSHIP OF THE WORKS ATTRIBUTED TO 'WILLIAM SHAKE-SPEARE'

“William Shake-speare” was a pen name. There was no actual person with that name involved with the theater in London at the time the plays were written, first performed or published. It is not surprising that the author used a pen name; as Archer Taylor and Frederic J. Mosher concluded in their study of literature in the Elizabethan era, “the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries [were] the Golden Age of pseudonyms [and] almost every writer used a pseudonym at some time during his career.”¹ Thus a search for the real author must be undertaken if we are to know his or her real identity.



The two principal candidates for the authorship of Shake-speare's works are well-known today: the man baptized as Gulielmus Shakspere, from Stratford-on-Avon, who was also known as William Shakspere² throughout his lifetime, and Edward de Vere, 17th Earl of Oxford.

It is easy to understand why Shakspere would have used a pseudonym, if he was the author. Writing was and is a dangerous occupation in authoritarian societies, and Elizabethan society was certainly authoritarian.



William Shakspere

And it is easy to understand why Oxford, as a courtier, would have used a pseudonym. In his day, Real Men of his social rank did not write poetry. As the author of *The Arte of English Poesie* noted, “in these days (although some learned princes may take delight in them [poetry]) yet universally it is not so. For as well poets as poesie are despised & the name become of honourable infamous, subject to scorn and derision, and rather a reproach than a praise to any that useth it.”³ And, as is well-known, the social customs at the time prohibited courtiers from publishing their works or having them performed on the public stage.



Edward de Vere,
17th Earl of Oxford

Evidence of authorship

It is an utterly astounding fact that no direct evidence exists today in support of either of these men – or anyone else – as having been the author of the works attributed to William Shake-speare. Think for a moment about how extraordinary this is. William Shake-speare, the greatest dramatist and one of the greatest poets in all of Western civilization – a man who lived in a society from which an exceptionally large number of documents have been preserved – and yet there is no direct evidence tying that name and the works associated with it to any specific individual.

Ben Jonson was clearly a writer, having left a literary paper trail on all 12 types of evidence shown in *Figure 1*, which is modeled after the chart at the end of Diana Price's

book *Shakespeare's Unorthodox Biography*. William Shakspere was clearly not a writer, having left behind no literary paper trail at all, casting doubt on whether he was even literate even though Shake-speare's works were attributed to him after his death. For the purposes of this paper, we will assume that the reason no paper trail exists for Shakspere today is because none existed during his lifetime because he was not the author.

Oxford, like Jonson, left behind a clear literary paper trail connecting him to a literary life. His paper trail contains eight types of documents, a record equal to or better than all but four of the 25 writers listed on the chart in Price's book. But, significantly, none of these records tie Oxford directly to the works attributed to William Shake-speare.

	Ben Jonson	Edward de Vere	William Shakspere
Evidence of Education	Yes	Yes	No
Record of handwritten correspondence	Yes	Yes	No
Record of correspondence on literary matters	Yes	No	No
Evidence of having been paid to write or having written at court	Yes	Yes	No
Evidence of a direct relationship with a patron	Yes	Yes	No
Evidence of association with other writers	Yes	Yes	No
Extant original manuscript	Yes	No	No
Commendatory verses, epistles or epigrams from other writers	Yes	Yes	No
Commendatory verses or epistles contributed	Yes	Yes	No
Misc. records referring to him as a writer	Yes	Yes	No
Evidence of books owned, written in or borrowed	Yes	Yes	No
Notice at death as a writer	Yes	No	No
TOTAL	12	8	0

Figure 1: Paper Trail of Three Writers
(modeled after the chart in Diana Price's book *Shakespeare's Unorthodox Biography*)

Although no *direct* evidence exists today to prove that Oxford was Shake-speare, a large and growing amount of *indirect or circumstantial* evidence does support that conclusion. That evidence, accumulated by hundreds of Oxfordian and even Stratfordian scholars and researchers since John Thomas Looney first proposed Oxford as Shake-speare almost 100 years ago, includes more than 1,000 correspondences between marked passages in Oxford's Geneva Bible and passages in the plays, as documented by Roger Stritmatter;⁴ and hundreds of examples of incidents and developments in the plays that mirror events in Oxford's life.⁵

Missing Documents

If Oxford wrote Shake-speare's works, direct evidence of his authorship must surely have existed at one time. But that evidence is missing now. Documents that would substantiate Oxford's authorship if they still existed include:

- Government records. For instance, minutes of Privy Council meetings are missing for more than two years (Aug. 27, 1593-Oct. 1, 1595). As Stephanie Hopkins Hughes points out, "this period of time included many developments related to the theater that surely would have been discussed by the Privy Council, given that

several “of Elizabeth’s leading councilors [were] also patrons of London theater companies.”⁶ This period, she notes “covers the months following Marlowe’s assassination, through the registration with the Stationers of a dozen (anonymous) plays of the 1580s, the murder of Ferdinando Stanley, Lord Strange . . . the formation of the second Royal company, the Lord Chamberlain’s Men from what was left of Stanley’s company and the marriage of Cecil’s niece (Oxford’s daughter) to Stanley’s brother, now the 6th Earl of Derby.”⁷

- Private papers of important government officials. The papers belonging to Sir Francis Walsingham, Principal Secretary to Queen Elizabeth, are missing. Walsingham had been extensively involved in supporting the theater, and Hughes believes that his papers would surely have shown his patronage of Oxford’s literary activities at Fisher’s Folly and the creation of the first two successful commercial theaters in London.⁸ The papers of Robert Devereux, Earl of Essex, and of Robert Dudley, Earl of Leicester, among others, are also missing.
- Records of theatrical performances. Records from the Master of the Revels are missing, as are records of works performed at the first Blackfriars theater, a key venue for performances of Oxford’s work in the 1580s. All of these documents would tell us much about the birth of the London stage and Oxford’s role in creating it.
- Personal documents such as letters. Missing are any letters from or to Oxford mentioning any of his literary activities. How incredible that not even one such letter exists even though, as Gary Goldstein pointed out, “33 books were dedicated to him, he employed writers such as John Lyly, Anthony Munday, and Thomas Churchyard, and was patron of two theater companies, one operating for more than 20 years.”⁹ Thousands of letters dealing with these activities must surely have existed at one time. It is easy to imagine one such letter to Oxford saying, something like “Hey Buddy, really enjoyed the play last night. *Hamlet* is your best work so far. I especially like the way you knocked off old Burghley by having Hamlet stab him through the arras.” Even one such letter would constitute direct evidence that Oxford was Shake-speare. Thomas Kyd, we can recall, was credited with authorship of *The Spanish Tragedy* because of a single oblique reference decades after the fact and in the complete absence of any circumstantial evidence.
- Oxford’s own dramatic works, personal papers, books, and will. As John Thomas Looney noted, “Edward de Vere is the only dramatist in the long list compiled by Francis Meres (1598) of whose work no trace has been found.”¹⁰

Documents missing . . . through accident or on purpose?

These records and documents that could serve as direct evidence of Oxford’s authorship of the works of Shake-speare – are they missing because they have been lost through the ravages of time over the last 400 years . . . or is there a more sinister reason?

To answer this question we can again turn to Stephanie Hopkins Hughes, who has persuasively argued that these documents have not gone missing simply by accident because they are too coincidentally relevant to the authorship question. As she explained, “when following the paper trails that lead to Oxford’s activities from the 1580s on, to the University Wits, and to the creation of the London Stage and Press, it seems to happen with rather considerable regularity that the trail will vanish just at the point in time where one would expect to find information, then reappear once that point is past.”¹¹

Charlton Ogburn Jr. similarly noted “the wholesale evidently selective disappearance, hardly to be explained as accidental, of records that might be expected to throw light on the object of the quest.”¹² As he explained in more detail,

The fact is that every contemporary document that might have related authorship of Shakespeare’s plays and poems to an identifiable human being subsequently disappeared. Every last scrap of paper that would have told who Shakespeare was – whether the Stratford man or any other – simply vanished; . . . And I think we cannot simply attribute the blank record to accident. For a body of work as superior as Shakespeare’s, it is simply not conceivable that every reference during the author’s life, and evidently for some years thereafter, which linked the work to a flesh-and-blood author, including everything in the author’s own words, written or quoted, should have passed into limbo by chance. Chance is not so purposeful. Elizabethan writers of far less stature than the author of Shakespeare’s works have been found unmistakably associated with their products by concrete references that have not had to be unearthed through the exhaustive searches over years by legions of investigators.”¹³

Thus, Ogburn concluded, “there can be but one explanation for the empty-handedness of generations of scholars after lifelong quests. Someone saw to it that those quests would be fruitless.”¹⁴

Gary Goldstein also concluded that “if the author of the canon wished to remain anonymous, then he and his friends did an outstanding job of eliminating any contemporary records that could identify him.”¹⁵ And, Morse Johnson concluded that “Such an unthinkable, singular and total eclipse cannot be attributed to happenstance or indifference. The sole rational explanation is that his identity was intentionally and effectively concealed during the lifetime of whoever was the author.”¹⁶

Hughes, Ogburn, Goldstein and Johnson are surely right. The scope and variety of the documents that are missing, the range of places where should have been found, and the fact that other similar documents that do not relate to Oxford’s authorship still exist, leads to the conclusion that their absence today is not the result of mere chance. It is hard to avoid the conclusion that a concerted, sustained, systematic effort was undertaken to seek out and destroy those documents that would have supported Oxford’s authorship of the works attributed to William Shakespeare.



Edward de Vere,
17th Earl of Oxford

Who Was Involved?

Oxford was surely involved in the effort to hide his authorship of his literary works. We know that he took steps earlier in his years as a courtier to hide authorship of his poems

because he published them anonymously or under pseudonyms such as the initials E.O. He also published two lengthy poems in 1593 and 1594 under the name William Shakespeare, and that he approved of at least some of his plays being published under the same name beginning in 1598, the 1603 quarto of *Hamlet* being a case in point.

In addition, we also have Oxford's own words in the *Sonnets* testifying that he was aware that his name would not survive: "My name be buried where my body is," (Sonnet 72), and "Though I, once gone, to all the world must die," (Sonnet 81).

Although we don't know to what extent Oxford was involved in the effort to seek out and destroy documents that would tie him to his literary works and the creation of the public stage in London, we do know that others must have been involved because Oxford did not have access to many of the documents that are missing, such as Privy Council records. What we see is a concerted, extensive effort carried out at least partly, if not largely, by people other than Oxford. So, who would have been involved in that effort?

Given the nature of the documents that are missing, the campaign to destroy them must surely have included, if not been led by, those who controlled state power. Only they would have had access to the state documents that are missing, such as Privy Council records and the records of the Office of the Revels. Only they would have had the power to seize the private papers of important officials and letters in private hands.

Nature of State Power in Authoritarian Societies

Because much of state power was in the hands of the two Cecils – Lord Burghley William Cecil, chief advisor to Queen Elizabeth throughout her reign, and his son Robert Cecil, Earl of Salisbury – it is principally that Father-Son team that we are referring to when we talk about the use of state power.



William Cecil, Lord Burghley

Father Francis Edwards provides the context:

For at least 50 crucial years – until 1612, in fact, England was virtually ruled, and with remarkable consistency and effectiveness, by Sir William Cecil and Sir Robert, his son. As principal secretaries, they had all the power necessary to preserve or destroy for posterity the materials of future history that lay in public hands. As Masters of the Court of Wards, they had similar opportunities to deal, sooner or later, with the private records of a great many leading families. No one who has attempted research on important figures who collided or disagreed with the regime at any point can fail to notice the curious lop-sidedness of the records.”¹⁷

Beyond controlling the paper record, the Cecils and others who controlled state power were ruthless in using it to ferret out risks to the government or the crown. As Alfred Hart explained, “Walshingham and the Cecils controlled an efficient secret service, and any person of local importance who criticized any action or proclamation of the Council ran the risk of being summoned to London.”¹⁸ And interrogated – and interrogation in Elizabethan England often involved torture.

Both the theater and the press were censored to restrain “the expression of discontent and criticism of the government and its



Robert Cecil, Earl of Salisbury

actions.”¹⁹ As Janet Clare noted in *Art Made Tongued-Tied by Authority*, “Elizabethan drama was subject to two largely unrelated types of censorship: censorship by the Master of the Revels before the performance of a play and censorship by an ecclesiastical licenser prior to publication.”²⁰ These two types of censorship were put under the sole direction of the Master of the Revels by the Star Chamber decree of 1586 mentioned below, thus “confirming the secularization of dramatic censorship under absolute state control.”²¹



Penalties for violating censorship regulations were severe, and playwrights, actors, printers and publishers were especially vulnerable to charges of possessing or writing seditious materials. It is well documented that Ben Jonson was arrested numerous times, and that Thomas Nash’s works were burned in 1599 and he was forbidden from ever publishing again. It is worth noting that Chapman, Jonson and Marston were all arrested after

the first performance of their play *Eastward Ho!* – a play that does not appear to contain seditious material but does appear to pay homage of sorts to Oxford. And we might also note that Ben Jonson’s study was set ablaze and all his papers and books were destroyed in 1623, shortly after the First Folio of Shake-speare’s works, which Jonson edited, was ready to go on sale – a very physical form of censorship.

The example of John Stubbs, who had his right hand chopped off for publishing a tract, *The Gaping Gulf*, which argued against the idea of the Queen marrying the French Duc of Alcenon, is a particularly relevant instance. We have some idea of just how traumatic that event was for Oxford because of his extraordinary use of the word ‘hand’ 72 times in *Titus Andronicus*, a play in which the main character has one of hands chopped off. We can, in fact, date that play to the months following Stubbs’ loss of his hand in 1579.



So, clearly, those who controlled the state during the reigns of Elizabeth and James had power far beyond that which exists in a modern democracy, and they could be ruthless in using it in the pursuit of their interests. And equally clearly, such severe penalties for crossing those with political power would have gone a long way toward instilling a sense of self-censorship among those who knew of Oxford’s authorship, thus limiting the number of handwritten or printed documents that would need to be sought out and destroyed in order to bury awareness of Oxford’s authorship and his role in establishing the public theater in London in the written record.

Only Two Choices Exist

Given that documents that once existed that tied Oxford directly to authorship of the works of Shakes-peare are now missing, that those documents have not gone missing by accident, that Oxford could not have destroyed all the documents by himself, that state power would have been needed to seek out and destroy the documents, and that those who controlled state power were sufficiently ruthless to use it to hide Oxford’s authorship of Shake-speare’s works if they had wanted to, we must choose between two options:

Either,

- Edward de Vere, 17th Earl of Oxford, was not the author of the works attributed to ‘William Shake-speare,’ or,
- Oxford was the author but an effort to hide his authorship was undertaken that was so systematic, so comprehensive and so successful that it could have been carried out only through the use of state power at the highest levels.



All options between these two extremes have been eliminated. Before we choose between them, it is worth pausing to consider just how improbable it would have been for state power to have been used to seek out and destroy the large number of documents that resulted from Oxford’s authorship of Shake-speare’s works and his role in the creation of the public theater. Charlton Ogburn described that effort as “highly implausible” and noted that “its implausibility is what has chiefly blocked a more general acceptance of “Shakespeare” as having been a pseudonym.”²²

At the same time, we can note, with Sherlock Holmes, “When you have eliminated all which is impossible, then whatever remains, however improbable, must be the truth.”

And so, based on the overwhelming amount of circumstantial evidence that has been uncovered in the past century, we must conclude that Oxford was the author and that state power was used to hide his authorship. The serious men who dominated Queen Elizabeth’s government made a determined—and until the past century successful—effort to wipe Oxford’s authorship of Shake-speare’s works from the historical record. We now turn to the question of why.



PART II: WHY STATE POWER WAS USED TO HIDE OXFORD’S AUTHORSHIP OF THE WORKS OF ‘WILLIAM SHAKE-SPEARE’

Many of Oxford’s plays were first written to be performed as entertainment in the court and for private performances for courtiers outside the court. If the story had ended there, there would have been little need for the use of state power to hide his authorship. It is only when the plays left the court to be performed on the public stage and to be published and thus read by the general public that they became of concern to the government.

For reasons to be explained later in this section, those who controlled state power believed it necessary to separate the plays from the court in the public mind, and the best way they found to do that was by cutting the connection between the plays and the author. This section considers three of the many reasons why. The first reason has to do

with Oxford's use of the plays to generate public support for Queen Elizabeth's reign and the War with Spain, the second with the political nature of the plays, which made them of concern to the government, and the third with the portrayal in the plays of the ultra-sensitive issue of the succession to Queen Elizabeth.

Conditions Early in Queen Elizabeth's Reign

Before turning to the three reasons themselves, it is helpful to review the conditions that existed early in Elizabeth's reign.

Elizabeth became Queen in November 1558, but her accession to the throne had not been at all a sure thing. Parliament had twice declared her a bastard ineligible for succession. The religious situation was even more contentious. The separation of the Church of England from Rome, the suppression of the religious orders and the dissolution of the monasteries had occurred less than 30 years earlier.²³ England had recently been through years of religious strife under the reign of Bloody Mary, and Elizabeth found herself a Protestant queen of a country that was still majority Catholic.

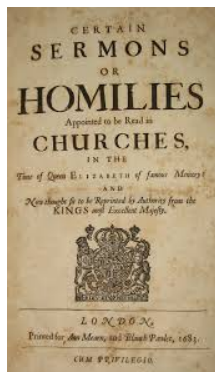


And, Elizabeth was under verbal assault from outside England almost from the first moments of her reign. "As early as 16 February 1559, Pope Paul IV published the Bull, Cum ex apostolates, advocating the deposition of all sovereigns who encouraged heresy."²⁴ Ten years later, early in 1570, following her government's victory over the Northern Rebellion, Pope Pius V issued a Bull of Deposition against Elizabeth that excommunicated her and absolved her subjects from allegiance to her.



Reason #1: Public Performances of the Plays to Garner Support for Queen Elizabeth's Reign

From her first moments on the throne, then, Elizabeth had strong reasons for needing to move quickly to increase public support for the legitimacy of her reign and the authority of the Church of England. She did this through both of the means to reach large audiences available to her – the pulpit and the public theater.



Her government ordered that certain Homilies, or sermons, be read from every pulpit in England every Sunday to give a common message to the entire country. In the early years of Elizabeth's reign, her government re-issued the series of Homilies originally distributed in 1547 by King Edward's Council of Regency. But after the Ridolfi plot, which aimed at the invasion of England and the accession of the Duke of Norfolk, she ordered that a new set of 20 Homilies on Disobedience and Willful Rebellion be prepared. They were distributed throughout England in 1573.

These Homilies, as Alfred Hart noted in his analysis published in 1934, “put into the form of sermons a series of simple lessons on the fundamental principles of Tudor politics.”²⁵ The most important of them, Homily X, was “‘An exhortation concerning good order and obedience to Rulers and Magistrates,’ . . . [and] it briefly expounds such politico-religious doctrines as the divine right of kings, non-resistance, passive obedience, and the wickedness of rebellion.”²⁶

It is just these themes from the Homilies that Shake-speare – far more than any other writer of his day – emphasized in his plays. As Hart observed,

Shakespeare outdoes every other important dramatist of his time in the number and variety of the allusions made to the divine right of the reigning monarch, the duty of passive obedience enjoined on subjects by God, and the misery and chaos resulting from civil war and rebellion. References to such topics are scattered through at least twenty plays . . . Though most frequent in the plays on English history, they are also to be found in comedies of his early and middle periods, and in the great tragedies.²⁷

What is peculiar to Shakespeare is that he treats the politico-theological doctrines of divine right, non-resistance, passive obedience and the sin of rebellion, as the accepted and immutable law of almost every land in every age. He has adroitly woven into the fabric of his plays so many and varied references, direct and indirect, to these doctrines, that we may extract from them an excellent digest of the main articles of the . . . political creed of the Tudors concerning the constitution of the body politic in general and the relation of ruler to subject in particular.²⁸

In fact, Hart concluded, “The number and variety of the passages . . . in which [Shakespeare] makes definite allusions to [these] topics . . . give . . . very strong support to my contention that Shakespeare derived these ideas either directly or indirectly from the Homilies.”²⁹ The similarities between the themes and wording of the homilies and Shakespeare’s plays are so similar that Mark Anderson speculates in his book, *“Shakespeare” By Another Name*, that one or more of the Homilies were actually written by a 20 year old de Vere. “The anonymous Homily Against Disobedience and Willful Rebellion (1571),” he wrote, “is a proto-Shake-spearean piece of prose—containing enough distinctive rhetoric and poetic flourishes to lead one to suspect the hand of a twenty-year old Bard. . . . Did de Vere” he asked, “record his theological reflections on rebellion for clergymen across the land to recite to their flocks?”³⁰

But even if Oxford did not write any of the Homilies, we see a body of work presented to the public in the theaters that mirrors the messages of the Homilies in support of the Queen and her government and the authority of the Church of England. We thus see Oxford seeking to influence public opinion through the theater long before he ever began to use the pseudonym William Shake-speare, and he would have been most effective in doing so if it



was not known that the author of the plays was a member of the court. And thus we see that these plays would have been of interest to the state for their content even if state power was not yet used to hide Oxford’s authorship of them.

Need For National Unity During the Anglo-Spain War (1585-1604)

This early use of the public theater to influence public opinion was expanded in a more systematic way to create unity throughout the country as England entered the War with Spain in the mid 1580s. At the same time, Oxford himself moved from being an unofficial supporter of the government to becoming a direct supporter and perhaps even a member of the government itself.



England's fear as the 1580s progressed was that if Spain succeeded in extinguishing the independence of the Protestant Dutch and Flemish communities, it would then be free to turn its power toward a religious crusade against England. In summer 1585 Elizabeth recognized that she had no choice but to support the Low Countries, and sent English military forces there to help defend them. Thus began the Anglo-Spanish

War that did not end until 19 years later, in 1604, when King James signed a peace treaty with Spain.

The war represented a direct threat to the continuation of Elizabeth's reign. In June 1587, following the trial and execution of Mary Queen of Scots, the Pope issued a Papal Bull calling on all English subjects to rise up and depose her. As historian Paul Johnson explained further,

There were few members of her government . . . who were under any illusion that her, and their, regime was likely to survive her murder. No imaginable successor would be able to command the confidence of the country; the result would be civil war, the intervention of one or more Catholic powers, a compromise at best, leading inevitably to the triumph of Rome. Then they would be hanged or burned alive. Nor was it just a question of their own lives. They had no doubt that the fall of England would mean the end of reformed religion.³¹

Elizabeth and her government were thus in for the fight of their lives, and it was a fight that put England on an exhaustive war footing for almost 20 years. As Col. B. R. Ward discovered, expenditure on soldiers, sailors and war materials averaged 70% of revenue during the entire 1585-1604 period, and expenditures on the Army and Navy in the year of the Armada actually amounted to 101% of revenue.³² This was a terrible burden to be borne by the English crown and people for such an extended period of time, and the government came close to bankruptcy during the closing years of Elizabeth's reign.



To garner public support for her regime during those difficult years, Queen Elizabeth took two steps in June 1586. First, on June 23, she established severe and rigid control over the Printing Press by a Star Chamber Decree, a measure designed to stop the dissemination of opinion contrary to the war effort. And second, only three days later, on June 26, she sanctioned a grant of £1,000 a year to the Earl of Oxford. Oxford was to serve, as Colonel Ward explained, "as the head of a Secret Service Department of State. This could hardly have been anything but a War Propaganda Department."³³ Payments to

him were retroactive back to March 1586, but it is likely that discussions on this issue were underway by Fall 1585. If so, the creation of this new secret department was likely the reason why Oxford had been recalled suddenly from the Low Countries in October 1585, where he was serving as General of the Horse.

In 1585 or 1586, then, Oxford moved from being an unofficial supporter of Queen Elizabeth's reign by writing plays emphasizing themes from the Homilies to working in an official capacity as a member, though secret member, of her government.

As a result of Oxford's new responsibilities, we see a change in themes of the plays that he and his team of writers wrote. Whereas in the earlier plays he had emphasized the ideas of the divine right of kings and the necessity of obedience and loyalty – themes supporting Elizabeth's reign – the plays now encouraged pride in the nation and support for the war with Spain. In *Henry V*, to cite one example, characters from every part of the British isles – the Welsh Fluellan, Irish Captain Macmorris, Scottish Captain Jamy, and English Gower – cooperate with each other, thus demonstrating the idea of Britain as a union of people united in resisting the Spanish menace.

1586 was thus a critical year in Oxford's life. It might have seemed at a glance as though other years were of greater importance – 1581, for instance, the year of his banishment from court, or 1593, the first use of the pseudonym 'William Shake-speare.' But a case can be made that 1586 was the true turning point for the future of Oxford and the memory of his name because it was that at time that he moved from hiding his authorship for traditional reasons – courtiers do not write or publish – to hiding it for reasons of state. It was at that time, with the launching of the state-funded propaganda effort in the theater, that state power perhaps began to be used to hide Oxford's authorship of his plays. If so, it was perhaps at that time that his art began to become "tongued-tied by authority."

THE GREAT IDEAS ONLINE

is published weekly for its members by the

CENTER FOR THE STUDY OF THE GREAT IDEAS

Founded in 1990 by Mortimer J. Adler & Max Weismann

Max Weismann, Publisher and Editor

Ken Dzugan, Senior Fellow and Archivist

A not-for-profit (501)(c)(3) educational organization.

Donations are tax deductible as the law allows.

Footnotes

¹ Taylor, Archer and Frederic J. Mosher, *The Bibliographical History of Anonyma and Pseudonyma*, 1952, p. 85, quoted in Anderson, Mark, *"Shakespeare" By Another Name*, 2005, p. xxviii.

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- ² Shakspere used a variety of spellings of his name, but none of them have the ‘e’ in ‘Shake.’ All of them would have been pronounced with the short ‘a’ sound. ‘Shack,’ not ‘Shake.’
- ³ Ogburn, Charlton, *The Mysterious William Shakespeare*, 1992, p. 688.
- ⁴ Stritmatter, Roger, *Edward De Vere’s Geneva Bible: the marginalia of Edward De Vere’s Geneva Bible: providential discovery, literary reasoning, and historical consequence*, 2001.
- ⁵ See, for example, Eva Lee Turner Clark: *Hidden Allusions in Shakespeare’s Plays* (1930), Dorothy and Charlton Ogburn: *This Star of England* (1952), and other works in the Bibliography.
- ⁶ Hopkins Hughes, Stephanie, “Missing From the Record,” www.politicworm.com, accessed January 17, 2014
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