The Puzzling Life of Edward de Vere—Political Allegory in *Venus and Adonis*

Surname Wordplay

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Wordplay... makes up the enduringly strange character of [Shakespeare's] writing.

Nicholas Royle, *How to Read Shakespeare*, 23

   The True identity of Master William Shakespeare will not <u>be</u> proved by our judgement; it is not a question of who *we think* he *is*. Rather, it is a question of who *he knew* he *was*. Despite protests to the contrary, this *is* the great puzzle of English Literature. In Shakespeare's wordplay, now examined with unprecedented skepticism, we detect a man consumed by the uncertainty of his being.

   The themes of dual identities, mistaken identities, and lost identities are central to his work. As Marjorie Garber has stated, the great protagonists of the Shakespeare canon have in common the search for 'self'. Ultimately, the author and his art were creatures of the 'Will'. While orthodox scholars see in that 'Will' a Stratford native named Shakspere, an unorthodox amateur, like myself, may justifiably conclude Edward de Vere **to be**—the 'grief' of his Monarch's <u>Will</u> and the agency of <u>Will</u>[iam] Cecil.

   I believe this verity can be discovered directly in Shake-speares Art, particularly the non-dramatic poetry, and most particularly in *Venus and Adonis*. His art constitutes a truthful and factual letter to the reader—nowhere so apparent as *V&A*; it need only be stripped of a translucent shroud of metonymy and indeterminacy. It is his 'Existential Deposition' and, if I understand the nature of poetic expression, more valid than any sworn statement.

   Surname wordplay—the painful fragmenting of de Vere's identity made manifest—appears everywhere in the canon. I want to remind the members attending the Shakespeare Authorship Conference of some significant examples on the surnames de Vere, Oxford, Seymour, and Tudor. Let me begin by noting that our author was not the only writer of the period who referred to Shakespeare's 'hidden' identity in clever wordplay. The prime example is, of course, the famous poem *To the memory of my beloved, The Author* *Mr. William Shakespeare* , by Ben: Ionson. Jonson, a great Latinist, evidently wanted to prove himself equal to the task of eulogizing 'Shakespeare'—though he durst not presume to do so for Edward de Vere; he frames the poem like this *Note: Underlined words are 'Emergent' or words of special interest as well as 'surname wordplay'* :

Ex. 1a   **To draw no envy (Shakespeare) on thy name,**
          Am I thus ample to thy Booke, and Fame;
          .....
          Shine forth, thou Starre of Poets, and with rage,
          Or influence, chide, or cheere the drooping Stage;
          Which, since thy flight from hence, hath mourn'd like night,
          And despaires <u>day</u>, but for thy <u>Volumes</u> <u>light</u>.

I want to focus on the wordplay in the last line, because it *'neatly'* affects the others:

Parse   **[And despaires** (*wordplay* <u>dis</u>: 'expressing negation'; alt.: 'denoting separation' + <u>pairs</u>: 'a set of two things used together or regarded as a unit') **day** (*wordplay* <u>de</u>: 'denoting formation from')**, but** ('otherwise than'*) **for** ('before'; 'toward, to, on the way to'*) **thy Volumes** (*Latin volumen 'a roll'*, *from volvere* 'to roll': here playing on '[a] turn of Vere', i.e. [a] variant of <u>Truth</u> = <u>Illumination</u>, <u>Light</u>, etc.) **light** ('capacity to give 'illumination of mind'*)**.]**

Interpret. **~ And unpairs 'de', otherwise before your 'turn of Vere'—Light. ~**

   Hugh Holland, also prefacing the First Folio with a poem, plays on the de Vere name :

Ex. 1b   **Dry'de' is that veine, dry'd is the *Thespian* Spring,**
          Turn'd all to teares,   *Upon the Lines and Life of...William Shakespeare, l.5*

Interpret. **~ Dry <u>'de'</u> is that <u>vein</u>, dried is the** Thespian <u>Vere</u>, **~**
          ~ Turn'd <u>all</u> to <u>teares</u>, ~ *See notes on Hildegard von Bingen, devereshakespeare@wordpress.com,*
               the 'Ode to Green', p. 155, V&A ll. 393-538

Someone has bothered to count 1700 examples of the *ever*-ambiguous 'ever' in the Shakespeare canon; here's the use that first caught my eye :

Ex. 2a   **As proper men as ever trod upon neat's leather have gone upon my handiwork.**

Julius Caesar I i 24-26, (cobbler) **.**

Parse: **[As** ('in the same degree, of the same quality'*; equally) **proper** ('fine'*) **men as** ('equal to') **ever** (= E.Ver) **trod** (= shod, 'past participle **shoe**') **upon neat's** (neat: '*archaic* a bovine animal'; neat's = an Ox's) **leather** (skin) **have gone** (to walk about, appeared; alt.: 'no longer present, departed', 'to vanish, to come to an end'*) **upon my handiwork** ('work of the hand'* of a cobbler, i.e. sole-mending, *wordplay* soul-mending)**.]**

Or, as I understand it:

~ *Equally fine men, like to E.Ver, shod with Ox's skin, have vanished with my soul-mending.* ~

This is the *very* essence of polysemy; *such* ambiguity is elegant, *strangely* intended, and *O so* satisfying. The author was so taken with the game that he repeated his success:

Ex.2b **As proper a man as ever went on four legs cannot make him give ground** *Tempest ll ii 59-60* **.**

And again:

Ex. 2c **... , he's a present for any emperor that ever trod on neat's leather** *Tempest ll ii 68-9* .

And on and on. De Vere's concern is his 'loss of fair' in being "unkept", "for call you that keeping for a gentleman of [his] birth that differs not from the stalling of a ox?" *As You Like It l i 8-10* . Incidentally, the word <u>present</u> is used here precisely as derived from Latin—*praesentia*: 'being at hand', from *prae*: 'before' + *esse*: 'be'.

If 'ever' signifies E. Vere, then 'O' = Oxford is an obvious correlative. The use of a single letter to represent princes ('who must not be named') is derived from the Queen, Elizabeth **R**. *'O'* ['interjection expressive of pain, of surprise or of desire, or used to give the speech the character of earnestness'*; alt.: = Oxford; shorthand for an impassioned self address, self admonishment, or an address to Oxford by another] appears frequently as an indicator of specific Oxford-related subtext.

Ex. 3 <u>O</u>**, had thy mother borne so hard a mind,**
She had not brought thee forth, but died unkind. *Venus and Adonis 203*

We all agree with this much. Now let's move on to the scary part:

Ex. 4a **A summer's day will seem an hour but short,** *V&A 23*

I think there's Tu-<u>d'or</u> in *them thar* 'wills'... (you'll have to forgive me, I've been doing *but* this *too long*).

Interpret. ~ *A 'Vere de' will (otherwise) hem 'Seym' an <u>o u r</u> short,* ~

or : ~ *A 'Vere de' hereditament—'Seym', an <u>h o u r</u>, [except] short,* ~

or : ~ *A de Vere-Tudor inheritance, 'Seym', only an <u>o u r</u> short,* ~

This is a straightforward equation; the de Vere on the left of the 'will' equals the Seymour on the right.

How about this one? Is this example too 'low' for the exalted Shakespeare intellect?:

Ex 4b **Being proud, as females are, to see him woo her,** *V&A 309*

Don't 'bee sham'd'—I had to blink twice, too.

Interpret. ~ *[With] Princely want of modesty, as <u>R</u>egina [was] to Se-ym-ou-r,* ~

It's not just *Venus and Adonis* ! In *The Tempest* we find this jewel from Ariel's Song:

Ex. 4c **Sea nymphs hourly ring his knell:** *The Tempest l ii 403*

Interpret. ~ *[Syllables among] '<u>Sea nymphs hourly</u>' toll his death:* ~

or : ~ *[Syllables among] '<u>Sea nymphs hourly</u>' circle his nomination/proclamation:* ~

This is the last of five statements that must be 'fully fathomed' if you are to understand de Vere's / Seymour's, elegy-like riddle to Henry Stanley, Lord Strange, 4th Earl of Derby. For more on 'Ariel's Song', see my essay, p.153.

Now, perhaps, you'll concede the likelihood that Ben Jonson played successfully in the penultimate line of his *To the memory of my beloved*, quoted above:

Ex. 1b **Which, since thy flight from hence, hath <u>mourn'd</u> <u>like</u> night,**

Interpret. ~ *Which, since thy flight from hence, hath Seym[d] mour darkness,* ~ *Or some such foolery.*

Some examples of surname wordplay need hardly any explanation:

Ex. 5a **And now the happy <u>sea</u>-<u>son</u> <u>once</u> <u>more</u> fits** *V&A 326*

Ex. 5b **"<u>More</u> I could tell, but <u>more</u> I dare not <u>say</u>:**
The text is old, the <u>orator</u> <u>too</u> <u>green</u>.

Therefore, in sadness, now I <u>will</u> away;   *V&A 805-7*

Similarly:

Ex. 5c   **Have I, thy schoolmaster, made thee <u>more</u> profit**
Than other princes can, that have <u>more</u> <u>time</u>
For <u>vainer</u> <u>hours</u>, and <u>tutors</u> not <u>so</u> careful.   *The Tempest I ii 172-4*   *note: <u>vain</u> = apparent, <u>seem</u>ing.*
Interpret. ~ *For <u>Seem</u>-<u>R</u>-<u>ours</u>, and <u>Tudors</u> not <u>child</u> careful.* ~

Ex. 5d   **<u>Would</u> in thy palm dissolve, <u>or</u> <u>seem</u> to melt.**   *V&A 144*   *note: <u>would</u> = Woodstock, Plantagenet.*
Interpret. ~ *Plantagenet in thy palm dissolve, ore 'Seym' to melt.* ~   *Note: 'ore seam' and vain/vein of prev. ex.*

The final steps are now inevitable:

Ex. 6a   **"Vouchsafe, thou <u>wonder</u>, to alight thy steed,**
And rein his proud head to the saddlebow;   *V&A 13-14*

I am convinced that the 'wonder' is the Primo-Tudor; that is, de Vere is the One-d'or among Tu-d'or. He is asked to be so trusting as to 'rein'/submit his 'Will' to the saddlebow of 'Packhorse Cecil' and to the Master of the Horse, Robert Dudley.

A *delightful* play on the Vere name—and with sledgehammer subtlety—is found in *The Winter's Tale I ii 44-66* . Who can miss it? **Verily**, **Verily**, **Verily**, **Verily**, **Verily**—with a "**<u>verier wag o' th' two</u>**" for good measure.

That last... ~ *the <u>More</u> <u>Vere</u> intail <u>O</u> the <u>Tu</u>* ~ is of interest because of the single syllable that expresses the whole, i.e. <u>Tu</u>dor. This is but one example among hundreds. Keep a keen eye for each <u>more</u> <u>or</u> <u>see</u>, <u>ore</u> or <u>seem</u>, <u>same</u> or h<u>our</u>*(but short)*, <u>one</u> or <u>two</u>, <u>won</u> or <u>too</u>, <u>day</u> or <u>light</u>, etc.

Here's a *more* straightforward approach:

Ex. 6b   **Foul cankering rust the <u>hidden treasure</u> frets,**   *Note <u>fret</u>: 'to corrode, to eat or wear away'*.*
But <u>gold</u> that's put <u>to</u> use <u>more</u> <u>gold</u> begets."   *V&A 767-8*

How many golds in the *hidden treasure*? Two? And *so* you then have Two-d'or? No doubt! Look above at ll.765-6—<u>Or</u> theirs, <u>Or</u> butcher sire = <u>Golden</u> theirs, <u>Golden</u> butcher sire—Tud<u>or</u> indeed. Also note the two lines that preface the important stanzas ll.757-68:

Ex. 6c   **'What is thy body but a swallowing grave,**
<u>Seem</u>ing to bury that <u>posterity</u>...   *Note <u>posterity</u>: 'what <u>more</u> follows'.*

Perhaps the most elegant 'surname wordplay' is to be found in Sonnet 18:

Shall I compare thee to a '<u>Somers-de</u>'?   *Note: Somers = Summers, from Edward Seymour (Somerset)*
Thou art '<u>mour</u>' '<u>Lovely</u>' and '<u>mour</u>' 'in-<u>Tempest</u>-uous':
Rough <u>heirs</u> do shake *the darling scions of Mary*
And '<u>Somer's</u>' <u>estate</u> hath <u>All</u> '<u>Tu</u>', short a <u>da</u>[te]:   *Note: Tu + da, two + date — te (minus 2)*
Attainted '<u>Tu</u>' hot, the <u>eye</u> of heaven shines,
And often is his <u>d'or</u> complexion dimmed;
And the <u>Vere</u> 'right', from <u>right</u>, by <u>attainder</u> declines,
By chance, or Nature's changing course, [if] not amended:
But thy '<u>Ever</u> <u>Somer</u>' shall not fade
Nor lose possession of that <u>Right</u> thou own,
Nor shall death brag thou '<u>Veer</u>' in his protection
When in <u>E.Ver</u> lines to <u>Cecil</u> thou '<u>Rise</u>'.
<u>S</u>outhampton, <u>as</u> men can speak, 'Midas'*(Dudley)* can 'Seat'.   *Note: So + outhampton (long).*
<u>S</u>outhampton, this lives, and this animates thee.   *Sonnet XVIII*

Don't you see? This surname wordplay is precisely the method orthodox scholars **crow** about with Robert Greene's "**Upstart** /**Shake-scene**" quote. Greene's comment is ambiguous, but we may safely assume he is using wordplay in the same manner as Ben Jonson, and Hugh Holland as noted above in examples 1a and 1b. No one contests "Shake-scene" is a reference to Shake-speare. Now—whether the 'hide' wrapping "his tiger's heart" refers to 'skin' or 'disguise' (<u>hide</u>: 'a camouflaged shelter') remains uncertain. What is not uncertain, is that such wordplay is counted as significant evidence.

De Vere's quibbling on his 'verity' is so highly developed as to lose ambiguity; but, I believe few have looked to find the Sey/mour and Tu/dor 'variety' that is closely associated. It is repeated frequently, yet requires concentration. To students of poetry who are accustomed to fashionable metaphor, direct allusion by name fragments is unexpected; by design it is not obvious. Had it been obvious, it would not have gone unnoticed for so long.

From where I now stand, it appears there is remarkable internal consistency; a metonym or 'emergent' word that has particular meaning in one place, has related meaning in most if not all instances. I believe this can be proved by feeding each suspected example from throughout the plays and poems into a spreadsheet that notes probable meaning. This will give a solid basis for my supposition.

Clearly, we must allow many of the examples shown in this essay as evidence of de Vere's hand in Shakespeare. If we maintain a balance sheet, I predict few if any may be credited to Will of Stratford, but many hundreds are creditable to Vere, Seymour, and Tudor. In doing so we will have begun to establish the means to 'truly' read Shakespeare. We will have discovered his method—and we'll double our pleasure. No! The pleasure will grow exponentially. Unraveling his 'hidden treasure' for ourselves must be far more satisfying than being spoon-fed a baseless myth by *the recalcitrant* or *the blind*.

Vere, Seymour, Tudor self-referencing can become very sophisticated. Here is an example of his *unexampled* mastery of the syllogism from the mouthpiece of de Vere's 'twin' Polixenes [<u>Poly</u> *Greek polloi:* many + *Greek* <u>xenes</u>: 'altered characteristics in form, color, etc.', morphological variation]:

Ex. 7a   *Polixenes*   **We <u>were</u>, <u>fair</u> queen,**
          <u>Two</u> <u>lads</u> that thought there was <u>no</u> <u>more</u> behind
          But <u>such</u> a <u>day</u> <u>to</u>-<u>morrow</u> <u>as</u> <u>to</u>-<u>day</u>,
          And <u>to be</u> <u>boy</u> eternal.   *The Winter's Tale I ii 62-5*

Wow! Having fun! Let me draw on the '*ever*' growing glossary to fathom the writers intentions:

Interpret.   *~ We Vere (fair heir Queen)*
          Tu Bois, that thought there was nom [d']ore behind
          Otherwise the Seym, a de Tu-mour-O, the Seym Tu-de,
          And 'to be' Wood forever. ~   Note: Wood is evolved from French <u>Bois</u>, here indicating Woodstock/Plantagenet.

The interplay of English, French, Latin, and Greek is an artifact of languages de Vere and Elizabeth held in common.

Now we may test the predictive power of this surname wordplay. We ask, where the devil is the poet 'coming from' in the following passage:

Ex. 8a   **Upon his hurt she looks <u>so</u> steadfastly,**
          That her sight dazzling, makes the wound <u>seem</u> three,
          And then she reprehends her mangling <u>eye</u>,
          That makes <u>more</u> gashes where no breach should <u>be</u>:
              His face <u>seems</u> <u>twain</u>, <u>each</u> se<u>ver</u>al limb <u>is</u> doubled,
              For oft the <u>eye</u> mistakes, the brain <u>being</u> troubled. *Note: wordplay* **troubled** *= trebled   V&A 1063-68*

Did you find some basis for this passage in Ovid? No, I didn't either. This is a case of dual—or is it treble? —identity:

Ex. 8b   **My tongue cannot express my <u>grief</u> for <u>one</u>,**
          And yet (quoth she) <u>be</u>hold <u>two</u> Adons dead,   *V&A 1069-70*

Venus is confused. I'm confused. Does Adonis '<u>Seym</u>' three, or does he '<u>Seym</u>' twain... shall we concede that he does '<u>Seym</u>-mour', and call it good?

So, where in Shakespeare does all this wordplay come together? Everywhere!

Interpret. ~ Enter three 'Which Is'. ~   *Or,* *~ Enter three 'Which R'. ~*
          ~ When shall we three meet againe?
          In Jove, Enlightning, golden Reign?   Or, *In Vere, Somers-day, Tudor?*
          When the casting-off of Burleigh's done.
          When the Battle's lost, and One
          That will be heir, the placement of Son. ~   *Macbeth I i 1-5*