

Alexander Waugh joins the De Vere Society



Alexander Waugh has recently been elected a life member of the De Vere Society. His interest in the

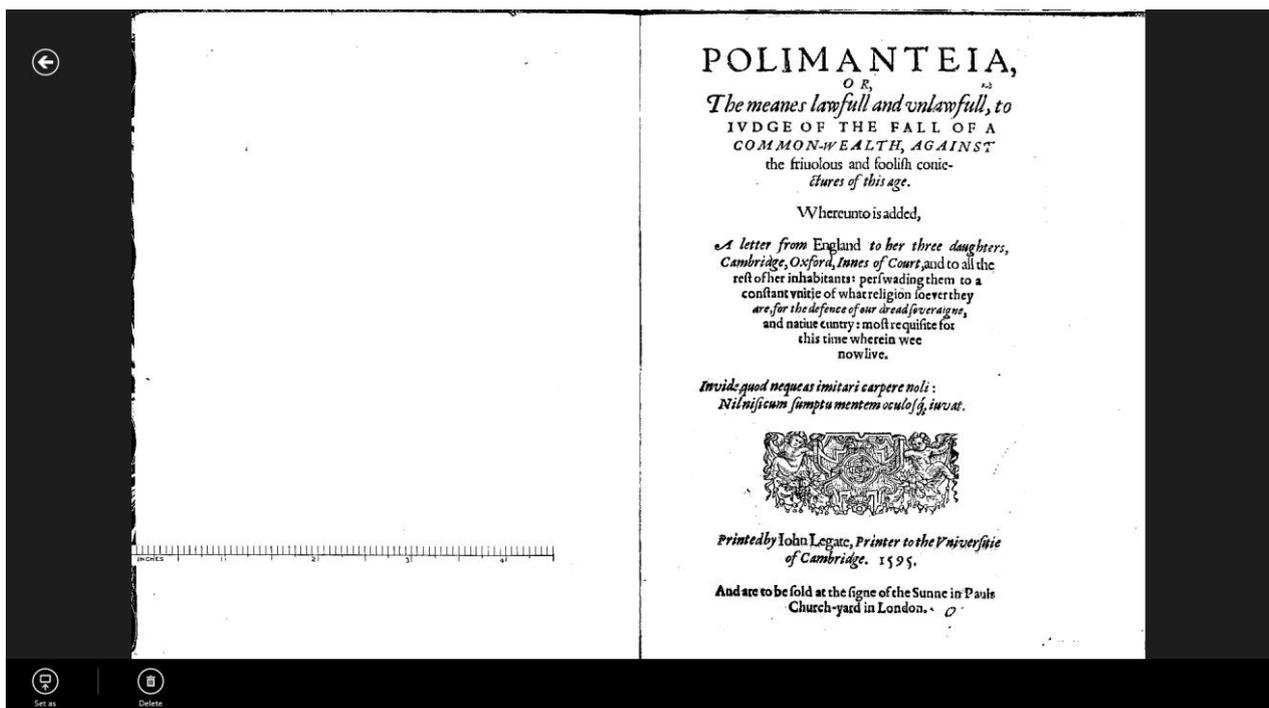
Authorship Question stretches back for more than a decade and he was co-editor of *Shakespeare Beyond Doubt?* published earlier this year. Alexander is a book reviewer and author of several critically acclaimed works including *The House of Wittgenstein* (2008). He has presented documentaries on BBC tv, was editor and founder of the Travelman Short Story series and composed the music for the award-winning *Bon Voyage!* He is presently editing the complete works of his grand-father Evelyn Waugh for OUP - in 42 volumes!

This exclusive extract from *Shakespeare's Bastard*, has been especially adapted for the De Vere Society Newsletter by the author. The book will be published by Bloomsbury in 2014.

A Secret Revealed

William Covell and his Polimanteia (1595)

One of the earliest allusions to Shakespeare can be found in a book called *Polimanteia* printed by John Legate and published by the University of Cambridge in 1595. A close examination of the text, especially by comparing the reference to Shakespeare in the margin with the main text, reveals an overlooked juxtaposition with Oxford.



The title of the book, *Polimanteia*, was formed by connecting the Greek words *πολις* ('city' or 'country') and *μαντεια* ('divinations') which might be intended to mean something like: 'predicting the future of the State,' but is perhaps best understood by its sub-title: *The meanes lawfull and unlawfull, to judge of the fall of a common-wealth against the frivolous and foolish conjectures of this age. Whereunto is added, a letter from England to her three daughters, Cambridge, Oxford, Innes of Court, and to all the rest of her inhabitants: perswading them to a constant unitie of what religion soever they are, for the defence of our dread soveraigne, and natine cuntry: most requisite for this time wherein wee now live.* (1595 STC 5884).

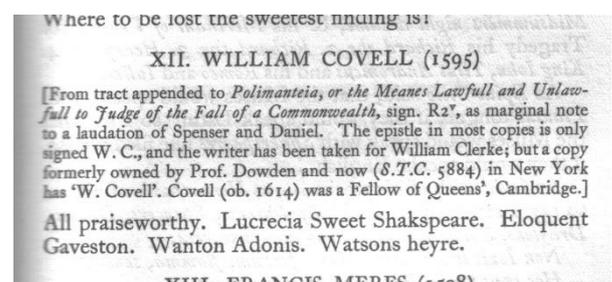
Most commentators cite the book's Shakespeare allusion as belonging to *Polimanteia*, which is only partially correct for, strictly speaking, the reference appears at the end of an unrelated addendum entitled 'A letter from England to her three daughters, Cambridge, Oxford, Innes of Court,' in which 'England' tries to persuade the two universities and the Inns of Court to get along with one another, to revere their own and each other's histories and to honour their distinguished alumni.

The title page bears no author's name and the initials 'W.C.' subscribed to the dedication of one surviving copy, led some Shakespeareans of the 19th Century to assume it to be the work of one William Clerke, an obscure Cambridge scholar. Since then another copy has surfaced with the dedication signed in full by William Covell, who was a writer, polemical clergyman and undergraduate at Cambridge from 1581-1585, who received his MA in 1588 and served as a Fellow of Queens' College, Cambridge from 1589 - 1599. Of particular interest is Covell's dedication to Robert Devereux, Earl of Essex, which is signed 'your honour's in all duty most affectionate' and reveals a surprisingly close relationship with the great earl and fellow Cambridge alumnus:

And I (who though I must needs honour) yet usually with so deep affection am not devoted without cause, doe so in kindnesse and love (if that be not a word too presumptuous) passe over the full interest of my self to your dispose.'

Readers of *De Vere Society Newsletter* will not need reminding that Essex was an intimate friend of Henry Wriothesley, Earl of Southampton, to whom Shakespeare dedicated *Venus and Adonis* (1593) and *Lucrece* (1594), and that he (Essex) was – like Southampton and Edward de Vere, Earl of Oxford – brought up as a ward-of-court in the household of William Cecil, Lord Burghley. What may have been forgotten is that in 1595 Lord Burghley was Chancellor of Cambridge University, a position he retained until his death three years later, when he was succeeded by the Earl of Essex; and that Essex, was sufficiently influential in the governance of the university to have initiated and bestowed a profusion of honorary MAs at Cambridge in February 1595. It may therefore be said, without exaggeration, that the Cambridge University book *Polimanteia*, was published under the imprimatur of Lords Burghley and Essex, both of whom were intimately connected to Henry Wriothesley (Shakespeare's dedicatee) and to Edward de Vere, Earl of Oxford.

Now let us turn to the allusion that *Polimanteia* contains relating to Shakespeare. Edmund Chambers in his influential treasury of Shakespeare allusions renders it thus:



E. K. Chambers *William Shakespeare: Study of Facts and Problems* (1930) ii. 193

Which nonsense, he describes as a ‘marginal note to a laudation of Spenser and Daniel,’ offering no explanation as to what it may mean, as to why it is punctuated with five full stops, or as to how, if at all, this ‘marginal note’ is supposed to explain, support, amplify or in any way relate to the text beside which it is printed. In an uncharacteristic dereliction of duty Chambers fails even to supply that text, offering only the marginal note, which as we can see, is of itself quite meaningless. Here then is that text beside which the Shakespeare note is set:

And unlesse I erre, (a thing easie in such simplicitie) deluded by dearlie beloved *Delia*, and fortunatelie fortunate *Cleopatra*; *Oxford* thou maist extoll thy courte-deare-verse happie *Daniell*, whose sweet refined muse, in contracted shape, were sufficient amongst men, to gaine pardon of the sinne to Rosemond, pitie to distressed *Cleopatra*, and verliving praise to her loving *Delia*.

This, on the face of it, seems of little interest – no more than a convoluted exhortation by ‘England’ to her ‘daughter’ (the University of Oxford) urging her to extoll the virtues of the poet Samuel Daniel (a one-time Oxford undergraduate) with special reference

to his recently published works, *Delia* (a sonnet sequence), *The Complaint of Rosamond* (a 106-verse epyllion) and *Cleopatra* (a tragic play).

Given that only a handful of direct allusions to Shakespeare are known to exist from the 1590s, and given that the world has been turned up-side down in search of any information relating to the Bard, I find it very strange that no Shakespearean scholar has yet seen fit to investigate the meaning of this little note in relation to the text to which it is supposed to refer.

The main text of *Polimanteia* is supported by a great many marginal notes all of which have been precisely and meticulously placed by the printer so that there can be no doubt as to which line each is intended to reference.¹

Bearing in mind the acknowledged Elizabethan passion for double meanings, hidden messages and cryptic allusions, let us now look carefully at the 1595 page upon which this reference to Shakespeare was originally printed:

*All praise
worthy.
Lucrecia
Sweet Shakes-
peare.
Eloquent
Gaveston.*

*uine Spenser. And vnlesse I erre, (a thing
easie in such simplicitie) deluded by
dearlie beloued Delia, and fortunatelie
fortunate Cleopatra; Oxford thou maist
extoll thy courte-deare-verse happie
Daniell, whose sweete refined muse, in
contracted shape, were sufficient a-*

Sign R2^v W[illiam] C[ovell]: *Polimanteia*, 1595

¹ The phrase ‘Daniell, whose sweete refined muse, in contracted shape...’ is a simple puzzle whose solution reads: ‘Daniell who[m] we refuse.’ ‘Eloquent Gaveston’ in the adjoining note refers not, as some commentators have suggested, to Marlowe’s play *Edward II*, but to an anonymously published poem of 1594, *The*

Legend of Peirs Gaveston, which may have been rumoured as Daniel’s in 1595 but is now known to be by Michael Drayton (1594, STC 7214).

Here it can be seen at a glance that the note ‘All praise worthy’ refers to Daniel’s *Delia* (a collection of poems published in 1592) and not to Shakespeare’s *Lucrece*, as is so often stated.

The following note ‘Lucrecia Sweet Shak-speare’ is aligned to the phrase ‘*Oxford* thou maist extoll thy courte-deare-verse,’ with the words ‘Sweet Shak-speare’ specifically set to the line containing at its centre the unique contrivance, ‘courte-deare-verse’. Now I suspect that many readers are ahead of me and have already noticed, glaring out from this hyphenated epithet, a message (in correct letter and word order) spelling out ‘our de Vere’.²

Less easily spotted is the fact that the remaining letters of ‘courte-deare-verse’ (c-t-a-r-e-s-e) form an anagram of the words ‘a secret,’ so that the whole message on the line referenced by the note ‘Sweet Shakspeare’ is ‘our de Vere – a secret,’ with the word ‘*Oxford*’ carefully placed above ‘deare-verse’ and within the compass of the whole side-note, ‘Lucrecia Sweet Shakspeare,’ to allow a neat triangle of the words ‘Oxford de Vere.’

To the Oxfordian eye it is perfectly obvious what all this means, but how will the dyed-in-the-wool Stratfordian respond? ‘An unfortunate coincidence of names, letters, puns and marginal notes’? Hardly possible! Perhaps he will try to argue that Covell only *thought* he knew the secret of Shakespeare’s identity, but he was wrong. How then will he explain Covell’s brazen temerity in publishing with the Cambridge University, under the noses of Burghley (Chancellor of the University) and Essex, both of whom are intimately associated with de Vere and with Wriothesley, Shakespeare’s dedicatee? A natural supposition is that the release of Covell’s secret was in some way sanctioned by Essex and/or Burghley.

Before setting the Stratfordian hounds loose on all this let us quickly review those salient points which may be said to be entirely free from controversy:

1. That Edward de Vere, Earl of Oxford is listed by contemporary sources as a leading poet of his age who has ‘suffered his work to be published’ without his own name on it.
2. That Edward de Vere was an alumnus of Cambridge University, the Inns of Court and received his MA from Oxford University.
3. That in *Polimanteia* William Covell addresses the students of Oxford & Cambridge Universities and the Inns of Court, three institutions at which there is no record of any ‘William Shakspeare’ having ever studied.
4. That the self-contained marginal note ‘Lucrecia Sweet Shakspeare’ is precisely aligned to the main text sentence: ‘*Oxford* thou maist extoll thy courte-deare-verse’.
5. That the unique contrivance ‘courte-deare-verse’ which is precisely aligned to the marginal note ‘Sweet Shakspeare’ is an anagram of ‘our de Vere – a secret’
6. That the word ‘Oxford’ is placed directly above the words ‘deare-verse’.

The above six statements are indisputable, so with these in mind let us now hear from professors Alan Nelson, Jonathan Bate, Stanley Wells, James Shapiro, and all Stratfordian academics hitherto conspicuously silent on the relation between Covell’s marginal note and its neighbouring text – and ask them what they make of it and what better alternative explanations they can provide.

While they are busy figuring this out, let the rest of us rejoice in the discovery of a significant piece of contemporary corroborative evidence for the Oxfordian identity of ‘William Shakespeare.’

Alexander Waugh, Somerset

² The spelling ‘Shak-speare’ (missing the medial ‘e’) is here forced by lack of space. Adding an ‘e’ after the ‘k’ which contains a swash would collide the hyphen with the top of the ‘e’ of ‘extoll’

in the main text. No other significance should be attached to this spelling.