

All Is True

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I am writing in response to essays that appeared in the Spring 2012 issue of the *Shakespeare Oxford Society Newsletter*, “Southampton Poem Proves Oxford, Prince Tudor Hypothesis” by Hank Whittemore and ““To Queen Elizabeth’ Just a Plea for Mercy” by John Hamill. My intent is to show that both authors are partially correct, and partially in error, and that only by putting the interpretations of both together can one come to a complete, albeit shocking, understanding of the Earl of Oxford as William Shakespeare.

Whittemore’s essay failed, in my opinion, to shed very much light on Southampton’s new poem. Not that great light was needed: “To Queen Elizabeth” is a straightforward plea for clemency and has, apparently, no hidden or subtle implications on Southampton’s relationship with Elizabeth, filial or otherwise.

Whittemore used the invitation to review “To Queen Elizabeth” as an opportunity to revisit many of his cherished themes regarding his version of the Prince Tudor Theory, which I will here term the Prince Tudor One Theory (PT1). This claims that Henry Wriothesley, the Third Earl of Southampton, was the bastard son of Queen Elizabeth and Edward de Vere, and that he was born secretly circa June 1, 1574. He was raised thereafter in the home of the Second Earl of Southampton, who was also named Henry Wriothesley.¹

The Prince Tudor Two Theory holds that Edward de Vere was himself the son of Queen Elizabeth, born sometime in the summer of 1548. Elizabeth was fourteen years old, third in line for the throne of England.

The Prince Tudor Two Theory (PT2) holds that Edward de Vere was himself the son of Queen Elizabeth, born sometime in the summer of 1548. Elizabeth was fourteen years old, third in line for the throne of England and moving in and out of legitimacy and relative importance in the eyes of the English government.

A new denomination, PT3, would hold that both PT1 and PT2 are true and correct.

Prince Tudor One

In his many writings, Hank Whittemore has espoused the PT1 theory. As he has so often done in the past, in “Southampton Proves Oxford, Prince Tudor Hypothesis” he writes that Southampton’s poem to the Queen proves “that the central story of the Sonnets occurs during Southampton’s imprisonment and is related to the succession question, his liberation and Elizabeth’s funeral.”² According to Whittemore, using this theory as a Shakespearean Rosetta Stone answers many persistent questions about both the sonnets and the life of Edward de Vere:

Why did Oxford agree to bury his identity to save Southampton? Why did he value Southampton to such an extent? What made Southampton so special to him? Why would Oxford promise the younger earl “immortal life”? And why would Cecil and James want to gain Oxford’s permanent silence? The Prince Tudor Theory offers the only persuasive explanation.

Whittemore then dismisses the rival interpretation, advanced by John Hamill that the Sonnets tell of a bisexual triangle between Oxford, the Fair Youth and the Dark Lady. Whittemore writes:

Is the “shame” and “disgrace” suffered by Oxford in the Sonnets because of a homosexual affair with Southampton? Of course not—that explanation is a holdover from the transitional view, which has never had the slightest historical foundation.³

The phrase “transitional view” indicates an intermediate opinion about the meaning and significance of the Sonnets. It means that the reader now accepts that the Earl of Oxford, and not the Stratford man, was Shakespeare, but that he still believes that the Sonnets are the record of Shakespeare’s personal romantic life, instead of the dynastic considerations as espoused by Whittemore.

Homoerotic Sonnets

Now let’s quickly review the main points made by Hamill. He contends that the Sonnets are “homoerotic” and tell of de Vere’s love of a younger man, who may or may not be Henry Wriothesley, the third Earl of Southampton.

“That Southampton was the Fair Youth of the Sonnets is not the question here. Most scholars accept this proposition,” writes Hamill,⁴ though he does not say whether he accepts it. He uses an impressive array of scholarship to support the homosexual interpretation, noting Harold Bloom’s “The human endowment, Shakespeare keeps intimating, is bisexual.”⁵ He quotes Stephen Booth (from Bruce R. Smith’s *Homosexual Desire In Shakespeare’s England*) about “how charged these poems are—even the most idealistic ones—with sexual puns.”⁶

Hamill quotes Maurice Charnay:

The issues of the homoerotic in Shakespeare are hopelessly entwined in academic controversy. Everything seems to come back to the unanswerable question of Shakespeare’s own orientation.⁷

Hamill goes on to argue that Shakespeare scholars, even Oxfordians, are bending over backwards not to draw the logical implications of *The Sonnets*. “Paul Ramsay concedes that the clause ‘Thy self thou gav’st’ at 87.9, if said of a woman, ‘would certainly suggest consummation,’” Hamill writes. He then adds, “Why should the identical clause take another meaning if the recipient is a man?”⁸

Finally, Hamill notes that *The Sonnets* seem to describe situations and passions that are typical of obsessive romantic love relationships. “The author speaks

of emotions that typically affect the love sick," he writes. "Sleepless nights when the Poet's thoughts make a pilgrimage to the Beloved (Sonnets 21 and 61); mutual possession and shared identity (31, 36, 39 and 42); the Poet as slave to his friend's desire (57); yearning and frustration (87); being deceived (93); sexual dependency (75) and, again, marriage (93 and 116)." ⁹

Based on these insights, Hamill dismisses the Prince Tudor One Theory. "The sonnets, filled as they are with sexual puns that express bodily desire and reflect consummation, and which are replete with bitter sexual jealousy, do not reflect the language or emotions in which one would address one's own son," he writes. ¹⁰ He then goes on to more fully "crush the infamous thing":

All the evidence we have contradicts the Prince Tudor theory... ¹¹

No facts support the theory, that the Queen had a bastard, or if she did, that it was Henry Wriothesley, the Third Earl of Southampton, and that Oxford was the father... ¹²

There is not the slightest evidence that the Queen thought that Southampton was her child and possible heir. It is to the Prince Tudor Theory that the phrase 'comically absurd' is most aptly applied. ¹³

So we see, both of these fine scholars are themselves quite obsessed with their theories and totally dismissive of the rival theory. It is here that each of them is equally wrong.

But now, after nearly 200 years of scholarship, it can be easily demonstrated that the Third Earl of Southampton was Mr. W.H.

Before I can demonstrate the truth of that contention, I must first establish that Henry Wriothesley, Third Earl of Southampton, was the Fair Youth of *The Sonnets*. As mentioned above, Hamill does not expressly accept that Southampton was the Fair Youth, either in the essay currently under review or in his 2005 essay "The Dark Lady and Her Bastard: An Alternative Scenario." ¹⁴

But now, after nearly 200 years of scholarship, it can be easily demonstrated that the Third Earl of Southampton was Mr. W.H. First of all, there is the striking similarity in language and theme between the "Thou must breed" sections (especially lines 163–174) of *Venus and Adonis*, which was dedicated to Southampton, and the first seventeen sonnets, which were dedicated to "Mr. W.H." There is the fact that, at first blush, sonnets 1 through 126 seem to be addressed to a nobleman. For example, in Sonnet 69, the author criticizes the Fair Youth for his growing commonness: "Thou dost common grow." This would not be a devastating criticism if the addressee were already a commoner.

There is the fact that Southampton's motto, *Ung par Tout, Tout par Ung* (One For All, All For One) is woven, in different versions and permutations, throughout *The Sonnets*. There is the fact that the first seventeen urge a young man to marry and beget heirs who will continue both his house and "beauty's rose." We know that about 1590 Lord Burghley attempted to arrange a marriage between the Earl of Southampton and Elizabeth Vere, who was thought to have been both Burghley's granddaughter and Edward de Vere's daughter. We know that Wriothesley was said to have been uncommonly beautiful, with wonderfully expressive eyes and an almost feminine face; and we know that a portrait of the teen-aged Southampton exists which for centuries was thought to have been of a girl.

The Fair Youth, apparently, also had a strangely feminine beauty, for William Shakespeare writes in Sonnet 20:

A woman's face, with nature's own hand painted,
Hast thou, the master mistress of my passion.

We also know that Southampton took part in the Essex Rising of February 8, 1601; that the rebellion failed, and that Southampton was arrested and sentenced to life imprisonment in the Tower. He was released on April 10, 1603, quite strangely on what must have been nearly the first piece of official business undertaken by the new king, James I. Many scholars have linked Southampton's release from prison to Sonnet 107, the so-called dating sonnet. These few facts are sufficient to demonstrate that Southampton was the Fair Youth.

Now let's consider Hamill's statement that

No facts support the theory that the Queen had a bastard or, if she did, that it was Henry Wriothesley, the Third Earl of Southampton, and that Oxford was the father.

More than a dozen facts falsify this. In what follows, I will consider his claim to be in three parts: first, that there is nothing to support the idea that Elizabeth had borne a bastard, second, that no evidence exists that that bastard was Southampton, and third, that there is nothing to support the claim that the child's father was Edward de Vere.

Let's look at the first part of the claim. I would mention the Act of Treason of 1571, which states that

whosoever shall hereafter during the life of said sovereign lady (i.e., Queen Elizabeth), by any book or work printed or written, directly and expressly declare and affirm at any time before the same be by Act of Parliament of this realm established and affirmed, that any one particular person whosoever it be, is or ought to be the right heir and successor to the Queen's Majesty, that now is (whom God long preserve), *except the same be the natural issue of her Majesty's body*, . . . shall for the first offense suffer imprisonment for one whole year, and forfeit half his goods.¹⁵

When Parliament substituted the phrase *natural issue* for the previously operative phrase *legitimate issue*, which is found in the Act of Succession of 1547, it was tantamount to officially acknowledging that Elizabeth could give birth to children without benefit of wedlock. I would say that, since political bodies such as the English Parliament do not make allowances for immoral behavior unless under compulsion of reality, the Act of Treason of 1571 is proof that Parliament had accepted, by 1571, that Elizabeth had already given, or would soon give, birth to a bastard.

This claim is supported by an additional fact: the appointment of Robert Dudley, Earl of Leicester, as Lord Protector during Elizabeth's nearly fatal bout with smallpox in 1562. As Charles Beauclerk writes,

In her delirium, with her counselors crowded around her bed, she named Robert Dudley as lord protector, an office that would have made sense only if the heir to the throne were a minor—in which case Dudley might conceivably have been appointed to govern until the lad had reached his majority—or if Elizabeth intended to create a republic. If Elizabeth had died, the meaning of her extraordinary appointment would doubtless have been called into question; but, as she survived, no one, even today, seems to have thought to ask for whom Dudley was supposed to have been protector. After all, her heir under the will of her father, Katherine Grey, was alive and well, and with a healthy son of her own, Edward Seymour.¹⁶

These two facts support the claim that, by 1562, Elizabeth had given birth to a child out of wedlock.

The second leg of Hamill's challenge is that there are no facts that support the claim that Southampton was a royal bastard. Once again, it can be demonstrated that he is incorrect.

Thomas Dymoke

First, there is the establishment of Thomas Dymoke in the home of the second earl of Southampton from 1575 to the earl's death in 1581. Dymoke is a figure of some mystery. According to Elisabeth Sears, there are a number of "non-sequiturs" associated with him. He was a member of an honored family related distantly to Queen Elizabeth, and had been educated as a lawyer. He was nevertheless made a Gentleman of the Bedchamber of the disgraced second earl, in which capacity he strove to keep the Countess of Southampton from visiting one of the Wriothesley estates a few miles away. When the Countess persisted in visiting the proscribed estate, Dymoke "imprisoned her" and her husband completely broke with her. Then, although the Countess regarded Dymoke as "the beginner and continuer of the dissension between" herself and her estranged husband, after the second earl's death in 1581, Dymoke was made one of five executors of his will, for which he was handsomely provided.¹⁷ This is a great deal of power to arrogate to a valet. Why was Dymoke given such power, and who gave it to him?

While these non-sequiturs do not conclusively demonstrate that Dymoke had been inserted by the Queen into the Wriothsesley household and had been charged with raising and protecting the Queen's child, they are consistent with that theory.

There is the Tower Portrait of Henry Wriothsesley, which he commissioned after he had been released from the Tower in 1603. In that portrait, not only is Wriothsesley's left arm in a sling, but the impresa in the upper right hand corner of the painting contains four swans, which are swimming in rough waters in front of the Tower. Elisabeth Sears writes that, since the swan is a royal bird, the impresa is symbolically stating that the subject of the painting is "royalty swimming in turbulent waters" or is "royalty in serious trouble."¹⁸

There is the repeated use in *The Sonnets* of imagery and language suggesting that the subject of the poems, the Fair Youth, was somehow royal. This piece of evidence was first educed by G. Wilson Knight in *The Sovereign Flower* (1958) and in his *The Mutual Flame* (1962) and then by Leslie Hotson in his book *Mr. W.H.* (1965). It has been recapitulated by Whittemore in *The Monument* and by Kathleen Chiljan in *Shakespeare Suppressed*.

It remains to be demonstrated that Hamill's third assertion, that there is no evidence to support the claim that Edward de Vere was Wriothsesley's father, is also false. In fact, there is a great deal of evidence to support this claim.

sify each other. By direct address, by varied metaphor, by multifarious allusion, the description of the Friend communicated is always one: monarch, sovereign prince, king...The harping on the same string is so insistent as to make one ask why it has not arrested attention. No doubt everyone has regarded this king sense as formal hyperbole and nothing more. Any literal meaning looks quite incredible—a rank impossibility."²⁰

Notice that Hotson writes that, in his view, "Any literal meaning *looks* quite incredible." He doesn't say that it *is* quite incredible. Perhaps unconsciously, Hotson is saying that there seems to be something more, something mysterious, in Shakespeare's repeated, varied and obsessive use of royal imagery in *The Sonnets*. He appears to be leaving the door open to a deeper revelation, a revelation that, because he was a Stratfordian, he was debarred from receiving.

These three facts, then (Dymoke, the Tower Portrait and the royal imagery in *The Sonnets*) support the contention that Henry Wriothsesley was royal. For him to have been royal, he must have been the bastard son of Queen Elizabeth.

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Although the Oxfordian Hamill dismisses this repeated usage as "a common lover's devotion"¹⁹, the Stratfordian Hotson sees it as "intrinsic," "insistent" and, it is fair to say, enigmatic.

"Clearly these consenting terms... cannot be dismissed as scattered surface ornament," Hotson writes. "They are intrinsic. What is more, they inten-

also false. In fact, there is a great deal of evidence to support this claim. First of all, we know that de Vere and Elizabeth were lovers. This is demonstrated by the existence of three letters, taken collectively. The first letter was written by English poet Edward Dyer to Sir Christopher Hatton in October 1572. In it, Dyer advises Hatton on how to behave in order to defeat a rival for the Queen's affections:

But the best and soundest way in mine opinion is, to put on another mind: to use your suits towards Her Majesty in words, behavior and deeds; to acknowledge your duty, declaring the reverence which in heart you bear, and never seem deeply to condemn her frailties, but rather joyfully to commend such things as should be in her, as though they were in her indeed; hating my Lord of Ctm in the Queen's understanding for affection's sake, and blaming him openly for seeking the Queen's favor. For though in the beginning when her Majesty sought you (after her good manner), she did bear with rugged dealing of yours, until she had what she fancied, yet now, after satiety and fullness, it will rather hurt than help you; whereas, behaving yourself as I said before, your place shall keep you in worship, your presence in favor, your followers will stand to you, at the least you shall have no bold enemies, and you shall dwell in the ways to take all advantages wisely, and honestly to serve your turn at times. ..."²¹

In the passage above, the clause, "until she had what she fancied, yet now, after satiety and fullness" clearly indicates that Elizabeth had had sexual intercourse with Hatton by October 1572.

The second letter, from Gilbert Talbot and written in May of 1573, indicates that just half a year after Dyer had written his letter to Hatton, de Vere was now Elizabeth's favorite. Speaking of Edward de Vere, Talbot writes that "The Queen's Majesty delighteth more in his personage and his dancing and his valientness than any other."²²

The third letter is from Hatton himself. It was written to Queen Elizabeth from Spa in Belgium in June of 1573, where Hatton had gone to recover from an illness. From the letter, we may suppose that Elizabeth had sent Hatton a plant as a gift. "God bless you for ever," Hatton writes, "the branch of the sweetest bush I will wear and bear to my life's end. God witness that I feign not. It is a gracious favor most dear and welcome unto me: reserve it to the Sheep, he hath no tooth to bite, where the Boar's tusk may both raze and tear."²³

"The Sheep" was one of Elizabeth's pet names for Hatton; Edward de Vere's heraldic animal was the boar. From these three letters, then, we may conclude that the Earl of Oxford was Hatton's rival for Elizabeth's favors and that he had bested him, an outcome that had perhaps contributed to Hatton's illness of 1573. Because consummation had occurred in the relationship between Hatton and Elizabeth, we can infer that it also had occurred in the relationship between Elizabeth and de Vere. Therefore, the existence of these three letters supports the contention that de Vere and Elizabeth were lovers.

Next, a detailed account of Elizabeth's whereabouts and actions indicates that she was virtually incommunicado from March to mid-June of 1574, that she was planning to spend six days at Edward de Vere's estate, Havering-on-the-Bower, in late May, but apparently did not go there, but that she did spend the night of May 30, 1574, at the old Merton Priory in Surrey.²⁴ While this unusual pattern of behavior does not conclusively prove that Elizabeth gave birth to a child then, it is consistent with that theory.

The most powerful proof of Southampton's filiality to de Vere and Elizabeth are the sonnets themselves. As already mentioned, the first seventeen sonnets urge a young man, a Fair Youth, to marry and beget children. As C.S. Lewis has written, "What man in the whole world, except a father or a potential father-in-law, cares whether any other man gets married?"²⁵

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In de Vere's case, Lewis's quote leaves the matter in doubt, because it could be argued that de Vere was both Southampton's father and his potential father-in-law, since those first seventeen sonnets were likely written while Burghley was trying to arrange a marriage between Southampton and Elizabeth Vere.

However, other passages in *The Sonnets* suggest that de Vere was Southampton's father, not merely his prospective father-in-law. There is this from Sonnet 10.

"Make thee another self for love of me. "

There are these lines from Sonnet 13:

Dear my love, you know
You had a father; let your son say so.

And Sonnet 37:

As a decrepit father takes delight
To see his active child do deeds of youth,

There is the totality of Sonnet 33, which suggests that the Poet's sun (son) has been taken from him:

Even so my sun one early morn did shine
With all triumphant splendor on my brow;
But out, alack, he was but one hour mine,
The region cloud hath masked him from me now.

In this reading, “the region cloud” suggests “the reginal cloud” or “the queenly power.”

Then there are the piquant lines by Thomas Nashe from the dedication to his 1593 poem, *The Choosing of Valentines*, which was dedicated to “Lord S.a.”, who is quite clearly the Third Earl of Southampton. The lines are:

Pardon, sweet flower of matchless poetry,
And fairest bud that red rose ever bore...

Using Hamill’s argument, that the frequent rose imagery in *The Sonnets* is nothing more than a pun or an echo of Wriothesley’s name, (i.e., Rosely), we can see that these two seemingly innocent lines confirm the hypothesis under consideration. For if Southampton was a “sweet flower of matchless poetry”, then he was the little purple flower in *Venus and Adonis*; if he was the little purple flower then he was the subject of *Shakespeare’s Sonnets*; if he was the “fairest bud,” then he was the son of Queen Elizabeth, and the line “fairest bud that red rose ever bore” would mean “the most royal child that the Queen had yet given birth to, which (by the way) was fathered by Edward de Vere.”

There is the revelation at the end of *Venus and Adonis*, where Venus tells the little purple flower that dwelling in her bosom, next to her heart, shall be its fate, as it was Adonis’s.

Here was thy father’s bed, here in my breast,
Thou art next of blood, and ‘tis thy right.—

—*Venus and Adonis*, 1183-4

This statement of the goddess makes little logical sense. Since the Greek gods were immortal, they couldn’t pass their godhead or their Olympian status down to their children. Therefore, in line 1184, Shakespeare is switching from the realm of the Greek gods and goddesses to the realm of European monarchy. He was saying in poetic code that a royal line proceeded from Venus, through her son Adonis, to their son, the little purple flower. Here I would like to point out that I understand that, according to classical mythology, Adonis was not Venus’s son. He was the son of Myrrha and the fruit of her incestuous copulation with her father, Cinyras. However, when Venus tells the little flower, after Adonis has died, that he now is “next of blood,” Shakespeare is altering the context of the poem, shifting from the realm of classical mythology to the real world. The fact that the little flower becomes “next of blood” after the death of Adonis, means that Adonis was “next of blood” while he was alive. Because Venus is the only goddess in the poem, that must mean then that Adonis is Venus’s son, at least in Shakespeare’s version of the myth. Then, once we have accepted that the royal imagery that suffuses *The Sonnets* indicates a real situation, we can see that Venus, in the poem, represents Elizabeth, that Adonis was Shakespeare, in fact, Edward de Vere, and that the lit-

tle purple flower, whose cropped stalk weeps “green-drooping sap” (Vere-dripping blood) was Henry Wriothesley, the Third Earl of Southampton, to whom the poem was dedicated. *Venus and Adonis*, therefore, supports the theory that Edward de Vere was the father of Henry Wriothesley.

Finally, there is the fact that Southampton was arrested on June 24, 1604.²⁶ brought to the Tower for questioning, his estate was ransacked, his papers gone through. It very much appears as if King James, who had released Southampton from the Tower the year before on what would have been nearly his first act king, had suddenly lost his trust in Southampton and now feared that he was planning to lead an insurrection against him. Of course the date, June 24, 1604, is the day that Edward de Vere died.

This fact demonstrates that Edward de Vere was the natural issue referred to in the Act of Treason of 1571 (i.e., the Queen’s natural issue); that it was he, therefore, who would have been protected by the appointment of Robert Dudley as lord protector in 1562; and that he was the father of Southampton, for it was his death that excited King James’s paranoia, for with it, Southampton then became the “next of blood,” and the English government acted on the same day.

This then is my argument against Hamill. He has claimed many times that “No facts support the theory that the Queen had a bastard, or, if she did, that it was Henry Wriothesley, Third Earl of Southampton, and that Oxford was the father,” and yet I have produced seventeen, from literature and from the historical record, that do exactly that. Hamill’s assertion, then, is false; therefore, the Prince Tudor Theory cannot be dismissed for lack of supporting evidence.

But what then of Hamill’s favored theory, the homosexual interpretation, which is so scornfully dismissed by Whittemore? This view of *The Sonnets* needs far less sleuthing with which to adduce support than does the Prince Tudor interpretation; indeed, it is self-evident. *The Sonnets* abound with clear statements that the Poet loves the Fair Youth that he finds him beautiful, and that sexual congress between the two men has occurred.

Shakespeare says that the Fair Youth’s eyes are so beautiful as to impart poetry into the souls of philosophers: they “have added feathers to the learned’s wings” (Sonnet 78); his face is so lovely that it “overgoes my blunt invention quite” (Sonnet 103); that he is more beautiful than Adonis and as beautiful as Helen of Troy (Sonnet 53); that he is so lovely that the Poet fears that readers in

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the future, who have not seen the Youth in his prime, will not believe he could have been so beautiful (Sonnet 17). As John Hamill has pointed out, the Poet acknowledges that the Youth has given himself to the Poet in Sonnet 87 ("Thyself thou gav'st, thy own worth then not knowing"). In Sonnet 52 the Poet again suggests that sexual congress has occurred. As the Poet describes it, their union is a rare pleasure, like that of a wealthy man viewing his riches.

So am I as the rich, whose blessed key
Can bring him to his sweet up-locked treasure,
The which he will not every hour survey,
For blunting the fine point of seldom pleasure.

That this pleasure is sexual is made clear:

Blessed are you whose worthiness gives scope,
Being had, to triumph, being lacked, to hope.

That the relationship between the two men was physical is made clear by the way that the sonnets meditate ceaselessly on the dark passions of the heart that arise when the soul meets the storm of reality. The sonnets tell of the Poet's jealousy (sonnets 61, 35), of his struggle not to be jealous (Sonnet 58), of his nagging fears that the Youth will one day cease to love him (Sonnet 49), that the Youth will leave him (sonnets 64, 89, 90, 91) and that the Youth will grow old and lose his beauty (sonnets 2, 3, 12, 15, 63, 104). Only a real, physical love relationship, rooted in reality and consummated in bed, could have provided the creative impetus for such a relentless exploration of passion.

As John Hamill noted in "To Queen Elizabeth' Just a Plea For Mercy," this view of *The Sonnets* has been endorsed by a phalanx of scholars, including "Berryman, Bloom, Charney, Garber, Giroux, Holland, Pequiney, Sams, Sobran, Sinfield, Bruce R. Smith, Waugaman, and Stanley Wells, among others."²⁷ In view of the preponderance of French-surnamed scholars who have endorsed this view, and with a tongue-in-cheek nod to that old cross-Channel argument over whether syphilis was The French Disease or *La Maladie Anglaise*, I will refer to the theory that *Shakespeare's Sonnets* speaks of a homosexual passion as The French Theory.

The French Theory

So let me now evaluate the theoretical situation. We have two mutually exclusive theories on how to interpret *The Sonnets*: the Prince Tudor One Theory and the French Theory. Both have much to recommend them. The Prince Tudor One interpretation is supported by documented facts and reasonable inferences from the lives of Queen Elizabeth, Edward de Vere and Henry Wriothesley, as well as by the works of William Shakespeare, who, as we know, was Edward de Vere. However, the French Theory is supported by *The Sonnets* themselves, which

plainly speak of a deeply joyous and painful love between an older man and a younger man from the nobility, who has been identified as Henry Wriothesley, the Third Earl of Southampton.

Moreover, both theories have their partisans, intelligent men and women who cumulatively have spent more than sixty years disparaging and unsuccessfully trying to annihilate the opposing theory.

For myself, in thinking about both these theories, I've been struck at how each theory, taken singly, is deficient and seems to give a one-dimensional view of *The Sonnets*. For example, when one views *The Sonnets* through the lens of the Prince Tudor One Theory's greatest exponent, Hank Whittemore, one is forced to accept that Shakespeare wrote his sonnets in code. In Whittemore's book *The Monument*, Whittemore offers a five-page glossary which translates 208 key terms used in *The Sonnets* into their hidden, but allegedly true, meanings.²⁸

As a result, when one plugs in the real meanings of these key phrases, one concludes that Shakespeare was indeed obsessed, not with Fair Youth but with the succession. If one happens to subscribe to the Prince Tudor One Theory, that is a satisfying thought, until one recognizes that it means that the great poetry of *The Sonnets* could not be sincere, or true, poetry, but that, according to Whittemore, *The Sonnets* are a cover-up, a supernaturally clever, artificially beautiful cipher meant to conceal an entirely different message from what the poems seem to be saying.

For example, look at the passage from Sonnet 52 quoted earlier:

So am I as the rich, whose blessed key
Can bring him to his sweet, up-locked treasure,
The which he will not every hour survey,
For blunting the fine point of a seldom pleasure.

Whittemore translates the meaning of these lines as follows:

Therefore I'm like a king, whose royal key
Can bring him to his royal imprisoned son,
With whom he will not spend each hour
For fear of spoiling his royal pleasure.²⁹

Note that here, the seldom pleasure, which was the rich man's, with whom the Poet identifies, now becomes the royal pleasure of the Fair Youth. The sexual connotation is lost; the quatrain becomes safe.

Here, once again, is Shakespeare's racy couplet from Sonnet 52:

Blessed are you, whose worthiness gives scope,
Being had, to triumph, being lacked, to hope.

And here is how Whittemore renders its "real" meaning:

Royal blooded are you! Your royalty is so free
That having you is triumph, lacking you, a hope.³⁰

When I step for a moment into Whittemore's Prince Tudor One perspective, I cannot understand how the Poet can "have" the Youth if he is visiting him in prison. Not being able to understand how de Vere could have had Southampton during his prison visits, or how he could be "having" him, means that I don't understand how doing so—whatever that might mean—could in any way be considered a triumph. In addition, if, out of desperation, I suppose that "having you" means "knowing that you're alive," then, "lacking you" must mean "imagining that you were dead," which, Whittemore tells us, the Poet describes as "a hope." So this means somehow that the Poet, whom we imagine loves the Fair Youth, hopes to see him dead. So Shakespeare's fine and succinct couplet, as rendered by Whittemore, becomes nonsense. This is a good sign that Whittemore's rendering of the Prince Tudor One Theory is at least partially wrong.

Here is the second couplet of Sonnet 103, in which Shakespeare laments the Fair Youth's inenarrable beauty.

Oh blame me not if I no more can write!
Look in your glass and there appears a face
That over-goes my blunt invention quite,
Dulling my lines and doing me disgrace.

This is rendered by Whittemore:

O don't blame me if I can no longer write!
Look in your mirror and see your royal presence
That transcends my invention for these sonnets,
Emptying its lines of your royalty to my disgrace.³¹

Oddly, Shakespeare's blunt invention didn't seem to have much trouble writing about royalty in *Richard II*, *Richard III*, *Hamlet*, *King Lear*, *1 Henry IV*, *2 Henry IV*, *Henry V*, in the three parts of *Henry VI*, and in many other of his plays. What possible reason could explain why the cat got his tongue here in *The Sonnets*, which everyone admits is his most personal and intimate work?

Finally, the third quatrain of Sonnet 73.

In me thou see'st the glowing of such fire
That on the ashes of his youth doth lie,
As the death-bed whereon it must expire,
Consumed with that which it was nourished by.

Here is Whittemore's translation:

In me you see the dying embers of your royalty,
 Lying on the ashes of your youth.
 As the death bed upon which I must expire,
 Destroyed by what had given me life and hope.³²

This is where I must part company with the Prince Tudor One Theory. I cannot accept that these sonnets, as beautiful and as searing as they are, are about any other subject than what they seem to be about. Even if I am willing to grant that some do refer to Southampton's plight as an unacknowledged royal bastard who has been sentenced to a life sentence in the Tower (Sonnet 27) or who has just been released (Sonnet 107), I cannot accept that Shakespeare's true-fied lines are always and everywhere intended to dupe us as to their real meaning. I cannot accept that the jealousy that Shakespeare so accurately describes, that the second-guessing of himself and the rationalizing of Southampton's waywardness that he so obsessively indulges in, are in fact ciphers for thoughts and emotions that the poet cannot bring himself to clearly express.

After all, he was Shakespeare: Edward de Vere. All his life he walked the tightrope between saying too little and saying too much, so much so that he could skewer his father-in-law as Polonius and even expose the sexual and ethical lapses of his mother, Queen Elizabeth, in *Hamlet*. He was afraid of nothing except death and I think he even saw himself, somehow, as the embodiment of the truth. He knew that his poems to the Earl of Southampton would not see the light of day during his life or during the life of Henry Wriothesley. (That they were published in 1609, during the life of the earl, must surely have been a lapse.) De Vere knew that in writing *The Sonnets* he was writing for futurity. So why would he have pulled his punches and have written, in this his most intimate work, a work in which, as the author, he was free from the necessity of having to please the theatre-going public, of his nagging sorrow that the House of Tudor was passing away in what Whittemore would have us accept was a homosexual cipher? I cannot conceive that Shakespeare could have written so beautifully unless he really lived the experiences that he has shared with us, and, expressed obversely, I cannot conceive that he could have made *The Sonnets* so beautiful and so succinct if in each of the poems he was trying to say something other than what he said. In other words, he wouldn't have written and he couldn't have written *The Sonnets* as a cover for what he really wanted to tell us. Therefore I think that the Prince Tudor

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One Theory, at least as Whittemore has applied it as a key to understanding *The Sonnets*, is incorrect.

Richard Nixon

But on the other hand the French Theory can only be partially correct as well. For when one embraces it as the single formula that illuminates and explains *The Sonnets*, one is forced to ignore the entire Prince Tudor underbelly that has made the poems shimmer unreachably in the world's imagination for the past 400 years. The French Theory reader will have to ignore or explain away Shakespeare's insistence that the Fair Youth is royal. He will have to sit in slack-jawed silence when asked why one man would tell another, whom he currently loves as a son and is about to love as a lover, "Make thee another self for love of me," as Shakespeare does in Sonnet 10. He will have to become another Richard Nixon and deny, deny, deny that there is some obscure but persistent relationship between the Youth and those two inscrutable forces, Beauty and Truth, buried but half visible in the poems.

For example, in Sonnet 105, where Shakespeare writes—

Fair and kind and true is all my argument,
 Fair and kind and true, varying to other words;
 And in this change is my invention spent,
 Three themes in one, which wonderous scope affords.
 Fair and kind and true have often lived alone,
 Which three, till now, never kept seat in one.

—Oxfordians know that Edward de Vere was the author and that his name meant "true." We can deduce quite easily that "kind" means "child" and, if we have read Hank Whittemore, we understand that Beauty and Fair are code words for Queen Elizabeth.

Accepting just the foundation of PT1 theory enables us to understand that Shakespeare is here expressing his desire that Elizabeth acknowledge Wriothesley, and thereby perpetuate the Tudor dynasty. But if one rejects PT1 and chooses to rely solely on the French Theory, then one must shrug off the passage above as just an unimaginative description of some of the Fair Youth's better qualities. And as for the couplet, the honest reader would have to regard it as one of Shakespeare's biggest mistakes, since he apparently is asking us to accept that, until the birth of Henry Wriothesley, there never was a human being who was good looking, kind and honest.

One must also shake one's head in helpless nescience at Sonnet 67, in which Shakespeare writes:

Why should false painting imitate his cheek
 And steal dead seeing of his living hue?
 Why should poor beauty indirectly seek

Roses of shadow, since his rose is true?

The enthusiast for the French Theory perhaps might wonder how a rose could be true, or why beauty would be seeking, indirectly, roses of shadow. But if he did wonder, it seems to me that the best he could come up with would be that it was some sort of poetic elevator music that had nothing to do with anything. However, the person who has read and assimilated Whittemore would understand that Beauty (Elizabeth) has been seeking to perpetuate the Tudor Dynasty through Essex (Shadow) or perhaps through one of her other children, but that the Poet, de Vere, is saying that his son is the best, since his Rose is True, that is, he is a true child, a Vere child. If one were to accept the Prince Tudor Two theory, one would understand in addition that the Poet is saying that Wriothsesley's claim to the crown is the strongest, since de Vere was Elizabeth's eldest child, and their son would have first claims to the throne by the rules of primogeniture. These insights, and many others that shimmer into consciousness under the Prince Tudor lens, will of necessity be lost on those who limit their understanding of *The Sonnets* to the French Theory.

All Is True

So we see, finally, that neither theory is satisfactory alone. Yet, at the same time, neither theory can be totally dismissed. Each theory claims half of a world. Within that world it is solid and bright and seems, almost, to explain everything, except that it is constantly being gnawed upon by the other theory. Each theory can only assert itself by denying the other theory, which it cannot successfully do because in both cases the other theory is correct. As with the Copenhagen Interpretation of quantum physics, a certain complementarity here applies. Both theories are partially correct; each is the complement of the other. In other words, to use the alternative title of *The Famous History of the Life of King Henry VIII*, "All Is True."

Edward de Vere, the eldest royal bastard son of Queen Elizabeth I, conceived a physical passion for his son, Henry Wriothsesley, who was born of the same woman as he was. Together, the two men consummated their passion and sustained it for some time. It is a horrifying solution but it must be true. *Shakespeare's Sonnets* expresses the complex love of a supreme genius, a genius who, as we know, was an iconoclastic rebel of the first water, for his beautiful, royal, bisexual, liberal, valiant, doomed, unacknowledged bastard son. It was a father's love, a vassal's love, a poet's love, a homosexual love and, I am sorry to say, an incestuous love. However unsavory it may be, this interpretation is supported by the historical record and by literary evidence, as well as by the text of *The Sonnets*, which it does not bowdlerize or emasculate or translate into words that the poet did not write. I refer to this theory as the Prince Tudor Four Theory and I believe it fully solves the riddle of *Shakespeare's Sonnets*.

Notes

1. Whittemore, Hank. *The Monument*, p.s 22-23. The Queen visited Merton Priory in Surrey on May 30, 1574, "spending the night on its grounds of some 2000 acres. As far as can be determined, there are no descriptive or explanatory accounts of this visit. Why she went there, or with whom, is unknown."
2. Whittemore, Hank. "Southampton Poem Proves Oxford, Prince Tudor Hypothesis", *Shakespeare Oxford Newsletter*, Spring 2012, Volume 48, Number 2, p. 6.
3. Whittemore. Op. cit., p. 12.
4. Hamill, John. "To Queen Elizabeth Just a Plea for Mercy," *Shakespeare Oxford Newsletter*, Spring 2012, Volume 48, Number 2, p. 13.
5. Hamill, op. cit. p. 18.
6. Hamill, op. cit. p. 14.
7. *Ibid.*
8. Hamill, op. cit. p. 15.
9. *Ibid.*
10. Hamill, op. cit. p. 17.
11. Hamill, op. cit. p. 13.
12. Hamill, op. cit. p. 16.
13. Hamill, op. cit. p. 18.
14. Hamill, John. "The Dark Lady and Her Bastard: An Alternative Scenario," *Shakespeare Oxford Newsletter*, Summer 2005, Volume 41, Number 3.
15. Streit, Paul, *Oxford, Son of Elizabeth I*. pp. 132, 133
16. Beauclerk, Charles. *Shakespeare's Lost Kingdom*, p. 74.
17. Sears, Elisabeth. *Shakespeare and the Tudor Rose*, pp. 28 – 35.
18. Sears, op. cit. p. 173.
19. Hamill, John. "To Queen Elizabeth Just a Plea for Mercy," *Shakespeare Oxford Society Newsletter*, Spring 2012, Volume 48, Number 2, p. 17.
20. Hotson, Leslie, quoted in Whittemore, Hank. *The Monument*, p. 807.
21. Chamberlain, Frederick. *The Private Character of Queen Elizabeth*, p. 182.
22. Whittemore, Hank. *The Monument*, p. 18. From a letter by Gilbert Talbot to his father, the Earl of Shrewsbury, May 11, 1573.
23. Ogburn, Charlton. *The Mysterious William Shakespeare*, p. 504
24. This claim first appeared in Allen, Percy and Ward, Captain B. M., "An Enquiry into the Relations Between Lord Oxford as 'Shakespeare,' Queen Elizabeth and the Fair Youth of Shakespeare's Sonnets," published by the English branch of the Shakespeare Fellowship in 1936 and reprinted in Whittemore, Hank and Altrocchi, Paul, *Shine Forth*, Volume III of their series *Building The Case For Edward de Vere as Shakespeare*. The timeline appears also in Whittemore's *The Monument*, pp 18-27.
25. Whittemore, Hank. *The Monument: An Abridged Introduction*, p. 43.
26. Akrigg, G.P. V. *Shakespeare and the Earl of Southampton*, p. 140.
27. Hamill, John. "Shakespeare's Bisexuality vs. The Prince Tudor Theory," *The Shakespeare Oxford Newsletter*, Volume 49, Number 1. Winter 2013, p. 8
28. Whittemore, Hank. *The Monument*, pp. 773-7.
29. Whittemore, op. cit., p. 328
30. *Ibid.*
31. Whittemore, op. cit. p. 549
32. Whittemore, op. cit. p. 409

Film Review: "All Is True". Shakespeare enthusiast Kenneth Branagh plays the Bard in his freely fictionalized retirement years, as the character is forced to reconcile the way he underestimated the women in his life. By Peter Debruge. Peter Debruge. Little is known about the events in "All Is True," an ill-advised Kenneth Branagh indulgence that reimagines the months immediately following William Shakespeare's retirement. But mostly what "All is True" does is give viewers a fresh look at Shakespeare, behind the guise, flaws and all. And if ever there was a man for that job, it's Branagh. May 24, 2019 | Rating: B | Full Review | Adam Graham. "All is True" is expertly acted and handsomely filmed but suffers from an excess of sentimentality, a rash of revelations, and a surfeit of subtext, with characters blurting out the hidden motives for their behavior instead of simply behaving them. May 24, 2019 | Rating: 2/4 | Full Review | Ty Burr. All Is True is a 2018 British fictional historical film directed by Kenneth Branagh, written by Ben Elton. It stars Branagh as playwright William Shakespeare. The film takes its title from an alternative name for Shakespeare's play Henry VIII. After the Globe Theatre burns down in 1613 during a performance of Shakespeare's play Henry VIII, William Shakespeare, aged 49, returns home to Stratford to rejoin his wife, Anne Hathaway. Shakespeare and Anne have a distant relationship, as he has spent most of "All is True" also wants to delve into the societal roles for women in Elizabethan times. We spend just as much time with Shakespeare's women as we do with him. Purists may have a field day with "All Is True," and it does have a tendency to lag, but I found myself thinking about it days after I'd seen it. Like the superior Emily Dickinson vehicle "Wild Nights With Emily," it bypasses the worthy immortal regard earned by the writer's works and lets us see the humanity and the drama beneath that surface.