



The Ashbourne Portrait; the altered original Kettel portrait of Edward de Vere?
(Folger Shakespeare Library)

Shakespeare—Who held the Pen?

Insights and research meet

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“The man of letters is, in truth, ever writing his own biography.” Anthony Trollope (1815–82).

“The marvel of Shakespeare's genius is that in his secular mirror the divine light also shines.” John Middleton Murry (*Heaven and Earth*, 1938).

The Authorship Question

Every theatre-goer and every reader can perceive the authentic voice, can sense the spirit, in and behind the work of the world's leading dramatic poet, known as “William Shakespeare”. The First Folio (1623) of his collected plays, however, was

only published years after his death. Of the actor, one William Shakespere (1564–1616)—the name never spelt as in the First Folio—, very little is known. Apparently neither manuscript nor letter is extant.¹ The many enigmas surrounding the whole phenomenon comprise “the authorship question”. The identity of the Bard, according to Emerson (1803–1882), is “the first of all literary problems”. John Michell² surveys the candidates with a commendable fairness, outlining the history of the search for the man who held the pen. The American author Mark Twain³ – Samuel Langhorne Clemens (1835–1910) – observed: “Shakespeare had no prominence while he lived, and none until he had been dead two or three generations. The Plays enjoyed high fame from the beginning.”

S.T. Coleridge (1772–1824), poet and seminal thinker, was almost the discoverer of the subconscious mind. His profound influence on philosophy, psychology, theology and literary criticism still continues. Coleridge assumed the conventional authorship of Shakespeare’s plays, while rejecting the facts of his life and character:⁴

Ask your own hearts, – ask your own common sense – to conceive the possibility of this man... being the anomalous, the wild, the irregular, genius of our daily criticism! What! are we to have miracles in sport? – Or, I speak reverently, does God choose idiots by whom to convey divine truths to man?

Coleridge, who set a standard for subsequent Shakespearean criticism, points to the universal genius of the playwright:

Nature’s... chosen poet, our own Shakespeare, himself a nature humanised, a genial understanding directing self-consciously a power and implicit wisdom deeper than consciousness.

This remarkable summary suggests both the reason for the fascination concerning this writer and its importance. The famous words of Ben Jonson (from his dedicatory verse in the First Folio) succinctly express the phenomenon: “He was not of an age but for all time!” The insights encapsulated in such statements also inevitably provoke emotional reactions that threaten to cloud the search for clarity, for what Coleridge calls “divine truths”. Yet perhaps a new angle on the mystery is already available. In this article, I take a new look at the teachings of the Austrian philosopher, Goethe scholar, educationalist, artist and spiritual scientist Rudolf Steiner (1861–1925). Steiner began his career by editing Goethe’s scientific works; as editor of a national journal, the *Magazin für Literatur*, Berlin (similar to the contemporary *Saturday Review*, London), he penned the editorials and theatre reviews. After his fortieth year, Steiner became an independent lecturer, to whom T.S. Eliot⁵ pointed as the spiritual leader of our time. Steiner’s grasp of world-development could well be unique. It reaches beyond a “history of ideas” to describe spiritual movements or “impulses”

¹ For another view on Shakespeare’s handwriting, see Charles Hamilton. *In Search of Shakespeare*. Robert Hale. London 1986.

² John Michell. *Who wrote Shakespeare?* Thames and Hudson. London: New York 1996.

³ Mark Twain. *Is Shakespeare Dead?* New York & London. 1909. P. 143.

⁴ S.T. Coleridge. ‘Shakespeare’s Judgement equal to his Genius’, Lectures, 1818, in *Coleridge: Poems and Prose*. Penguin Books. Harmondsworth. 1957. P. 240; also ‘Old’ Everyman, *Coleridge’s Essays & Lectures on Shakespeare...* Dent, London: Dutton, New York. ND. P. 47.

⁵ Towards the end of his life, the poet, essayist and critic T.S. Eliot (1888–1965), on *Nordwestdeutscher Rundfunk* (N.W. German Radio), 26th Dec., 1959, in the context of contrasting Goethe’s scientific consciousness and that employed in atomic research, said: “I see the path of progress for modern man in his occupation with his own self, with his inner being, as indicated by Rudolf Steiner.” From a longer quotation cited in Colin Wilson. *Beyond the Occult*. Caxton Editions. London 2002. P. 335f.

and the part played in them by creative personalities.

Steiner spoke about Shakespeare on several occasions. I discuss one of his insights in the light of discoveries made since his day, especially the “Oxfordian” claims. Alone the evidence of the *Sonnets* (1609) fits Edward de Vere (1550–1604), the Earl of Oxford, hand in glove. *Encyclopaedia Britannica* observes: “[I]n the twentieth century” (apart from William) Edward de Vere is “the strongest candidate proposed for the authorship of Shakespeare’s plays”. In this article, I do not attempt to solve all the riddles, neither survey the current state of the Oxfordian claims, nor pursue all of Steiner’s revelations. However, I do suggest:

(1) Steiner *may* have left a specific insight concerning Shakespeare’s Hamlet which links to the Oxfordian claim.

(2) If the recent scholarship (discussed later) is correct—showing de Vere’s Geneva Bible⁶ was the Bard’s, and why he led a hidden life as an author—then this result in turn may explain the form of Steiner’s revelation.

Shakespeare the actor-playwright

In his lectures, his chosen teaching method, Steiner complies with the conventional view of the authorship; when he uses the name “Shakespeare”, he consistently means the actor as poet-playwright. He states this during a straightforward evening class in Berlin, 1902.⁷ Speaking practically to stage-artists in 1924, Steiner⁸ again emphasises the outstanding gifts of “the actor Shakespeare”, mentioning his inside knowledge of down-to-earth tavern life. During a question time,⁹ Steiner uses the phrase: “*der Shakespeares Dramen verfaßt hat* – he who wrote Shakespeare’s dramas”; in another lecture¹⁰ “*der Dichter des «Hamlet»* – the poet [who wrote] *Hamlet*”. He sums up:¹¹ “Nothing human was alien to the genius who stood behind Shakespeare’s plays and the characters in them.” This helped him to portray the variety of human types and human life—a spiritual collaboration also seems indicated here. The playwright, Steiner continues, identified with his many characters; their joys and sorrows become his, yet he lets them express their own views. The literary critics, however, point to a deepening that occurred in mid-career, an analysis of tragedy and an eventual emergence beyond it, to which Steiner¹² also concurs:

Shakespeare draws on historical traditions... [he is] still dependent on others.

Then... from about 1598 onwards a certain inner life... his own artistic imagination is awakened. He is able to give his characters the very inmost of his being. Then, when he has created *Hamlet*, a kind of bitterness towards the

⁶ The Geneva version (1560, NT rev. 1576)—de Vere’s copy is of the second quarto 1568-70 edition—, popularly referred to as the “Breeches Bible”, preceded the Bishops’ Bible (1568, rev. 1569, 1572) and the Authorised, King James version (1611).

⁷ Rudolf Steiner, Berlin, May 6th, 1902. GA 51. *Anthroposophic News Sheet*. Vol. 14 (1945). No. 9/10. March 4 (<rsh-library@anth.org.uk>).

⁸ Rudolf Steiner. *Speech and Drama* (GA 282). Lecture, Dornach. 18th December, 1924. Rudolf Steiner Press (RSP). London 1986. (“GA” = *Gesamtausgabe*; list of Steiner’s Collected Works. German original pub. Dornach, Switzerland. Complete works on-line: <<http://rsv.arpa.ch/>>))

⁹ Rudolf Steiner. ‘Eine Fragenbeantwortung’. Dornach. 10th April, 1921. *Sprachgestaltung und Dramatische Kunst* (GA 282). Dornach 1981. P. 18.

¹⁰ Rudolf Steiner. Lecture Dornach 24th Feb., 1922 (GA 161).

¹¹ Rudolf Steiner. *Metamorphoses of the Soul*. Vol. 2 (GA 59). Lecture, Berlin, 12th May 1910. Rudolf Steiner Press (RSP). London 1983.

¹² Rudolf Steiner. Lecture, Stratford, 23rd April, 1922 (R. Steiner Library, London. Z.91).

external physical world comes over him. We feel as though he were living in other worlds and judging the physical world differently... From this inner deepening of experience with all its inner tragedy we see him emerge again. First he has learned the external dramatic medium, then he has gone through deepest inwardness (what I would call the meeting with the World-Spirit of which Goethe spoke so beautifully). Now he enters life once again with a certain humour, and his work carries in it the loftiest spirituality and the highest dramatic power—as, for example, in the *The Tempest*, one of the most wonderful creations of all humankind, one of the richest products of the evolution of dramatic art. Here, without allegory, Shakespeare is able in a living, human way to lay his ripe philosophy of life into every character and figure.

From a kind of “self-education” (Steiner continues), Shakespeare the writer rises to the highest spirituality, uniting science, art and religion as once prevailed in the early Mystery centres, which were the only centres of learning. In his deep spirituality, pointing to “exact clairvoyance” (*Oxford English Dictionary*: “exceptional insight”), Shakespeare stimulates “our spiritual nature, our own creative powers... [I]n his wonderful power he is modern as modern can be”. The entirely “modern”, supreme poet-dramatist re-attains the unity of cultural activity that once determined life in the ancient world. Whence does he draw the supreme motive power?

Transformation of personality

Steiner speaks of the inner source of Shakespeare’s motive power in the remarkable 1912 lecture-course on Mark’s gospel. Here, the influence of the cosmic Christ in world-history is sketched, that is, the long-term universal change, wrought by the Mystery of Golgotha—the term he uses for the Christ-event of death-resurrection seen in its significance for the race. In other lectures mentioning Shakespeare, Steiner¹³ also speaks of “the tremendous transition from the fourth to the fifth post-Atlantean cultural epoch”, which began in the 15th century. In the opening lecture of the cycle on Mark’s gospel,¹⁴ Steiner, always aiming to be concrete, names five figures who determined the cultural life of the 18th and 19th centuries: David, Homer, Dante, Shakespeare and Goethe.

There lived then, more than anyone can imagine now, even in the most delicate stirrings of the soul, what we may call the feelings and truths of the Psalms; there [also] lived fundamentally what is to be found in Homer as well as what took such magnificent form in Dante; then, even if it did not live *in* Shakespeare himself, there was what is nevertheless so beautifully expressed *by* him in the form in which it now lives in men of modern times. Added to this is the striving of the human soul after truth which Goethe expressed in *Faust*, something that in reality lives in every human soul in such a way that it was often said, “Everyone who seeks the truth has something of the Faust-nature in him”.

This passage deserves some discussion.

(1) “Feelings” and “truths” are mentioned and—considering all five writers—a cosmic, comprehensive, *poet’s* world-view is implied, even if expressed in five individual ways. The Psalms (“Praises”) are religious lyrics, prayers that are songs, yet, in the words of Father Benson,¹⁵ the whole Psalter is “a continuous epic” of Messiah’s conflict and victory over evil. “Homer”, writes the translator E.V. Rieu,¹⁶

¹³ Rudolf Steiner. Lecture, Dornach 22nd Feb., 1922.

¹⁴ Rudolf Steiner. *The Gospel of St Mark* (GA 139). Lecture, Basel, 15th Sept., 1912. E.T. Anthroposophic Press. Hudson, New York: RSP 1986. Tr. rev. A.S.

¹⁵ R.M. Benson. *The War-Songs of the Prince of Peace*. 2 vols. John Murry. London 1901. This translation and commentary occupies a class by itself.

¹⁶ Homer. *The Iliad*. Tr. E.V. Rieu. Penguin Books. Harmondsworth 1950. P. xiii.

“invented drama before the theatre was invented to receive it.” Dante’s visionary *Divine Comedy*, we know, assumes epic proportions. In the light of the subsequent discussion, it is worth observing here that the five poet-singers are epic-dramatists, all serving the truth—noticeably, of self-transformation—as they perceived it, mainly through the word (the chants have been lost).

(2) We may note scholars contest the authorship of three of the five artists. “King David”, rather like “King Arthur”, is more an office than a single individual. The Psalms were written by more than one individual, yet the unitary inspiration passed along a line of contributors to a completion. In the lecture, too, Steiner (like Rieu) makes light of the contested individuality of Homer. Connected to this point, the lecturer dismisses the minutiae concerning Goethe’s personality; to let this fall into oblivion would be “a good thing”.¹⁷ Both the historical prototypes of the artistic works and the details of the artists’ earthly lives are minimised. We are to realise that the Mystery of Golgotha, registered in what C.G. Jung calls the Collective Unconscious, meant that “souls had to make a new beginning: Everything had to be transformed and altered so that great souls appeared small”. A new beginning is made. In short—as John Vyvyan¹⁸ also shows—the love of power is to change to the power of love. Divine unconditional Love is to become divine-human. Clearly, the five poet-singers are mentioned for the significance of their creations. We note, too, as has also been pointed out before now,¹⁹ the entire Shakespeare canon pursues in detail what Goethe’s *Faust* undergoes in a comprehensive single dramatic creation—the unfolding of tragedy and the overcoming of tragedy.

(3) The phrase qualifying Shakespeare’s contribution appears enigmatic. Steiner, as we saw, notes that Shakespeare “deepened his experience”, and yet he also seems to suggest the playwright was more an instrument for what entered his teeming imagination. Surely, we feel, a writer inwardly lives what he creates? The two aspects, however, cannot be disjunctive. It is precisely this dual aspect of creative activity itself that, as we saw, is recognised by Coleridge. Moreover, in his graphic summary of Shakespeare’s psychic deepening, Ted Hughes²⁰ shows how the poet-playwright mirrors the deepest struggles of his age, in which in our century we, too, are emphatically involved.

(4) Finally in this passage, the search for “truth” is explicitly mentioned, concentrating in the individual. Epics, dramas, “the truth”—behind the whole story of the human word expressed through these five widely influential artist-creators, we glimpse the cosmic Word, the *logos*. The meaning of this name is revealed in that chapter of the Bible which is second to none, John 17:17: “thy Word is truth.”²¹

¹⁷ *Cf.*, R. Steiner. Lecture, Berlin 8th May, 1910 (GA 116): Paintings, like Leonardo’s *Last Supper*, will one day fall to dust, but the experience of “millions and millions” works on. And “just as the time came for Homer and is already for Shakespeare, so it will come for Goethe, too, that people will attempt to prove that an historical Goethe never existed.” (Tr. A.S.)

¹⁸ See John Vyvyan. *The Shakespearean Ethic* (Chatto & Windus. London 1959; Barnes & Noble, New York); *Shakespeare and the Rose of Love* (London 1960; New York 1968); *Shakespeare and Platonic Beauty* (London 1961; New York 1970).

¹⁹ See Edouard Schuré. *The Genesis of Tragedy*. Rudolf Steiner Pub. Co. London 1936; Charles Williams. *The English Poetic Mind*. OUP 1932; reissued Russell & Russell. New York 1963.

²⁰ Ted Hughes. ‘The Great Theme: Notes on Shakespeare’ (1971) in Ted Hughes, *Winter Pollen*. Faber & Faber. London & Boston 1994. Pp. 103-121; very impressively developed in Ted Hughes, *Shakespeare and the Goddess of Complete Being*. Faber & Faber. London & Boston 1992.

²¹ *Cf.*, Gerald Stanley Lee. *The Shadow Christ*. New York 1905. P. 74: “He has come

Art as Truth

In the same 1912-lecture, Steiner emphasises the fidelity of poetic creations. As products of the spirit, they more faithfully express the complete reality of human personality—the highest category we know—than do the reductions of scholar-critics of his acquaintance. Personality, Steiner argues, has undergone the most tremendous and far-reaching transformation from the ancient world to modern times. Two group-soul representatives of their people are named. Taking the great philosopher Empedocles (5th-century B.C.)—who taught the transmigration of souls—Steiner reveals that his inner striving comes to life again in Faust, “*in the way Goethe portrays him*”. The original figure lived in the 14th-/15th-century. Then—the decisive revelation for the present enquiry—Steiner also links Hector of Troy, a personality notably sure of himself (portrayed in *The Iliad*), and Shakespeare’s Hamlet, “the doubter, the sceptic, the procrastinator”.

I cannot go into everything underlying the historical prototype of the poetical figure of Hamlet, but through the research of spiritual science, I can offer you a striking example of how a man, a spirit of ancient times, reappears²² in the Christian era. The real figure underlying Hamlet, *as presented by Shakespeare*, is Hector. [Emphases added.]

The two historical prototypes are mentioned, yet the emphasis in both, indeed in three cases, falls on poetic creation: Homer’s Hector, Goethe’s Faust, and Shakespeare’s Hamlet. The Hector–Hamlet relationship is drawn from *artistic* portrayal which, Steiner is claiming, best portrays the human reality. The story of the 11th-century Danish prince—on my reading—fades from view.

A self-portrait?

Steiner chooses *Hamlet*, the most discussed play of the canon. Here the authorship question becomes immediate. Hamlet himself, as nobody can mistake, exhibits a consciousness above all those in his environment, to the point of reflecting that environment in the “play-within-the-play”. Early in the play (1, 2), Hamlet declares, “I know not ‘seems’”. He strives for truth at all cost. In such a context, one might suppose Shakespeare, the man, speaks.

“Oxfordians” claim that a particular nobleman was the hidden author writing under the *nom de plume* “William Shakespeare”.²³ The “play-within-the-canon”, reflecting the actual life and situation of Edward de Vere, 17th Earl of Oxford and Lord Great Chamberlain, is *Hamlet*. (I am unaware of a claim made for any other personality.) It

to His sons not by hiding the human, but by calling the human forth and shining through it.” Lee’s little volume is “still worth its weight in gold” (J. Alexander Findlay, theologian. 1938).

²² Steiner argues for the logic of repeated earthly lives, *i.e.*, the concept of metamorphosis applied to human life, in chapter 2 of *Theosophy* (GA 9), 1904; RSP: London 1970. The Platonic concept of pre-existence may be more apparent in English literature, yet reincarnation is widely held by philosophical and literary personalities. See Joseph Head & S.L. Cranston. *Reincarnation and World Thought*. Julian Press. New York 1967.

²³ First claimed in 1920 by J. Thomas Looney. “*Shakespeare*” identified in *Edward de Vere*... 3rd annotated edition, ed. Ruth Loyd Millar. 2 vols. Kennikat Press, Port Washington, New York; London for Minos Pub. Co. Jennings, Louisiana 1975. See Charlton Ogburn. *The Mysterious William Shakespeare*. EPM Pubs. McLean 1992; abridged version, Charlton Ogburn. *The Mystery of William Shakespeare*. Cardinal: Sphere Books. London: New York 1988; summarised, Charlton Ogburn. *The Man who was Shakespeare*. EPM Pubs. Inc. Delaplane, Virginia 1995.

is argued that his flesh-and-blood contemporaries *also* correspond to the characters in this play: Queen Elizabeth as Gertrude; Robert Dudley, Earl of Leicester, as Claudius; William Cecil, Lord Burghley, as Polonius; Anne, Cecil's daughter and de Vere's first wife, as Ophelia, *etc.* The evidence is plausible. "Most convincing is the parallel between Lord Burghley, who, as Elizabeth's chief minister, was charged with maintaining the security of her realm, and Lord Polonius, who had the same position under the king of Denmark", John Michell²⁴ observes. "Oxford makes a convincing Hamlet—or vice versa... Comparisons between Anne Cecil and Ophelia are also reasonably close...."

If Steiner was as knowledgeable as the record of his whole, astonishing life's work attests, we might look to him for orientation. Does the Oxfordian contention contribute to our reading of the above-cited 1912-lecture? What precisely does Steiner mean by, "I cannot go into everything underlying the historical prototype of the poetical figure of Hamlet..."? In the cited lecture outlining the transforming power of the Mystery of Golgotha, Hector and Hamlet are linked to, and by, the death-resurrection of the divine Word, Truth itself. If (as Oxfordians claim) Edward de Vere is the writer of *Hamlet*, then, from the perspective of posterity, could "the historical prototype" for Hamlet *also* correspond to the playwright himself?

"Divine truths"

If there is anything (i) in the discoveries made since Steiner's day, and (ii) in the above reasoning, the question may arise: Though Steiner mentions "the genius who stood behind Shakespeare's plays and the characters in them", why with his sovereign seership did he not reveal more details? For Steiner's perception, the "genius" in the background (see FN 25) was King James I—how, when and whom did he inspire, are tantalising questions. Was only one of the Great Lord Chamberlain's players (Shakespeare) involved? Why is the remarkable Great Lord Chamberlain (de Vere) himself unmentioned?

An observer might initially suggest (as Steiner himself remarks), a mere substitution of authors' names in itself *signifies* precious little. Such a "solution" for Steiner would be no solution. Yet essential facts and the context, too, I suggest, *may* have been revealed by Steiner as an "open secret" already in 1912—in the best and only way he could. With a life dedicated to cultural renewal, Steiner could not afford to be involved in the literary and historical detective-work surrounding this question. This had to be left to others. The right time for a rational discussion, too, would arrive. In Steiner's day, the authorship question was hardly topical. Steiner dismissed the Baconians' claim²⁵ of his day as "utterly superficial". The "Oxford" claim for Edward

²⁴ John Michell. *op. cit.* P. 169.

²⁵ Rudolf Steiner. *Karmic Relationships*. Vol. 2 (GA 236). Lecture 12th April, 1924. RSP. London 1974. Here, Steiner concentrates on Francis Bacon (1561–1626). I submit that Steiner (i) uses the accepted name "Shakespeare" for the dramatic poet who wrote the canon; (ii) leaves the question "who held the pen?" untouched. Richard Ramsbotham, *Who wrote Bacon?* (Temple Lodge, London 2004), who accepts the actor as the playwright, to my mind establishes that the reference to the inspirer, yet "*lästiger Patron* – intolerable fellow/patron", is James I (also seen by Friedrich Hiebel, *Das Drama des Dramas*. Dornach. 1984. Pp. 56-61). Ramsbotham clearly presents Steiner's main concern to depict the tremendous streams associated with Bacon and Shakespeare. At *this* level of seership there is nothing to contest. There is an antagonism, to which Eliot already alludes (see FN 5), between a Baconian science that would torture nature's secrets from her, and a Shakespearean doctrine of self-transformation. Now, in Ramsbotham's view (letter to present writer), the suggestions in the present paper are quite untenable. However, his research question (concerning

de Vere was first made (1920) only towards the end of his extremely busy life.²⁶ With this whole enigma, we must also remember, literary questions were bound up with the political situation. With the completion of *Henry V*, writes John Masefield (1915),²⁷ Shakespeare “had done more than any English writer to make England sacred in the imagination of her sons”. The playwright had more or less created the national myth! A hundred years ago, the time was hardly ripe for a direct revelation of the hidden (as is contended) author; today the British Empire is a faded glory. (Shakespeare’s crowning greatness is that he *also* anticipated today’s situation.) Moreover, the state of scholarship both of the times and of literature has advanced, providing much circumstantial evidence, and also offering answers to such disputes as dates of composition.

Let us return to the most important consideration of all, which, I needs must think, could shed the most light on the whole riddle. It is axiomatic that for the most important realisations of self-knowledge—*i.e.*, knowledge in relation to a self,²⁸ ultimately the Self—the connections have to be made by each seeker for him/herself. Is this not the key to the authorship claim? The real question of authorship touches something sacred. Who is prepared to investigate the very core of his/her humanity: “I am that I am”? These are Yahweh’s words to Moses when asked to identify Himself (Ex 3:14), quoted in a blazing, indignant letter²⁹ of 1584 from de Vere to Lord Burghley, angrily rebuking Burghley for employing his own servants to spy on him, and they appear, too, in Sonnet 121:

Noe, I am that I am, and they that leuell
At my abuses, reckon vp their owne[.]

Precisely in the lecture-course on Mark’s gospel, Steiner³⁰ claims that people “will have to learn to read the Bible in a completely new way”. Not surprisingly, a powerful and perhaps supremely helpful light on the whole subject is offered by an in-depth study on “The Marginalia of Edward de Vere’s Geneva Bible”³¹ with their direct

inspiration) and mine in this paper (who held the pen?), I suggest, overlap. For Ramsbotham ‘knowledge’ and ‘inspiration’ coincide. As I understand Steiner’s revelation (12th April, 1924, clarified by Ramsbotham), James I, at a profound rather than a personal level, inspired in particular four named personalities (two lived in Central Europe), one of whom was Shakespeare. The remarkable yet enigmatic James, then, is the “genius standing behind” Shakespeare and his characters (see FN 10). Yet James did not hold their pens. Several questions—concerning dates; how inspiration works; why Steiner consistently made orthodox statements, and so on—merit further discussion.

²⁶ After reading Moody’s discoveries, Sigmund Freud wrote to the author, “confessing... to be a follower of yours”. “The man of Stratford... seems to have nothing at all to justify his claim, where Oxford has almost everything” (quoted in Ogburn. 1988. P. 120). The list of sympathisers has grown significantly in recent years.

²⁷ John Masefield. *William Shakespeare*. Heinemann. London 1915. P. 123.

²⁸ This phrase comes from an unjustly neglected work: Wilfrid Richmond. *An Essay on Personality as a Philosophical Principle*. Edwin Arnold. London 1900.

²⁹ Quoted in Stritmatter (2001), p. 145. “I pray, my lord, leave yt course, for I mean not to be yowre ward nor yowre chyld, I serve her magestie, and *I am that I am*, and by alliance neare to yowre lordship, but fre<e>, and scorne to be offred that iniurie, to thinke I am so weak of government as to be ruled by servants, or not able to governe myself.”

³⁰ Rudolf Steiner. GA 139. Lecture 2, Sept. 16, 1912.

³¹ Roger A. Stritmatter. *The Marginalia of Edward de Vere’s Geneva Bible: Providential Discovery, Literary Reasoning, and Historical Consequence*. University

relation to the poems and plays. Here it is not a mere matter of matching quotations from Bible and plays. With the new evidence, the reader should be better able to meet the Oxfordian claims, reasonably expecting to encounter the creative mind at work. We take a single example relating to *Hamlet* from Roger Stritmatter's dissertation (chap. 22, p. 183f.):

[Hamlet's] consciousness operates on a higher level of awareness than that of any other character in the drama. When Claudius admits out loud "if thou knewest our purposes in sending thee to England," Hamlet is three steps ahead of him: "I see a cherub," he announces, "that sees them" (IV.3.50). Far from being insane, then, Hamlet represents the most developed manifestation of the deep Shakespearean archetype of the holy prophet. Like Feste or Touchstone, he speaks in riddles and enigmas. Unlike them, he is a Prince of the realm who is destined to inherit power and influence—if he survives.

The prophet belongs to the class of mythic character-types in Shakespeare. Indeed the plays, as Harold Goddard has apprehended, are a prolonged symphonic meditation on the dilemma of the artist/prophet confronted by brute force. Cordelia, Hamlet, Lucrece, Feste and many more, are characters whose knowledge of the unspeakable brings them into unavoidable conflict with the prevailing social norms of the world in which they live and make symbolic acts. They understand that "where force rules, truth must either undergo martyrdom, be silent, or speak a language its enemy cannot understand".³² These Shakespearean characters are nourished by the deep wellspring of their literary antecedents in Ovid and other sources. The author's mythic paleo-symbols—Philomela, Orpheus, or even David—embody the quest for a language which can survive the disfiguring rituals imposed by political power and still communicate critical truths. They live in a world, like that of the marked Bible verse Hosea 9:7, in which political corruption and moral blindness decree that "the Prophet is a fool" and "the spiritual man is mad".

The dilemma is directly addressed in Sonnet 66, in which "Shakespeare" complains of "art made tongue-tied by authority".

Stritmatter's Ph.D.-dissertation (2001) also contains Appendices on such technical matters as scientific tests on the handwriting, and a statistical investigation refuting charges of "randomness". The all-important, crucial linguistic evidence he discusses in the body of the work reveals the annotator's search for ethical support as a hidden writer:³³

Of the top eighty-one Shakespearean Bible verses identified in my SD list..., no fewer than five of them—I Samuel 16:7, Matthew 7:15, I Corinthians 6:19, II Corinthians 4:16-18 and II Corinthians 11:14—are variations of this neo-Platonic theme of the apprehension of a hidden, higher spiritual reality which can only be apprehended through "insight" which goes beyond mere physical perception.

Despite David Kathman's dismissive internet-article—some important Shakespeare Bible references, he observes, are not marked in de Vere's Bible—, the reader could well believe he is led into the Bard's workshop; we seem to follow linguistic inspiration at work. Whatever we think on the authorship question, de Vere,

of Massachusetts, Amherst. February 2001:

<<http://scholarworks.umass.edu/dissertations/AAI3001149/>> . Published as: *Edward de Vere's Geneva Bible*. Oxenford Press, 20 Day Avenue, Northampton, MA 01060 (Tel: (413) 585-8610). <www.deverestudies.org/bookstore/index.cfm>. Also from <stritmatter24@hotmail.com>

³² Harold C. Goddard. *The Meaning of Shakespeare*. Chicago: Univ of Chicago Press 1951. P. 61.

³³ Stritmatter thesis, *op. cit.*, chap. 12, p. 196f.

apparently, regarded himself as a hidden author. The name “de Vere” means “truth”; the coat of arms carries the legend *Veronihil Verius*—“Nothing Truer than the Truth” or “Nothing Truer than Vere” (probably created by de Vere during the 1570s).³⁴ The light shed especially by Stritmatter’s recent research lifts the whole authorship question beyond literary detective-work—which nevertheless forms the essential basis—into a spiritual awareness. Now, at last, inner and outer research, biography and inspiration, can all meet.

The Logic of Life

The case appears to be unique. Every life, of course, is unique. Consequently, objections on “logical” grounds could miss the point. It is easy to claim that a comparison of Steiner’s two examples (Empedocles–Faust; Hector–Hamlet), as also the alternative reading itself which I am suggesting, reveals logical discrepancies—*i.e.*, in the two “equations” representing the historical and literary personalities. Let us state the argument once more. The two examples of an earlier and a later incarnation stand side by side, similar yet different: (i) Empedocles becomes 14th/15th-century Faust (perceived and expressed by Goethe); (ii) Hector (perceived and expressed by Homer) becomes Shakespeare’s Hamlet—the story in the Danish chronicles of Saxo Grammaticus (end of C12th) via Belleforest and an earlier tragedy by Thomas Kyd,³⁵ taken over and transmuted. The result, a play showing how revenge leads to racial suicide (followed by *Measure for Measure*—“the resolution of *Hamlet*”),³⁶ *at the same time* becomes the vehicle for a certain self-revelation of the playwright. The orthodox, “logical” reading of Steiner’s 1912-lecture, failing to differentiate the details of the authorship-rôles of Goethe and Shakespeare, could appear today as somewhat literal. *What is essential, I concede, is not so much the possible connection of the playwright to Hector-Hamlet, but what it could account for—the indicated process of transformation, manifesting as that deepening of the Bard’s work to which the critics point.* Whatever interesting questions on human life and creativity remain, a full enquiry has to include our own preconceptions—Coleridge, cited above, points out one widespread phenomenon. Then again, is Steiner taken rather literally, even uncritically? In his lecture, Steiner at any rate shows his habitual, fruitful attempt to raise thinking itself above mere concern for information and a satisfaction with generalisations. Life shows its own artistic logic, nowhere better perceived than in the works of the five cited authors.

It is also worth noting that there is nothing automatic about repeated earth-lives; in Steiner’s teaching, human beings incarnate again through the grace of the “Lord of Karma”. In order to do justice to the roots of *artistic*, human transformation, Steiner (as we saw) takes significant, concrete-artistic examples. The career of the dramatic poet “Shakespeare” shows precisely the artist’s dual struggle to make of life itself a work of art in the practice of his vocation—here, Steiner points out more than once, the transforming Christ-Impulse is significantly active.

Conclusion

Rudolf Steiner spoke about Shakespeare for the most part as a man of the theatre; his emphasis on character in the plays would be considered today as inadequate. Steiner

³⁴ Andrew Hannas points to Martial 7.76 as the probable source. Cited in Stritmatter, p. 231f.

³⁵ J.M. Robertson. *The Problem of Hamlet* (1919): Shakespeare performs “a miracle of transmutation, vitalizing, elevating, and irradiating a crude creation [Kyd’s play] into a world’s wonder...” (Quoted in Anne Bradby/ Ridler (ed.). *Shakespeare Criticism 1919-35*. OUP 1936. P. 15).

³⁶ John Vyvyan, 1959. P. 76.

refused to reduce Shakespeare's art to a philosophy. With regard to "the authorship question", he refused to discuss it on any but the highest creative and human level. Steiner showed no inclination to enter into the "superficial" debates of his day. Professing the orthodox view, he does not even mention Edward de Vere. As Ramsbotham³⁷ has shown, Steiner points to James I as the "inspirer". For most of Steiner's followers, there is no case to argue. "An argument from silence", they rightly point out, is dangerous—or worse.

Nevertheless, questions still remain, not least of interpreting Steiner. Discoveries, too, have been made since Steiner's day. And Steiner, after all, could also look ahead. Upon these premises, the present paper has been written—roughly a hundred years on. Steiner saw the unitary inspiration in James (*c.f.*, "David",³⁸ and "Homer"); he must have regarded the question 'Who held the pen?' as subsidiary. *Were not others involved*, as research suggests? Despite my critics, I submit that Steiner's "silence" here speaks louder than words. It is possible Steiner may have left an essential clue with his revelation about Hamlet—attained "through spiritual science", the method of tested seership he established.

(1) Steiner revealed that Hector was reborn as Hamlet. *Homer's* Hector and *Shakespeare's* Hamlet are linked; artistic creation, he stresses, faithfully portrays both the historical personalities and the profound impact of the Christ-event in the Collective Unconscious. Past action becomes present psychosis and search for truth.

(2) Some historical and literary scholarship, especially of the last hundred years, claims that Shakespeare's Hamlet, at the same time, points to a self-revelation of the Bard—Hamlet's situation is a reflection of the playwright's actual situation. If, assuming the Oxfordian arguments, we bring points (1) and (2) together, could the complex personality who held the pen be Edward de Vere, possibly Hector of Troy³⁹ reborn?

My suggestion may appear to complicate an already involved enigma; I suggest it throws light on it. Perhaps three important corollaries, essential to appreciate why there is an authorship question at all, may point us further. *If* my suggestion contains any truth, we would have to say that Steiner:

(1) respected *to the hilt* the playwright's self-chosen and also prescribed, hidden rôle, necessary during his lifetime to protect (i) his person in a troubled and violent age, and to keep the political situation stable, (ii) his creativity, and (iii), both then and subsequently, also the Mysteries (the *inspirer*, James, was already "hidden");

(2) anticipated the situation that historical and literary discoveries would sooner or later provide enough evidence for informed discussion;

(3) anticipated, too, the continuation of a fear and resistance to Mystery-wisdom that originally dictated the playwright's need of secrecy.

In this contribution, I have not summarised the Oxfordian answer to the questions about dates. Edward de Vere died in 1604; several of the greatest plays first appear after this date. On the other hand, it seems early versions of some plays were performed before William came to London. Again, I have merely mentioned Steiner's revelation about James I as the genius behind the playwright; the latter he defends as William Shakespeare, one of Oxford's, later James's, troupe of actors. Historical research is rather baffled with *both* personalities (William and James). How indeed did this spiritual collaboration work? And how was the Hamlet-situation transcended?

³⁷ *Op. cit.*

³⁸ Even Jesus in the gospels claims "David" wrote Psalm 110: Matt 22:45, Mark 12:37, Luke 20:44. Scholars think otherwise.

³⁹ For another view, see Manfred Seyfert-Landgraf. *Hector Berlioz and his Karmic Background*. <rsh-library@anth.org.uk>

readership are led into the duties of realising sovereign humanity—we are all “to become ourselves” in the practice of creative mercy.

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