A Psychoanalytic Study of Edward de Vere’s
The Tempest

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Abstract: There is now abundant evidence that Freud was correct in believing Edward de Vere (1550-1604) wrote under the pseudonym “William Shakespeare.” One common reaction is “What difference does it make?” I address that question by examining many significant connections between de Vere’s life and The Tempest. Such studies promise to bring our understanding of Shakespeare’s works back into line with our usual psychoanalytic approach to literature, which examines how a great writer’s imagination weaves a new creation out of the threads of his or her life experiences. One source of the intense controversy about de Vere’s authorship is our idealization of the traditional author, about whom we know so little that, as Freud noted, we can imagine his personality was as fine as his works.

When psychoanalysts and other people hear the claim that Edward de Vere, Earl of Oxford (1550-1604) wrote the works of William Shakespeare, they often react with two questions: “Why would he have used a pseudonym?” and “What difference does it make, anyway, who wrote the plays?” In this article, I will first give some background on de Vere, and consider possible reasons he used one or more pseudonyms. I will then explore the second question by narrowing our focus to a single play—The Tempest. I make several points about the relevance of de Vere’s authorship to The Tempest.

Many of us felt embarrassed when we first learned that Freud concluded Edward de Vere wrote the works of Shakespeare. Freud’s belief in de Vere now seems less eccentric, as gradually accumulating evi-

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dence supports it as valid. In 1930, Freud first published his belief in de Vere during his remarks on accepting the Goethe Prize. He interwove his comments on de Vere with his defense of a psychoanalytic study of Goethe. He acknowledged that some would object that such psychoanalytic studies would “degrade” a great man. He argued that only a psychoanalytic study of great writers can “throw any light on the riddle of the miraculous gift that makes an artist” or “help us comprehend any better the value . . . of his works” (Freud, *Standard Edition* 21:211). He then continued, “It is undeniably painful to all of us that even now we do not know who was the author of [the works] of Shakespeare.” He identified a crucial factor in the psychology of our response to new information about great authors—we have the “expectation that their personalities will be just as fine and admirable as those works of art of theirs which we possess.” He contrasted such an idealized expectation with the reality of “the nobly-born and highly cultivated, passionately wayward, to some extent *declassé* aristocrat, Edward de Vere.” He concluded that “[I]t is unavoidable that if we learn more about a great man’s life we shall also hear of occasions on which he has in fact done no better than we, has in fact come near to us as a human being” (p. 212). But Freud insisted that the alternative is a “forcible suppression of the truth.”

Freud’s remarks imply that we want Shakespeare to remain anonymous so he can be more of a blank screen, onto which we can project our personal idealized beliefs about him. Who wants to give up their idealizations, when real people inevitably disappoint us? Not psychoanalysts, apparently. Freud was to learn that none of his followers accepted his belief that de Vere wrote Shakespeare’s works. James Strachey, his translator and former analysand, persuaded Freud to suppress a 1935 footnote to his 1925 *Autobiographical Study* in which Freud had wanted to announce that “I no longer believe that William Shakespeare the actor from Stratford was the author of the works which have so long been attributed to him” (Freud, *Standard Edition* 20:63n).

Freud was also unable to persuade Ernest Jones to launch a new psychoanalytic study of Shakespeare based on a new understanding of his identity. He wrote to Jones on March 11, 1928,

I am again impressed by a book that, after a year, I have read for a second time. *Shakespeare Identified* ... The book makes it seem probable that Edward de Vere, seventeenth Earl of Oxford, is the author of Shakespeare’s poetry and plays. Until now I was a convinced Stratford supporter [i.e., a supporter of the traditional author, Shakespeare of Stratford] and dismissed particularly the Bacon hypothesis as being absurd. But now, I must confess, I am very impressed by Looney’s investigations, almost convinced. If this aristocrat, of whose life much is known and even more can become
known, really was Shakespeare, then we have much to modify in our analytic constructions, perhaps also much to gain. It would surely repay an analyst’s interest to look into the matter... Would you not like to look into whether a reliable analysis of Shakespeare can be constructed on the basis of this new hypothesis? (Freud, 1928, p. 643)

Finally, A. Bronson Feldman (who had a Ph.D. in English) became the first psychoanalyst to take up Freud’s suggestion to Jones (for example, see Feldman 1953a, 1953b, 1954, 1955a, 1955b). Since Feldman, there have been few if any psychoanalytic studies of Shakespeare from an “Oxfordian” perspective (that is, based on Freud’s conclusion that de Vere, Earl of Oxford, was the author).

Let me clarify my terminology. We are accustomed to speaking of the works of Mark Twain, knowing his given name was actually Samuel Clemens. In what follows, I will refer to the “traditional” author as Shakespeare of Stratford. Rather than place “Shakespeare” in quotation marks to signal my Oxfordian conclusion that de Vere was the author of these literary works, I will follow the convention of continuing to refer to the plays and poems of William Shakespeare. Some confusion is inevitable, especially because I believe we need to undergo something of a paradigm shift in re-examining deeply embedded assumptions about who Shakespeare was.

What is the evidence for de Vere? The best clue we have is the 1568 Geneva Bible he owned and annotated. It demonstrates that de Vere was interested in the same Biblical passages that scholars agree Shakespeare alluded to in his work (Waugaman, 2008d). Ongoing research shows that dozens of previously undiscovered sources for Shakespeare may be found in the 20 Psalms that de Vere marked in the metrical Psalm translation bound at the back of his Bible (Waugaman, in press-b,c). No, it’s not likely that de Vere first read Shakespeare’s works, then marked up his Bible—de Vere died in 1604, five years before the Sonnets were published, and nearly 20 years before half of Shakespeare’s plays were published.

I will briefly review the now abundant evidence that the name “William Shakespeare” confuses de Vere’s pen name and stage name with his front man, William Shakespeare of Stratford (see Anderson, 2005; Looney, 1920; Ogburn, 1984; Sobran, 1997; Stritmatter, 2003; Waugaman, in press-a).

George Greenwood (1908) and Diana Price (2001) ably review the evidence against the traditional authorship theory. That case is actually much weaker than many realize. Its supporters correctly note that no serious doubts about authorship were raised until the mid-1850’s. They then resort to the \textit{ad hominem} argument that doubts were subsequently
raised only by “conspiracy theorists,” and by snobs who cannot believe a relatively uneducated commoner could have written such great works.

There was in fact little concern with who wrote the works (or with biographies in general) until the late 18th century. Significant interest in the life story of the author only began after the renowned Shakespearean actor David Garrick’s 1769 “Stratford Jubilee” led to Shakespeare’s apotheosis as a secular deity, filling the void that the late stages of the Enlightenment left after undermining traditional religious belief in many intellectuals.

But subsequent intensive archival research failed to turn up any documents that supported the authorship claim of Shakespeare of Stratford. Two prominent researchers (William Henry Ireland and John Payne Collier) then compensated for this lack by forging the missing records. Although dishonest, they were simply trying to feed the popular hunger for facts about the world’s greatest literary celebrity.

Each was highly successful until their forgeries were exposed. It was only a few years later that the first serious challenges to the traditional author were published. I would speculate that pathological group dynamics then led scholars seriously astray, as they displaced their rage for having been duped by the forgeries onto anyone who dared to challenge their authorship orthodoxy. It should be easy for psychoanalysts to imagine just how this happened. Think of our field’s struggle to face the tragic reality of child abuse as a pathogenic force, and of the many other examples where yesterday’s theoretical renegades became today’s mainstream analysts. Research in social psychology has amply documented how easily even the simplest acts of perception may be distorted by group process. Literary scholars lack a reliable methodology for settling authorship disputes. As a result, tradition and authority often replace objective arguments based on the evidence. (And Shakespeareans do not just ridicule us Oxfordians—they also ridicule one another.)

Scholars who support the traditional authorship theory claim that many contemporary documents prove that everyone knew Shakespeare of Stratford was the author. That line of reasoning crumbles when we recognize that Elizabethan references to the name “William Shakespeare” were in all likelihood references to the pseudonym that began appearing in print in 1593. What we know about the traditional Shakespeare of Stratford from the historical record shows no connections with a literary career. The long history of slanderous attacks on anyone who challenges traditional beliefs about who wrote Shakespeare have grown more vicious and more frequent as the traditional authorship case has been collapsing. For example, Stephen Greenblatt recently claimed that
those who question the traditional author of Shakespeare’s works are like those who claim the Holocaust never happened (on National Public Radio, July 5, 2008). Once we become better acquainted with the weakness of orthodox evidence, the desperation of such outrageous attacks becomes more understandable.

Although only sixteen poems signed by him survive, we know that de Vere was regarded by his contemporaries as one of the best of the Elizabethan courtier poets. A few of his contemporaries knew he wrote anonymously, which helps explain why we have so few signed works. He sponsored theatrical companies most of his life, and most suggestively, he was regarded as one of the best Elizabethan authors of comedies. We can speculate that these were the comedies of Shakespeare.

There are hundreds of connections between the content of the plays and poems of Shakespeare and the documented facts of de Vere’s life (Farina, 2006). But, we still do not know with certainty why he wrote under a pseudonym. This crucial, missing piece of evidence is a major reason de Vere is not yet more widely accepted as Shakespeare.

In all likelihood, there were multiple internal and external reasons that he used a pseudonym (see North, 2003 and Mullan, 2007). Most books published in 16th century England did not include the author’s name. They were published anonymously or with a pseudonym. Among the possible reasons for this tradition was the controversial nature of a book. Many authors of the era were punished for offending those in power. Even Ben Jonson was tortured for one of his plays. Most Elizabethan nobility did not publish poetry under their own names during their lifetimes. In addition, the world of the theater was held in some disrepute.

Why did de Vere hide his authorship behind the front man from Stratford? In 1586, de Vere was granted a large annuity by Queen Elizabeth, for the rest of his life. I suspect that Francis Walsingham, director of the Queen’s intelligence service, knew that the history plays would be more effective propaganda among the English people if these pro-Tudor plays were thought to be the work of a commoner, rather than the work of one of Elizabeth’s favorite courtiers. Walsingham was, in fact, expert at manipulating public opinion covertly through propaganda.

The psychology of pseudonymity (Waugaman, 2007b, 2008b, 2008c) offers many examples of writers whose creativity seemed to flourish when their authorship was concealed. If de Vere used one pseudonym, he probably disguised other writings as well. For example, I recently attributed two anonymous 1585 poems to de Vere/Shakespeare (Waugaman, 2007a, 2008a).
THE RELEVANCE OF DE VERE’S AUTHORSHIP OF THE TEMPEST

Controversial ideas have to pass through three stages before they win widespread acceptance. The first stage has been called “the rhetoric of ridicule” (Marshall Alcorn, personal communication, January 11, 2008). Attacks on de Vere’s authorship offer a case study in the psychology of ridicule and ad hominem reasoning. But we now seem to be entering the second stage of reaction to de Vere’s authorship; it is characterized by the question “What difference would it make anyway?” Again, my goal in linking de Vere’s life with The Tempest is to show that it matters very much indeed who the author of the world’s greatest literature is. I hope I will thus help pave the way to the third stage of acceptance, characterized by scholars claiming, “I always said it was de Vere!”

Some great authors have doubted the traditional authorship theory. Henry James (1999) wrote a brilliant essay on The Tempest. He considers it to be Shakespeare’s best work. James accepts the scholarly consensus that this was Shakespeare’s last play. He therefore finds it impossible to understand why Shakespeare allegedly stopped writing after this play and retired to Stratford for the last several years of his life. James says of this mystery, “its power to torment us intellectually seems scarcely to be borne” (p. 658). He finds the playwright to be elusive in his other plays, but in The Tempest,

    it is as if [the artist] came to meet us more than his usual half-way, and as if, thereby, in meeting him, and touching him, we were nearer to meeting and touching the man. The man everywhere, in Shakespeare’s [other] work, is so effectually locked up and imprisoned in the artist that we but hover at the base of thick walls for a sense of him. (p. 652)

James concedes that in most cases, knowing details of the life of a poet is irrelevant to understanding their work. But he seems desperate to know more of the life of this artist, “the human character the most magnificently endowed, in all time, with the sense of the life of man, and with the apparatus for recording it” (1999, pp. 660-661). He rejects the opinion of Shakespeare scholars that we have all we need to know of Shakespeare in the plays themselves.

Five years before he wrote this piece about The Tempest, James speculated about a possible answer to these enigmas. In his 1902 story “The Birthplace,” James wrote of a man hired to oversee the birthplace of a great writer (clearly that of Shakespeare of Stratford). As time goes by, he comes to doubt whether this man was the author he is thought to be,
but he keeps his doubts to himself, not wanting to jeopardize his livelihood (and Stratford remains one of Britain’s largest sources of tourist revenue).

One reason I have chosen *The Tempest* to show connections with de Vere is that this play, more than any other, has traditionally been used to argue that de Vere could not possibly have written the works of Shakespeare. There have been no definite literary sources for Shakespeare that were published after 1604, the year of de Vere’s death. Yet, through circular reasoning, the composition of the plays have been speculatively dated based on Shakespeare of Stratford having lived from 1564 to 1616. And it has long been assumed that *The Tempest* could not have been written by de Vere because it was falsely assumed it had to have been written after 1610. This crucial assumption is based on a 1610 letter about a shipwreck on a voyage to Bermuda. If that letter was indeed the source for *The Tempest*, it would disprove de Vere’s authorship. But this challenge to de Vere’s authorship has been discredited by evidence that the letter in question was not published until after 1616; further, the letter borrows from accounts published decades earlier, describing some of the many shipwrecks in the Americas (see Stritmatter & Kositsky, 2007).

I *do not* wish to minimize the extraordinary richness of Shakespeare’s imagination when I highlight some autobiographical parallels in *The Tempest*. It is a false dichotomy to imply that literary works rely *either* on creativity *or* on the writer’s life experiences, on nature *or* nurture. Since Shakespeare’s day, the roots of his genius have been misunderstood as stemming from nature alone. Falling into the trap of false dichotomies that Shakespeare always avoided, many critics have misused Shakespeare’s work to argue that native genius alone can produce his extraordinary creativity. As a result, scholars were slow to acknowledge the wide range of books in several languages that deeply influenced Shakespeare (Gillespie, 2004).

I accept the traditional theory that *The Tempest* constitutes the author’s “farewell to the stage,” because I believe de Vere wrote it during the last two years of his life. I therefore connect its content with several salient events from those years—1603 and 1604. Queen Elizabeth died in March of 1603. Soon after King James took the throne, he released the Earl of Southampton (probably de Vere’s former lover) from his two years’ imprisonment in the Tower of London. This was the earl to whom Shakespeare dedicated his two long poems and, many scholars believe, the young man to whom the first 126 sonnets were written.

*The Tempest* was published as the *first* play in the “First Folio,” the 1623 first complete edition of Shakespeare’s plays. It is a play for which a major literary source for the plot is unknown. One possibility is that it
is one of the more autobiographical of Shakespeare’s plays. That is, its source was primarily de Vere’s life experiences, especially near the time he wrote this play. Although Queen Elizabeth exiled him from court for what another courtier called his “fickle head,” he may have been her lover, and was definitely one of her favorites. When she died in March of 1603, de Vere wrote, “In this common shipwreck, mine is above all the rest, who least regarded, though often comforted, of all her followers, she hath left to try my fortune among the altercations of time, and chance, either without sail whereby to take advantage of any prosperous gale, or with anchor to ride till the storm be overpast.” (That final phrase is found in Richard Day’s (1578) “A Prayer Against Despair”: “Depart not from me in the time of my need, but defend thou me till this storm be overpast.”) Note the many words in this brief passage from de Vere’s 1603 letter that overlap with the content of The Tempest—storm, gale, shipwreck, sail, and anchor. For example, Trinculo says, “I will hear shroud till the dregs of the storm be past” (Act II, Scene 2). Prospero promises “auspicious gales/And sail so expeditious” (Act V, Scene 1). Among other losses for de Vere, the Queen’s death might have threatened his financial solvency. Since 1586, she had granted him an annuity of 1,000 pounds per year (roughly one million dollars today), presumably for his theatrical work in general, starting with his pro-Tudor history plays. But King James continued this annuity.

De Vere was ill during the months leading up to his death. In late 1604, a few months after de Vere’s death in June, his youngest daughter Susan got married. So de Vere wrote The Tempest while he was facing the marriage of Susan to Philip Herbert. (Herbert later became the Earl of Pembroke, to whom Shakespeare’s First Folio was dedicated in 1623.) Susan’s engagement to Herbert became official in October, three months after de Vere’s death; a biographer said their engagement took place “after long love.” Herbert’s uncle was the illustrious Philip Sidney, who died in 1586. Sidney and de Vere were arch-rivals, starting when Anne Cecil’s engagement to Sidney was broken so she could marry de Vere. The marriage of de Vere’s daughter to his old rival’s nephew echoes the marriage in The Tempest of Miranda to Ferdinand, son of Prospero’s old enemy Alonso.

So I believe de Vere wrote The Tempest when he was beset with loss—he had lost the Queen, he was struggling to relinquish his youngest daughter Susan to marriage, and he was contemplating his own impending death. He may have written it to be performed (posthumously) for Susan’s wedding celebration. In 1728, someone recorded an oral tradition that Shakespeare wrote a play for his daughter at the time of his retirement from the stage. This legend is consistent with the theory
that de Vere wrote *The Tempest* for his daughter Susan. (It was later performed at the wedding of King James’ daughter.)

Exile, imprisonment and confinement are central themes that get repeated in several ways throughout the plot of *The Tempest*. As the play opens, we find Prospero and Miranda confined on the island by Antonio, Alonoso, and Sebastian. We learn that Ariel had been imprisoned in a tree by Sycorax before Prospero frees him. In the epilogue, Prospero asks the audience not to imprison Prospero further. As I have noted, I would speculate that King James’s release of the Earl of Southampton from the Tower of London was one of the contemporary events in 1603 that inspired these references to confinement. There is now persuasive evidence that the Earl’s imprisonment was based on the treachery of de Vere’s brother-in-law Robert Cecil, who spread a false rumor that Southampton and the Earl of Essex were trying to overthrow Queen Elizabeth (see Hammer, 2008). I suspect de Vere knew of this treachery at the time, and that it thus influenced the theme of political corruption in *The Tempest*.

In *The Tempest*, Prospero relinquishes his magical power in several stages, from early in the play. Just after he tells Miranda it is time for him to tell her the truth about her origins, he asks her to help him take off his magic garment. After he puts it down, he says to his cloak, “Lie there my art” (Act I, Scene 2). Why? I wonder if he is enacting a step in his daughter’s emotional development, symbolically helping her to see her father in less idealized terms, as less of an omnipotent magician, so she can soon shift her primary emotional attachment from him, the only real human being she has known for the past twelve years, and be able to fall in love with the young man Prospero wants her to marry.

Recall that Prospero has been on the island for 12 years when the play takes place. Ariel was imprisoned in the pine tree Sycorax put him in for 12 years. And Prospero threatens to punish Ariel by imprisoning him in a tree again for another 12 years. I do not think these repeated references to “twelve” are accidental. De Vere was 12 when his father died; that was a major loss and a major turning point in his life. His grief over his father’s death was probably revived by losing the Queen and facing his own death.

A person’s age when a parental figure dies often becomes a crucial span of years for them in later life. For example, Ezra Pound’s pattern of making major life changes at 12-year intervals has been linked to the death of his influential grandmother when he was 12 (Kavka, in Pollock, 1970). From what we know, de Vere idolized his father, and had an idyllic life until he lost his father and was sent by the Queen to be raised by William Cecil. Cecil is mocked in *Hamlet* as the character Polonius, but, now deceased, he is depicted much more favorably in *The Tempest*. 
as Gonzalo, the kind, elderly adviser to the King of Naples. De Vere characteristically softened his acerbic caricatures of his enemies in his plays after their deaths. William Cecil’s son Robert may lie behind the character of Prospero’s treacherous brother Antonio. Robert Cecil was not only de Vere’s brother-in-law; he was also a sort of step-brother, although 13 years younger, since they were raised in the same household after de Vere lost his father.

Miranda was not yet four when she and Prospero arrived on the island, so she is 15 when the play begins. That was the age of de Vere’s wife when they were married. A father arranging his 15-year-old daughter’s marriage to a nobleman also recalls William Cecil using his power as de Vere’s guardian to marry the 21-year-old de Vere to Cecil’s daughter Anne. The tender affection between father and daughter in the play is closer to Anne’s relationship with Cecil, her father, than it is to what we know about de Vere’s distant relationship with his children.

Miranda’s mother is only spoken of once, when Prospero says to Miranda, “Thy mother was a piece of virtue, and / She said —thou wast my daughter” (Act I, Scene 2; emphasis added). In fact, de Vere doubted that his wife Anne was pregnant with his child when he was 25, traveling without her on the Continent, and learned she was pregnant. One rumor is that he had never consummated their marriage, so he would have a legal way to get it annulled if he chose. He did not live with his wife for the next few years. After her death when he was 38, their children were raised by their grandfather, William Cecil. Anne died a year after she gave birth to their youngest daughter, Susan, so Susan, like Miranda, would not have remembered her mother.

Freud, who became convinced de Vere was the author of Shakespeare’s works, speculated that in King Lear de Vere projected a fantasy of the sort of relationship he wished he had had with his children in Lear’s relationship with Cordelia. We could say the same of Prospero and Miranda’s idealized relationship. The near absence of Miranda’s mother may also reflect de Vere’s distant relationship with his mother—we have virtually no documentation of their having any contact with each other after de Vere’s father died.

Near the end of the play, Prospero says of Caliban, “This thing of darkness I/ Acknowledge mine” (Act I, Scene 5). Just earlier, he called Caliban a “bastard”—precisely what de Vere’s older sister accused him of being. Commentators have speculated that Caliban represents Prospero’s own darkest nature. If so, we might take a fresh look at the story of Caliban’s attempt to rape Miranda. (And Caliban later acts as a panderer, trying to help Stephano to rape Miranda once they’ve killed Prospero.) Does it reflect Prospero’s projection of his own incestuous feelings toward his daughter? One might reasonably ask how Prospero
has been dealing with his sexual feelings during these past 12 years on the island. (Is Ariel the young Earl of Southampton?)

In the epilogue, Prospero entreats us, the audience, to release him—not to confine him “to this bare island” by our spell. Prospero has just freed Ariel. In the very next line, he announces that his “charms are all o’erthrown” (Epilogue). By some magical transmutation, the magical power he relinquished has now become ours.

Part of the play’s magical charm is the amount of music and song in it. One of Caliban’s loveliest lines is his reassurance of Stephano and Trinculo when Ariel’s music frightens them—“Be not afeard; the isle is full of noises,/ Sounds, and sweet airs, that give delight and hurt not” (Act III, Scene 2). Several works of music were dedicated to de Vere. A few of his musical compositions for lute, keyboard, and ensemble exist. Since I believe de Vere published literary works under pseudonyms, did he also write additional musical compositions under pseudonyms? That intriguing speculation was made by Ann-Louise Silver (personal communication, March 21, 2009). John Farmer dedicated compositions to de Vere in 1591 and in 1599. He wrote in the latter that de Vere’s musical talent was greater than most professional musicians. Some literary works dedicated to de Vere may have actually been written by him; the same may be true of musical compositions dedicated to him. (As is the case with most of the documented facts about de Vere, by sharp contrast, we know nothing of the musical interests of the traditional author from Stratford.)

Some of de Vere’s earliest published poems were in Paradise of Dainty Devises, the most popular collection of Elizabethan song lyrics. That is, these were all poems meant to be sung. Two poems attributed to William Shakespeare in the 1598 The Passionate Pilgrim were reattributed to “Ignoto” in the 1600 England’s Helicon. I assume de Vere used “Ignoto” as another pseudonym. De Vere’s poetry was thus closely linked with music.

The anonymous 1589 Art of English Poesy argued that poetry is intrinsically connected with music. It called poetry a kind of “musical speech” (see Whigham & Reborn, 2007, p. 98). The world’s first poets were also the first musicians. Poetry “is a skill to speak and write harmonically; and verses or rhyme be a kind of musical utterance, by reason of a certain congruity in sounds pleasing to the ear” (p. 154). Much internal evidence, as well as some external evidence, points to de Vere as the anonymous author of The Art of English Poetry (Waugaman, 2009).

I now return to Prospero’s abandonment of his magical power—in the first scene of Act V, just before he appears to Alonso and his followers, he asks Ariel to release them. Ariel has persuaded Prospero to
forgive his enemies, and Prospero promises, “My charms I’ll break.” Prospero then reminds the spirit world of his “so potent art,” that could even wake the dead. He follows this God-like assertion of power by giving it up, so he will meet his enemies as equals —“But this rough magic/ I here abjure... I’ll break my staff,/ Bury it certain fathoms in the earth,/ And deeper than did ever plummet sound/ I’ll drown my book.” These are very specific enactments of his relinquishment of his magical power. I hear allusions to the crucifixion in Prospero’s reference to being able to wake the dead, and his forgiving his enemies before his symbolic death at the end of the play. He says his own strength is “most faint” in the epilogue, and he tells Alonso “every third thought will be my grave.” (Recall that Ariel’s first words to Prospero were “All hail, great master! grave sir, hail!”; Act I, Scene 2, emphasis added).

On the cross, Christ said “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.” One theological interpretation of the crucifixion was that Christ had to become fully human in order to be able to die. Soon after Prospero spoke of opening graves, he says he will “bury” his broken staff. Not just six feet deep, but “certain fathoms” (Act V, Scene 1), with each fathom representing six feet. And his magical book will sink so deep in the sea that it can never be retrieved. Prospero implies neither he nor anyone else will ever be able to retrieve the accoutrements of his magic. This portrays Prospero as a Christ-figure, giving up his god-like power in preparation for his death. Shakespeare had also depicted Julius Caesar as a Christ-like figure at his death (Waugaman, 2007c). There are several ostensible resurrections in the The Tempest —Prospero, Miranda, and the entire passengers and crew of the ship are thought by some to have died, only to be reborn.

It is easy to imagine that de Vere identified with Christ. De Vere was the only Elizabethan arrogant enough to have put himself in God’s place when he used God’s reply to Moses in Exodus, “I am that I am,” on two occasions. He used this phrase in a letter to his father-in-law. It was an angry tirade because he thought William Cecil was paying de Vere’s servants to spy on him. In Sonnet 121, the speaker uses that same phrase “I am that I am” in anger. [And Iago says in Othello, “I am not what I am” (Act I, Scene 1).] If the Elizabethan pseudonym “Ignoto” belonged to de Vere, it was yet another example of his hubris, since that word was previously used nearly exclusively in the Latin phrase “Ignoto Deo,” or “the unknown god.”

Although Prospero has his enemies within his power, he turns away from revenge, and chooses forgiveness and reconciliation instead. The Tempest begins with an archaic form of justice. Talion punishment, an eye for an eye, requires that the guilty party suffer the same injury he has caused another. Those whose deliberate actions led Prospero and
Miranda to be shipwrecked on the island are now shipwrecked there themselves. A more advanced concept of justice, that includes forgiveness, is depicted light-heartedly as Miranda and Ferdinand are discovered playing chess. Miranda tells Ferdinand he can cheat all he wants, and because of her love she “would call it fair play.”

In Act IV, Scene 1, Prospero introduces a magical entertainment for Miranda and Ferdinand by saying “I must/ Bestow upon the eyes of this young couple/ Some vanity of mine art; it is my promise,/ And they expect it from me.” Near the end of the entertainment, Prospero answers Ferdinand’s question about “this… most majestic vision” by saying “Spirits, which by mine art/ I have from their confines called to enact/ My present fancies.” Prospero suddenly ends this masque when he recalls the plot against his life. He then speaks some of his most beautiful lines—“Our revels now are ended: these our actors,/ As I foretold you, were all spirits… And, like the baseless fabric of this vision… shall dissolve” (emphasis added).

Think of Prospero and the impact that his magical powers have on everyone else as you read these Biblical lines, from 2 Maccabees 3:24—“... he that is the Lord of the spirits, and of all power, showed a great vision, so that all they which presumed to come with him were astonished at the power of God, and fell into fear, and trembling” (emphasis added). The Biblical context was that this vision, this Godly show of power, succeeded in deterring Heliodorus from stealing for the Babylonian ruler the money in the Jerusalem treasury that was intended for widows and orphans. Each of the three times “vision” is used in The Tempest, it is to describe the similar way in which Prospero is “Lord of the spirits.” His power over the spirit world astonished and frightened his audience.

I have mentioned this possible connection with Maccabees because de Vere underlined the number of this verse in his Geneva Bible, and also drew a large flower in the margin next to it. The chapter in which it occurs is annotated with a large pointing hand. De Vere annotated many psalms in the Sternhold and Hopkins metrical psalter bound at the end of his Bible with the same drawings. But 2 Maccabees, chapter three has the only pointing hand anywhere else in his Bible. So the triple annotation of this passage is unique; we can assume it reflected de Vere’s special interest in this passage.

In Maccabees, God’s power makes people fall “into fear and trembling” (emphasis added). Prospero’s power likewise causes trembling. In threatening Caliban to obey, Prospero tells him that otherwise “I’ll... make thee roar/ That beasts shall tremble” (Act I, Scene 2; emphasis added). Later, Caliban assumes that the drunken Stephano is a spirit
sent by Prospero to torment him as threatened, and says “Thou wilt [hurt me] anon, I know it by thy trembling. Now Prospero works upon thee” (Act I, Scene 2; emphasis added). Prospero addresses Ariel as “spirit” ten times. But Ariel is only one of many spirits over whom Prospero shows his power.

I would now like to contrast my reading of The Tempest with that of Stephen Orgel. I hope that doing so will illustrate some salient differences stemming from our respective authorship assumptions. In his excellent essay, “Prospero’s Wife” (in Murphy, 2001), Orgel gives a fascinating psychoanalytic account of The Tempest. He draws attention to the absence of Prospero’s wife in the play, and concludes that Prospero tries to be both father and mother to Miranda. Although I agree with many of Orgel’s points about the play, our interpretations of it diverge as to the influence of the author’s life experiences on the play. This, of course, is the crux of the matter when it comes to the question of what difference it makes who wrote The Tempest.

Orgel considers the play to be problematic at precisely those points where recurrent themes not only in this play, but throughout the Shakespearean corpus, are at sharp variance with the life of the traditional author. Orgel interprets Prospero’s exile from power as merely symbolizing the generic usurpation of a child’s previous position of power by the birth of a younger sibling. I believe Orgel is correct as far as he goes, but he fails to link this theme with de Vere’s actual exile from Queen Elizabeth’s court from 1581-1583. In addition, de Vere was four years old when his younger sister Mary was born — roughly Miranda’s age when she loses her place in Milan.

Miranda, like other heroines in Shakespeare, marries young. Orgel notes, “We are always told that Juliet’s marriage at fourteen [in Romeo and Juliet] is not unusual in the period, but in fact it is unusual in all but upper class families” (Orgel, 2001, p. 237; my emphasis). Orgel’s observation here is consistent with the fact that most of Shakespeare plays take place at court, and the characters that are drawn as individuals are most likely to be nobles; commoners, by contrast, are caricatured.

Miranda, as I noted, married at the same age that de Vere’s first wife, Susan’s mother, married de Vere. Orgel also notes that “the plays reveal a strong interest in the subject of illegitimacy” (p. 237), and he speculates that Shakespeare may have fathered illegitimate children. De Vere’s older half-sister took him to court after his father died, accusing him of being illegitimate. Queen Elizabeth locked him in the Tower of London after his lover Ann Vavasour gave birth to their illegitimate son Edward in 1581.
In summary, I have reviewed the evidence that Freud was correct in believing Edward de Vere wrote the works of Shakespeare. I have then explored some implications of de Vere having been the author of The Tempest. A psychoanalytic perspective is vital to help us overcome powerful group psychological forces that perpetuate traditional but erroneous assumptions that Shakespeare’s works were written by Shakespeare of Stratford. In accepting the authority of Shakespeare experts, psychoanalysts have failed to address the systematic distortions that result from a fallacious belief that Shakespeare of Stratford wrote the works. One of the worst of these distortions is the disavowal of a fundamental psychoanalytic understanding of the irreducible connections between a work of art and the artist’s life experiences and conflicts. I use Freud’s authorship theory to bring The Tempest into line with our usual psychoanalytic understanding of literature, which takes into account the ways in which a great writer’s imagination weaves a new creation out of the threads of his or her life experiences.

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