

Will the real William Shakespeare stand up ?

**The Mysterious William Shakespeare
The Myth and the Reality
Charlton Ogburn Jr.
(Dodd, Mead, 892 pp.) 1984**

review by Peter J. Cole

In this intricately woven tapestry of Edward de Vere's claim to the authorship of Shakespeare, Ogburn's case against William, christened Gulielmus, Shaksper is as strong as it is in favour of de Vere's. Not only is the Stratfordian's disguise threadbare but the few facts we know of Shaksper do not at all fit in with the sort of man Shake-Speare the dramatist might be thought likely to be. Whenever biographical comparativism is brought up regarding the obvious discrepancy, traditionalists in uproar claim that genius is immune to such mundane influences as; home life, schooling, travel and social position.

Shakespeare's writing was not done in a vacuum, uninfluenced by his surroundings. Unlike musical, mathematical or artistic genius, literary genius cannot get along without at least a critical amount of knowledge of the subject being dealt with. The amount of information necessary to write the dramas is so large, so detailed that it is highly unlikely that an unschooled glover's son from a village of 217 houses could so rise above his academic and social station and, indeed, his own time that he all but stands alone as the premier artist of England's history. Shakes-

peare is the first author in the English language to use more than 3,200 different words in his working vocabulary — he used 17,677 of which 7,200 were used but once. Just try to find a dictionary of that magnitude in sixteenth century London!

Expecting to be assaulted by Baconian cryptology, Marlovian bombast and intrigue, Darbyesque interlineation *ad absurdum* or the marginal credibility of Dr. Safa al Khulusi's Moorish claimant, Sheikh Zubair, I was surprised and impressed to discover how objective and open-minded Mr. Ogburn was toward a subject too often prone to fantasy and overly zealous extrapolation. Having co-authored a book on de Vere with his mother, Dorothy Ogburn (who also co-wrote a lengthy book on Oxford's claim with her husband, Charlton Sr.), Ogburn has an impressive list of some 2,000 cited quotations to back up his case for de Vere.

The number of parallels between the plays and de Vere's life can no longer be ignored *prima facie*. His claims must be viewed in the same light and with the same fairness as Shaksper's, not simply as another crackpot theory held by a bunch of iconoclastic fanatics. A brief biography of de Vere is in order. He was born April 22, 1550 and died June 08, 1604, apparently of the plague. After the death of his father he was brought up as a ward of the court of Queen Elizabeth — he lived in the home of the Lord High Treasurer, Lord Burghley, otherwise known as

William Cecil. At his majority de Vere was the XVII Earl of Oxford, Viscount Bulbeck, Baron Scales and Badlesmere and Lord Great Chamberlain of England. He attended Cambridge at age eight, received his M.A. at fourteen, went to Gray's Inn to study law at seventeen and married his guardian's daughter, Anne Cecil aged fifteen — he was twenty-two. Oxford spoke French, Italian, Latin, Greek and likely Hebrew. He travelled widely in France and Italy, was the best at tilt, tourney, and barriers in every tournament he is known to have entered, fought in the Netherlands and against the Spanish Armada. De Vere spent his life selling off his land to raise cash, having no head for business — his real estate agent being Burghley, his father-in-law.

So many incidents in the plays are undisguised mirrors of incidents from his own life that they appear to be deliberate analogies of the circles in which he moved. In his time it was much frowned upon for any nobleman, let alone England's premier Earl, to engage in the publishing of dramas under his own name. It was even less kindly received to publish mockeries of aristocratic goings-on and who but an audacious nobleman would dare, given Elizabeth's moodiness and her grip on domestic affairs?

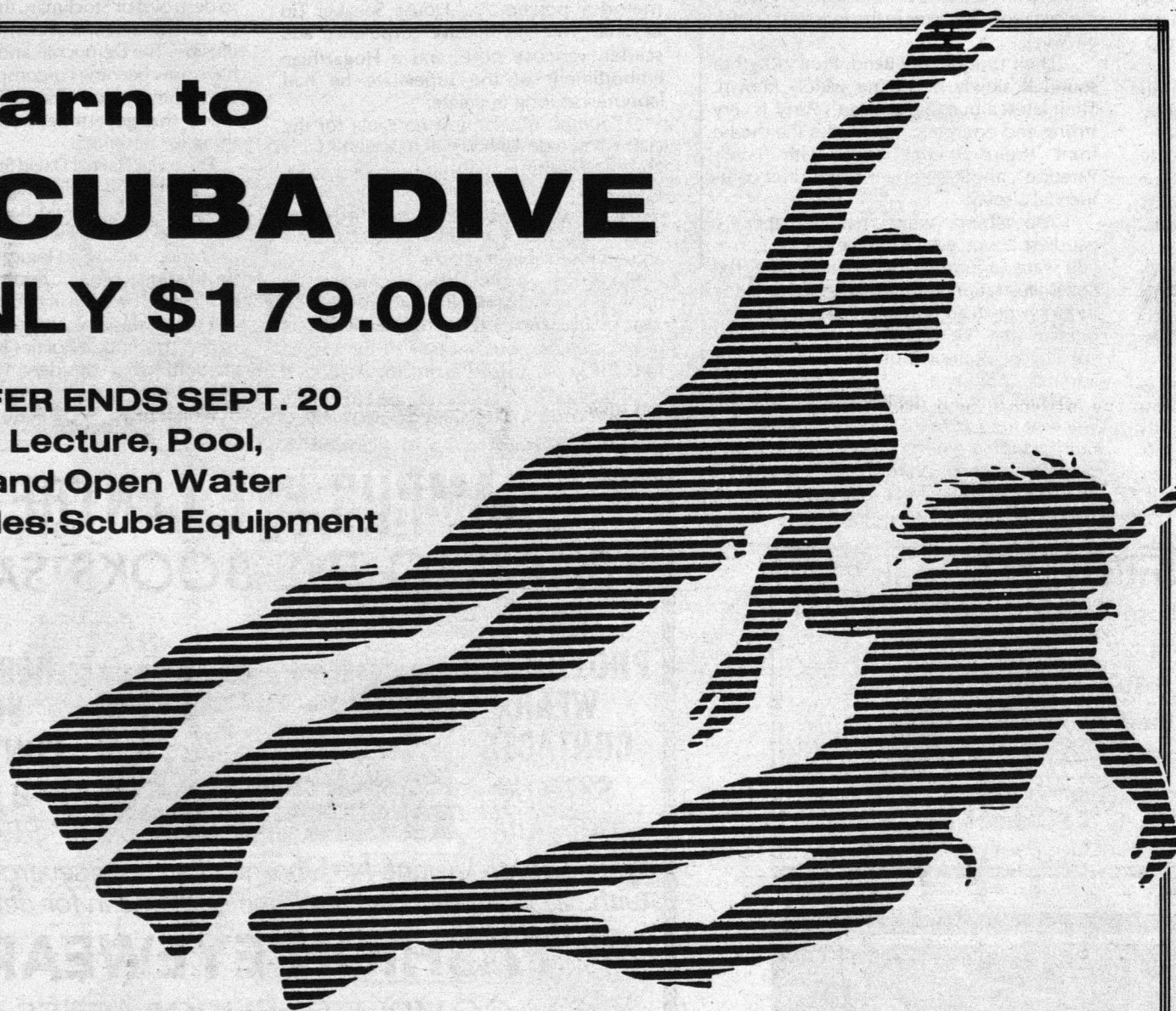
Though the style is relatively detached, disinterested as it were, from time to time Ogburn forgets himself and fires off rather rash surmises which are out of place given

the overall tone of the book. Thereby is the reader oft made bluntly aware of the employment of hearsay, speculation, and blatant fact-bending by adherents of a theory to promote and embellish their case. Little of that sort of subterfuge is present in this book but now and then the author's bias is strongly felt in parenthetical phrases, subordinate clauses and the occasional aside. By treating the story like a detective novel, Ogburn holds the reader entranced and catches him off guard. Led on, one falls into the trap of thinking that such and such is an obvious conclusion when this and that are true. This and that are not always true though — sometimes they are the author's opinion without being presented as such. *Let the reader beware.*

It is not an easy book to read because every page contains thought provoking ideas, allusions to little known historical incidents, cross-references to obscure works and letters — some unpublished and the reader feels overwhelmed by the scope of the author's knowledge of the subject. You can take these literary and historical arcana at face value, i.e. on faith or you can read the lengthy bibliography and exhaustive citation index. Having studied the subject for some years now, I've done both and find an honest, straightforward and creative approach by Mr. Ogburn with less stacking of the deck than any other author on the subject of Shakespearean contenders.

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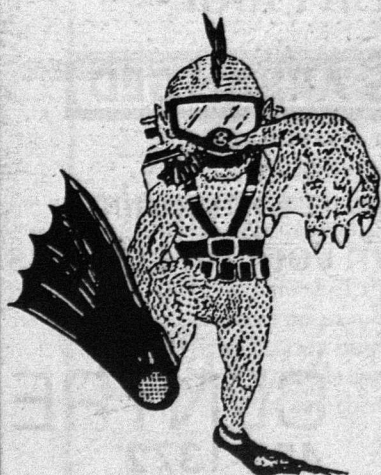
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Nov. 11, Tues./Thurs.
Nov. 15, Saturdays
Nov. 16, Sundays
Jan. 10, Saturdays
Jan. 11, Sundays
Jan. 13, Tues./Thurs.

O'Leary Pool, 6 Weeks
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