

New Light on the Dark Lady

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For anyone who cares about authors, for whom it is almost as important to know how great works of art come to be written as it is to know the works themselves, *Shakespeare's Sonnets* are of unequalled importance, for they are the only piece of his writing that we can be sure speaks to us directly from the heart of the great author about his own life. Unfortunately, although they tell us a great deal about his feelings, they don't tell us much of anything else. No one is identified, not even the poet himself. We're given very little background detail and what he does give is for the most part far too general to assign a specific time or place with any certainty or to connect with any known event.

In spite of this, or perhaps because of it, literally thousands of books have been written about the sonnets, and although many commentators stay away from any attempt to identify the personalities portrayed in them, or even when they were written, because, as one put it, it is a bog more easily got into than gotten out of, many have addressed it and in the process came up with a dizzying array of candidates and scenarios. Yet, despite the questions that still remain, most scholars willing to address the issue have agreed on a scenario based on a number of meticulous and convincing studies made in the first half of the twentieth century, which holds that all but a few of the sonnets were written over a period of five or six years, possibly beginning as early as 1589 or 90 and ending in 1595 or 96 (Akrigg 201 fn 2, 203 fn).

Identifying the cast of characters

Chiefly because these dates have been more or less firmly determined, most scholars writing today identify *The Fair*

Youth as Henry Wriothesley, Earl of Southampton, who turned seventeen in 1590. This identification works even better for Oxfordians than orthodox scholars, since Southampton was being urged by his family and friends at that time to marry Oxford's daughter, an historical fact that fits much better with the marriage theme of the first seventeen sonnets than anything the Stratfordians can suggest. Also, with Wriothesley as *The Fair Youth*, *The Rival Poet* can be identified as his beloved friend and mentor, the Earl of Essex. For Oxfordians, the identity of the melancholy poet himself certainly works better for Oxford, turning forty and up to his ears in money problems and loss of reputation, than it does for William of Stratford, just turned thirty and, as orthodoxy has it, embarked on an exciting and successful career.

Which resolves the identity of all of the major characters of the sonnets but one.

The Dark Lady

Scholars gave her the name because the poet made such a point of her dark complexion and mournful eyes. Rather unkindly he suggests that most did not consider her beautiful. In the old age, he wrote, black was not counted fair, or if it were, it bore not beauty's name, though he assures her always that he thinks her the fairest and most precious jewel. In calling her black, we mustn't be confused into thinking that, as with our concept of Othello, she was of African descent, for black was the common term then for a brunette (as we still speak of the black Irish today). Based on Shakespeare's repeated description, most scholars conclude that she was of Mediterranean descent, with the dark curly hair, olive skin and dark eyes of Spain, Italy, Southern France and Greece. Actresses like Sophia Loren and divas like Maria Callas, suggest the sexual appeal of such a woman and the temperament that often goes along with it.

What else do we know or can we guess about the Dark Lady from the poems? She was an expert keyboard player (Sonnet 128); had to have been to have impressed Shakespeare, the most musical of writers. She was committed in some way to another man (Sonnet 152); in his picque over the fact that he was not the only man in her life he came close to call-

ing her a whore (Sonnet 137). She was high-strung and demanding—tyrannous—he called her (Sonnet 131). And she was considerably younger than he (Sonnet 138).

His sexual attraction to her was so intense that he felt it as a sort of bondage that he was simply too weak to break, though he knew he should (Sonnets 134, 139, 141, 144, and 147, among others) He felt so guilty about the relationship that we might guess that the man she belonged to was a friend of his; that in loving her he was hurting one who had more of a claim on her and perhaps on him as well (Sonnets 142, 152). Yet, despite the pain she caused him, there can be no doubt he loved her, not just with the sexual passion expressed in Sonnet 147 (right), but also with a great deal of tenderness.

Rowse uncovers her identity

In 1974, the historian A.L. Rowse published his claim to have discovered the identity of the Dark Lady. Opinionated and egotistical, Rowse remains a thorn in the flesh of traditional Shakespeareans. As a fierce defender of the Stratford myth, he has been a problematic figure for Oxfordians as well. But he got this one right, and so we must be grateful.

Rowse had discovered that the diaries of Simon Forman, lodged in the Bodleian Library at Oxford University, were a gold mine of information about the Elizabethans. Forman was an astrologer and self-qualified physician to a variety of Londoners, including several noblewomen and wealthy merchant's wives. One day, while examining Forman's notes, Rowse came across the horoscope of one Emilia Lanier, who had visited Forman in May and June of 1597. According to his notes, Emilia had been at one time the mistress of Lord Hunsdon, the Queen's Lord Chamberlain.

Since Rowse had already spent a great deal of time and energy on efforts to resolve the identity of the Fair Youth, he was well aware of the qualities necessarily possessed by the Dark Lady. Emilia Lanier appeared to have several of those qualities. Although married at the time she visited Forman, she would certainly have been seen as a courtesan during the years when she was Hunsdon's mistress. It was

Sonnet 147

My love is as a fever; longing still

For that which longer nurseth the disease;

Feeding on that which doth preserve the ill,

The uncertain sickly appetite to please.

My reason, the physician to my love,

Angry that his prescriptions are not kept,

Hath left me, and I desperate now approve

Desire is death, which physic did except.

Past cure I am, now reason is past care,

And frantic mad with evermore unrest;

My thoughts and my discourse as mad mens are,

At random from the truth vainly express d;

For I have sworn thee fair and thought thee bright,

Who art as black as hell, as dark as night

also clear that she was immensely attractive to men, for Forman, who documented his active sex life in his diaries, became somewhat obsessed by her, an obsession that was not deterred by her obvious refusal to fulfill his desires.

Further research revealed that she was a member of the Bassano family, which made it very likely that she was a musician, for the Bassanos were the most numerous and important of the families that provided the music that entertained the Courts of Elizabeth and James. And because they were Italians, brought originally from Venice to the Court of Henry VIII during his courtship of Anne Boleyn, it seemed more than likely that she would have Mediterranean coloring and the tyrannous temperament that often goes with it. As the Queen's Lord Chamberlain of the Household, it was Hunsden's duty to oversee entertainment for the Court, which meant, naturally, that he would have had plenty of contact with the Court musicians.

Since Henry Carey, Baron Hunsden, was forty-five years older than Emilia, their relationship was not one of sexual passion, certainly not on her part and possibly not on his as well. The youngest of Hunsdon's ten grown children was nine years older than Emilia. So, although

Shakespeare may scorn the Dark Lady for breaking what he terms her bed vow, we can surely understand why a young woman in her early twenties might seek emotional satisfaction outside a relationship that was not a marriage and, as it turned out, assured her little in the way of future security. With her youth and her powers of attraction, Emilia would surely have been on the lookout for a relationship that would. During this period as she told Forman, she had been favored much of her Majesty and of many noblemen and hath had great gifts and been made much of (Rowse 11).

According to Emilia, Hunsden kept her in style and when she became pregnant in 1592, he arranged a marriage for her with a member of the second most important family of Court musicians, Alphonse Lanier. Her son was born early in 1593. Hunsdon continued to support her, and them, for four years until his death in 1596. It was during the year following his death that she visited Forman to see if astrology might reveal whether her husband, then with the Earl of Essex on his Cadiz campaign, would be knighted and herself made a Lady.

The Bassanos

At the time Rowse first announced his discovery (1973) he was unaware of the considerable body of information on Emilia and her family which had been uncovered by historians of early music beginning in the late nineteenth century. In their 1995 book on the Bassanos, music historians Roger Lasocki and David Prior claim that the family had an enormous influence on the development of music in England in the sixteenth century. Considered foremost in their fields in Venice, both as players and, what was perhaps even more important at the time, skilled instrument-makers, Lasocki and Prior hold that, despite the fact that they left no compositions clearly labelled as their own, they brought new ideas in musical composition to England, ideas in vogue in Italy at the time, ideas that led the way to England's finest musical hour. They kept in touch with Italian ideas by travelling back to Italy from time to time where some of them still owned property in the town of Bassano, a village about forty miles northwest of Venice.

Even more interesting, perhaps, is the fact, uncovered by Lasocki and Prior, that the Bassanos were not Italians, but Sephardic Jews. They had been residents of Venice for only a brief forty years or so before first coming to England, having left Spain during the diaspora created by the 1492 edict of Ferdinand and Isabella that banished the Jews from Spain.

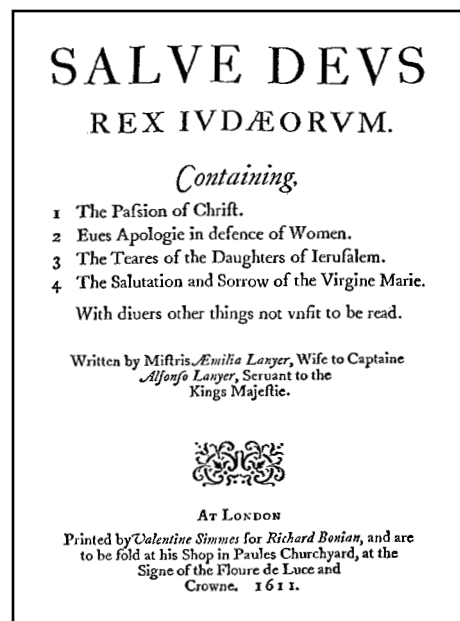
Recent research sheds light on this community of Jews who had lived and prospered in the Languedoc region of southern France and northern Spain for centuries, even before the time of Christ. It was from this area that the culture of

decades as the first woman in English history to publish a full book of poetry under her own name. This little book, *Salve Deus Rex Judeorum*, was registered with the Stationers in October 1610, and printed (by Valentine Simms) sometime in 1611. Although, like *The Sonnets*, it barely survived into the present age (there are but nine copies known to exist), King James's son Prince Henry owned a beautifully bound copy, which suggests that Emilia's book was known and read by the community for whom it was intended, the Court community that, despite her low rank, was hers since childhood.

Emilia's long poem is an account of Christ during his final days, his beauty described as a woman would have seen him. As Rowse grudgingly admits, she has an exceptional ear and a strong sense of meter and rhythm and, much like early Shakespeare, she seems to write rapidly and easily, as though thinking out loud in verse, and to express her personal feelings freely and confidently without awkwardness or self-consciousness; an astonishing performance by any poet then, much less a woman. The other long poem, a description of the estate of Cookham where she lived for a time with the Countess of Cumberland and her daughter, Ann Clifford, is another first for Emilia, for it is known as the first country house poem in the English language, a genre soon to be popularized by Ben Jonson.

Nor is this the end of her firsts, for what is perhaps of more importance to feminists even than the quality of her poetry is the fact that the preface to her poem is the first genuine feminist tract ever published in the English language. It would be the only one for almost two hundred years, until Mary Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* was published in 1792. Emilia dedicated her book to a dozen patrons, all of them women, another first, while her Preface made it clear that it was an audience of women that she was addressing.

Speaking forcefully and directly in the only prose in the book, she urges women to see themselves, not as weak, sinful, inconstant creatures, as men so often were wont to portray them, but as worthy and as virtuous as any man, and certainly as important in the grand scheme of things. She demanded that women stop



Title page of Emilia Bassano Lanier's 1611 book of poetry, *Salve Deus Rex Judeorum*.

chivalry and courtly love was spread by troubadours throughout Europe, a culture steeped in knowledge of ancient languages, in science, cosmology, poetry, music and the use of stringed instruments, a culture whose origins were the near East, originally centered on the great city of Alexandria in Egypt. Dinner table conversation at the Bassanos would have been interesting, to say the least.

Emilia the feminist poet

But there is yet another and perhaps even more interesting frame of reference for our nominee, for as Emilia Lanier she has been energetically promoted by feminist literary historians over the past two

their cruel judgements of each other, and that they would refer such points of folly to be practised by evil-disposed men, who forgetting they were born of women, nourished of women, and that if it were not by the means of women, they would be quite extinguished out of the world (Rowse 78).

She states her case in language so strong that four centuries later it antagonized A.L. Rowse. In a time when women dared not publish anything but the most cautious translations of works of piety, to speak as Emilia does, boldly and in the first person, and then to publish it under her own name, was an act of extreme bravado. How can we doubt that this is the woman that captured the heart of Shakespeare, a writer who in every one of his stage heroines showed that wit, daring and intelligence were the prime qualities he treasured in a woman? He loved music, she came from a family of musicians; he loved Italy, her family came from Italy. Forman's obsession shows that she had intense sex appeal. And, as the mistress of the patron of the Lord Chamberlain's men, raised in the family that provided the Court with their musical entertainment, she could hardly be closer to Shakespeare's world.

But what about Oxford?

Oxford as Shakespeare actually makes the case for Emilia as the Dark Lady more solid. In the sonnets to and about the Dark Lady, Shakespeare refers several times to their age difference, as in Sonnet 138 (above, right).

In 1590, when Emilia was nineteen, William of Stratford was twenty-five; in 1596, the probable end of the period of sonnet composition, Emilia was twenty-five while William of Stratford was thirty. Even today when we are more concerned about such things, an age difference of five years hardly qualifies as an age gap. To claim that it does makes nonsense of the poems. Between Oxford and Emilia, on the other hand, there was a genuine age gap of almost twenty years.

Among the dedicatory poems in the front of her book is one in which Emilia declares her gratitude to Susan Bertie, Countess of Kent, whom she addresses as the Mistress of my youth, the noble guide of my ungoverned days. Forman quoted her as stating that she was brought up on

Sonnet 138

When my love swears that she is made of truth,

I do believe her, though I know she lies;

That she might think me some untutor'd youth,

Unlearned in the world's false subtleties.

Thus vainly thinking that she thinks me young

Although she knows my days are past the best,

Simply I credit her false-speaking tongue;

On both sides thus is simple truth suppress'd.

But wherefore says she not she is unjust?

And wherefore say not I that I am old?

O, love's best habit is in seeming trust,

And age in love loves not to have years told.

Therefore I lie with her and she with me,

And in our faults by lies we flatter'd be.

the banks of Kent, which suggests that she spent a number of years in her childhood or early teen years in this noble and childless household. As Rowse notes, it is likely that it was while she lived with the Countess that she received the impressive education that she demonstrates in her writing.

As for the Countess's own education, as the daughter of Catherine Bertie, the Dowager Countess of Suffolk, her education could hardly have been neglected. Catherine Bertie was a leading member of the community of protestant expatriates who fled England during the reign of Mary Tudor and that later provided the reformed Church with its most important officials. It also provided the English literati with several highly educated women, among them Francis Bacon's mother and her sister, Oxford's mother-in-law.

And finally, Susan Bertie was Oxford's sister-in-law. Her brother was Sir Peregrine Bertie, husband of Mary Vere and one of Oxford's close friends.

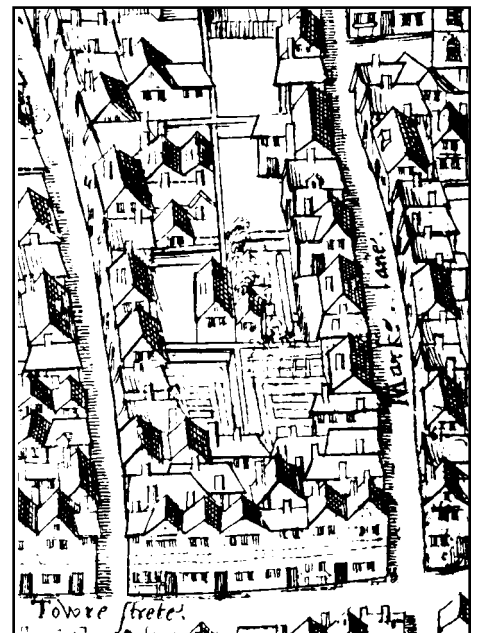
The first theater district

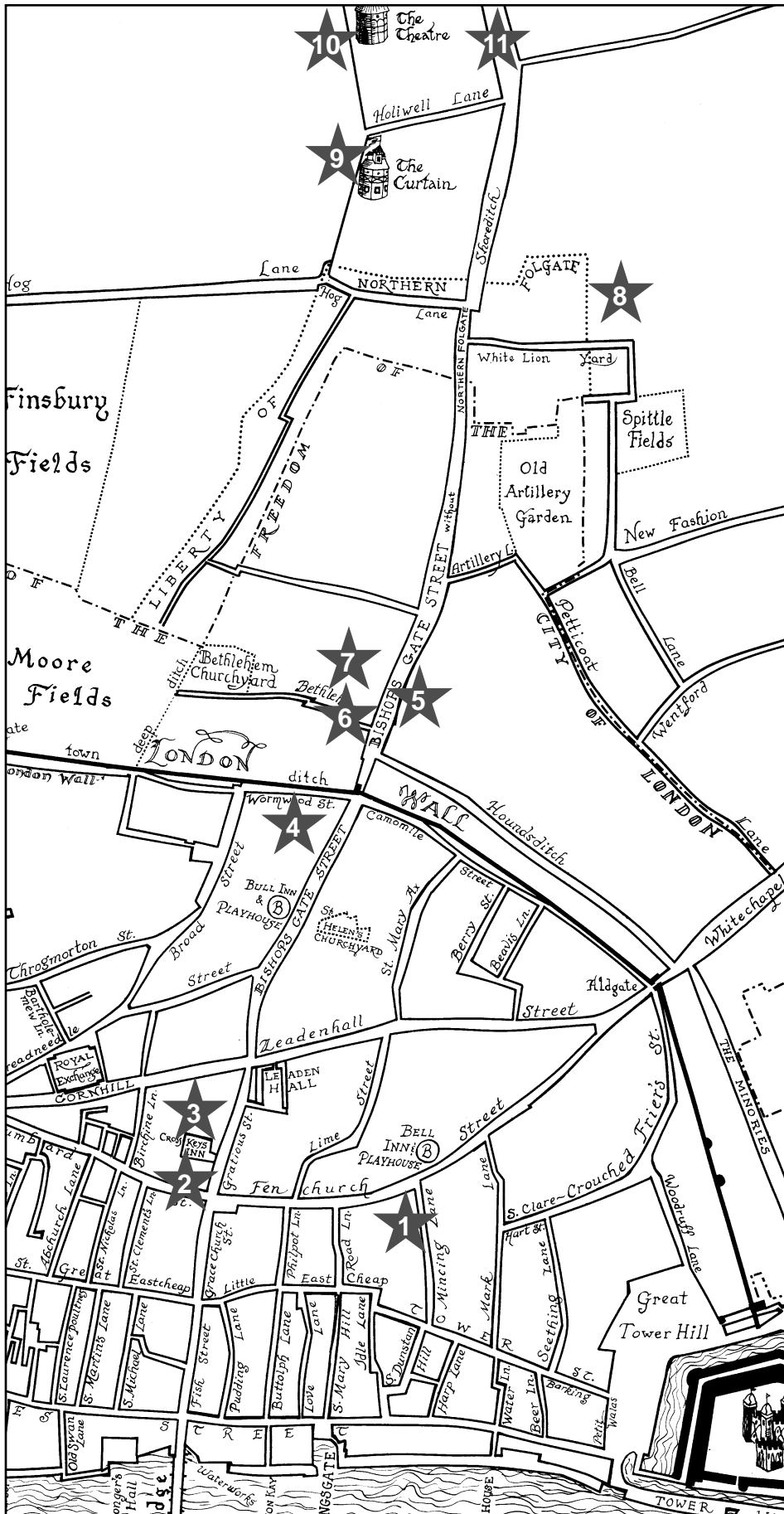
In 1552, Antonio Bassano and his brothers purchased property in the parish of All

Hallows Barking, a neighborhood frequented by foreigners, actors and musicians (Lasocki 25). Several purchased property on Mark Lane, including Emilia's uncle, Antonio Bassano, where he and his wife Elina raised their large family (Figure 1 and Figure 2, #1). Five of their six sons became Court musicians, and two of the four daughters married Court musicians. Five of Antonio and Elina's children were within four years of Oxford in age, all five of them Court musicians or married to Court musicians. There can be no doubt that as soon as he began frequenting Court holiday events, probably at the age of twelve when he came to live in London at Cecil House, Oxford would have the opportunity to get to know the professional musicians that made up the several instrumental consorts that entertained the Court on a daily basis, including, of course, the Bassano family and their most prominent member, Antonio, leader of the recorder consort.

Baptista Bassano, Emilia's father, was Antonio's youngest brother. Baptista moved to Norton Folgate, in Shoreditch (Fig. 2, #8), in the early 1560s, and over time, purchased several buildings and parcels of land in this area, so that it is fair to conjecture that it was somewhere in this neighborhood that Emilia was born. She was one of four children, though the two

Figure 1: The residence of Antonio Bassano on Mark Lane near the corner of Tower Street; probably the group of buildings at the center of this map section.

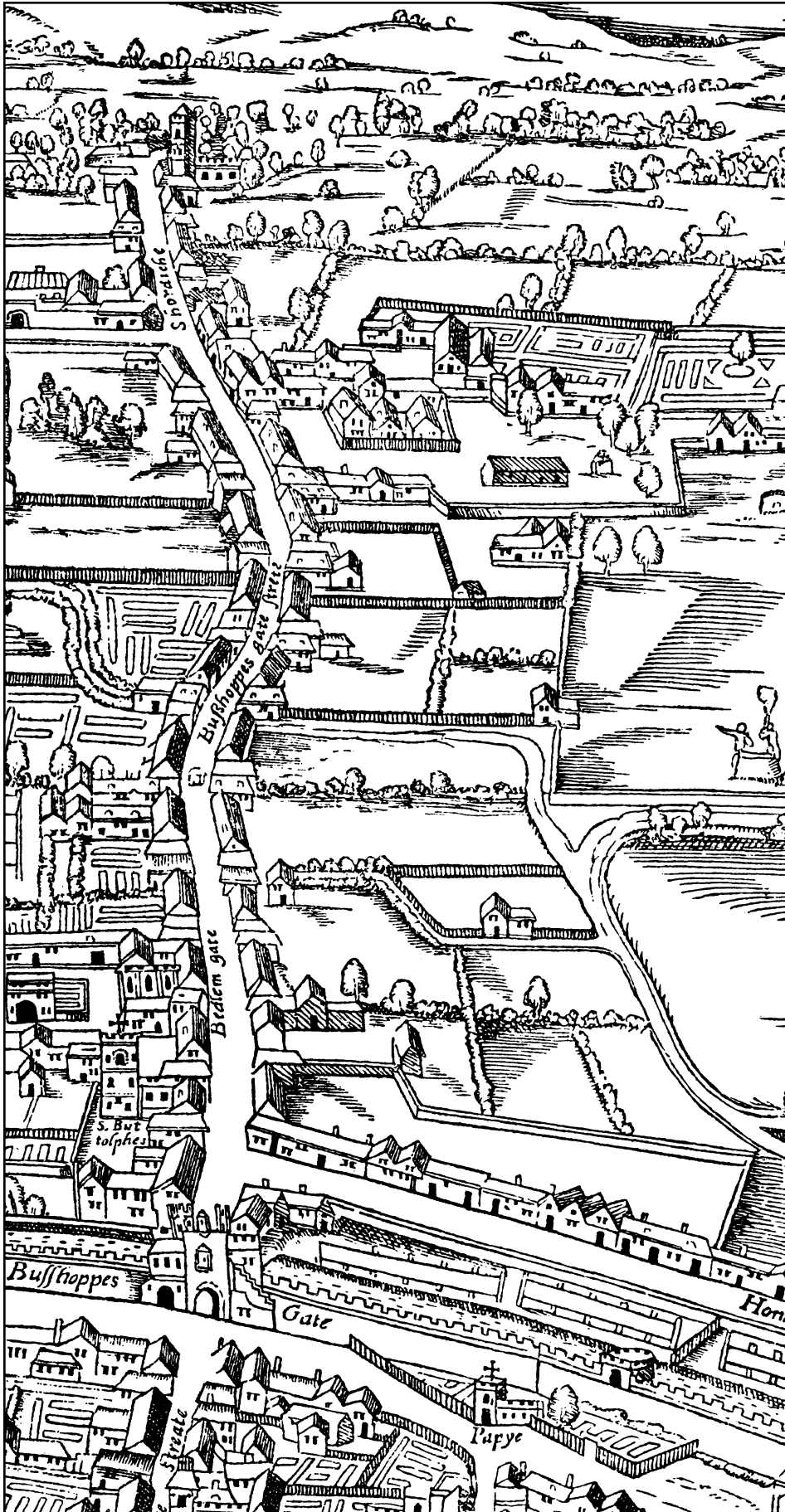




boys died in early childhood, leaving just herself and her sister. She was baptized in the parish church, St. Botolph's, Bishopsgate (Fig. 2, #6) on January 27, 1569. That her brothers died in childhood makes it even more likely that her father taught his trade to his daughters. She could also have received instruction from her uncles, Edward and Andrew Bassano, both of whom bought property in Norton Folgate in the 1570s. It is also possible that her mother, Margaret Johnson, was a member of a family of musicians as several Johnsons appear in lists of Court musicians.

Emilia's marriage to Alphonse Lanier in 1592 took place in the neighboring parish at St. Botolph's, Aldgate; but by 1597, when she visited Simon Forman, she and her husband were living in Longditch, an upscale neighborhood in Westminster near Cannon Row where many members of the nobility and Court community had London residences, among them Oxford's daughter Elizabeth and her husband, the Earl of Derby. A daughter born to Emilia in December 1598 was baptised in the local Westminster church, St. Margaret's, and then, sadly, buried nine months later back in Emilia's old neighborhood at St. Botolph's, Bishopsgate (Fig. 2, #6). Whatever her living situation in Longditch, it was clearly not of a stable or permanent nature. Rowse conjectures that she re-turned with her children to her old

Figure 2: The original theater district along Bishopsgate Street in East London: #1, the Bassano residences on Mark Lane; #2 The Bull Inn (theater); #3 The Cross Keyes Inn (theater); #4 Broad Street, Oxford's location in late 70s; #5 Fisher's Folly, Oxford's residence in the 80s; #6 St. Botolph's, Emilia and her daughter's births registered here; #7 Bedlam, the hospital for the insane; #8 neighborhood of Norton Folgate, probable location of Emilia's childhood home; #9 The Curtain, theater; #10 The Theatre; #11 the road to Hackney, Oxford's primary residence from the mid 90s to the end of his life. This map gives a sense of how close these places were to each other, and their relation to the Thames River. Bishopsgate Street was part of the ancient road leading into London from Canterbury to the South, and out of London, towards Norwich to the North, the road to Oxford's ancestral domain in NE Essex. This road crosses the river at London Bridge, the only bridge over the Thames in Oxford's time.



neighborhood, perhaps to live with relatives, while her husband was in Ireland with the Earl of Essex.

At some point between 1598 and 1609, she and Alphonse moved to the village of Hackney, a short ride further north from Norton Folgate along that same road (Fig. 2, #11). After her husband's death in 1613, Emilia rented an old farmhouse in St. Giles in the Fields, another area where there were a number of noble residents. Here she did her best to support herself and her son by operating a small school for the children of divers persons of worth and understanding, though this venture ended in grief after only two years. Court records over the years show several lawsuits she instigated over the years in attempts to secure a living for herself, her son and her grandchildren. Much like Ann Vavasor, another of Oxford's innamoratae, Emilia outlived her son, and just about everyone else in this story, dying at the ripe old age of seventy-four.

Oxford's neighborhood

London wasn't very big during this period. It isn't necessary to place Emilia and Oxford in the same neighborhood to argue that they had a relationship; they could have been lovers whether they lived near each other or not. Nevertheless, it is interesting that when Oxford lived in the mansion known as Fisher's Folly he was living in the same neighborhood in which Emilia was born and raised, and a short walk from Mark Lane, where the Bassanos had their family home. Two of Emilia's uncles, both Court musicians, both within two years or less of Oxford's own age, had homes in Hoxton, which was just north of Shoreditch and south of Hackney, where

Figure 3: Oxford's chief residence during the 1580s, Fisher's Folly, is the group of buildings just above Bedlam Gate on the right, with a tree. Keep in mind that these early maps are rarely exact, so we have no way of knowing whether this reflects the property as it was. The map dates from the 1570s. Across from Fisher's Folly was the old priory of Bethlehem, by then a hospital for the incurably insane. Below is St. Botolphs, the parish church for Bishopsgate parish, where Emilia was christened in 1569, and where her daughter was christened in 1598.

both Emilia and Oxford lived later.

It was in this same neighborhood of Norton Fulgate that James Burbage built his Theater in 1576 and where the Curtain theater was built not long after. Here also the Burbage family lived and raised their sons, one of whom, Richard, grew to become the leading actor in the Lord Chamberlain's Men in the 90s. It was in this same neighborhood that the playwright Christopher Marlowe was living in 1589 while rooming with the poet Thomas Watson. In the early 1590s, Watson was tutoring the children of William Cornwallis, to whom Oxford sold Fisher's Folly in 1589.

There is evidence that before Oxford bought and renovated Fisher's Folly in 1580 he had been living somewhere on Broad Street (Fig. 2, #4) (Nelson), one street over from Bishopsgate Street.

It is not surprising that so many actors and musicians lived in this neighborhood, since at one end of Bishopsgate street, not far from Mark Lane, were two of the inns where plays were still performed during the winter season as they had been before the public theaters were built: *The Bull* (Fig. 2, #4) and *The Cross Keyes* (#5), while at the other end of Bishopsgate Street, outside the city walls, in the suburb of Shoreditch, were located the first public theaters: *The Theater* and *The Curtain* (Fig. 2, #s 9 & 10).

Both Oxford and Emilia Bassano married in 1592 (though not to each other) and both had sons the following year. Oxford's second wife, Elizabeth Trentham, was an heiress whom he probably married to repair his ruined estate. At some point in the mid-90s, Oxford and his new wife and son moved to Brooke House in the Village of Hackney, a few miles further north along the same road that led from Bishopsgate through Norton Folgate (Fig. 2 #11). So far as we know, this was Oxford's residence until his death in 1604. We know that Emilia and her husband and son also lived in Hackney for some period between 1599 and 1609, though since we have only the single date, 1609, we don't know for how long. She may not have moved there until after Oxford's death.

None of this proves, of course, that Oxford and Emilia had an intimate relationship. It does, however, make it extremely unlikely that, given the small

size of both communities to which they belonged, that of the theater and of the Court, they managed to avoid meeting and knowing each other, and knowing this, and knowing both their natures as evidenced by their writings and their reputations, we are free to guess the rest.

If Emilia Lanier was Shakespeare's Dark Lady, we should find evidence of her, and perhaps her family as well, in the plays. Many interesting connections do exist, but there are two Shakespeare plays in particular that seem to speak to their relationship.

The Merchant of Venice

The first thing that strikes us is that the youthful protagonist who falls in love with Portia is named *Bassanio*. Names in Shakespeare can often be traced to an original story in French or Italian, but this one is original with Shakespeare. Although *Bassanio* is not exactly the same as *Bassano*, it is a fact that, in the records of the time, Bassano was spelled *Bassani*, almost as often as it was spelled with an *o*. As an Italian name, derived from a location, the family themselves may well have called themselves *the Bassani*, in Italian, the plural of *Bassano*.

The Merchant of Venice himself, the older man that loves Bassanio with the same dedication as the poet of *The Sonnets* loved the Fair Youth, is named *Antonio*. As we have already noted, in Oxford's time, Antonio Bassano was the patriarch of the Bassano family, the father of five Court musicians and two Court musician's wives, all Oxford's contemporaries in age and steeped in the culture of Italy, the culture he badgered the Queen and his guardian to be allowed to experience and which he was forced to leave after less than a year, long before he was ready to return to England. In fact, several of *the Bassani* could be regarded as real merchants of Venice, for they had business dealings that took them back to Venice from time to time. As with Antonio in the play, their success in these dealings depended upon the health and welfare of ships. But most members of the Bassano family were primarily professional musicians. More than most of Shakespeare's plays, *The Merchant of Venice* is filled with descriptions of the beauty, effects and,

above all, the importance of music.

But if the Bassanos were Jews, what about Shylock, Shakespeare's antisemitic caricature? Wouldn't they see Shakespeare's portrayal of Shylock as an insult?

Perhaps they would have known, as would all of Oxford's personal audience, that he was creating a paradox, for if the Christian Antonio was based in part on a Jew, the antisemitic caricature, Shylock, was based on a Christian, one who dealt in money, land and favors like any Jew on the Rialto; one who—in Oxford's angry opinion, at least—prized his ducats over his daughter and, while spouting Christian doctrine at every turn, openly advocated usury (Read 274). We suggest, of course, that in the early 90s version of *The Merchant of Venice*, Shylock was based on Lord Burghley, Oxford's father-in-law, who was at that time foreclosing on Oxford's supposed debt to the Crown. This and other debts were forcing him to sell the last of his properties, including his home in Bishopsgate.

Whatever the exigencies of Burghley's office that may have forced him to foreclose on his son-in-law, beneath their uneasy *dolente* lay an opposition of values that ties of marriage and progeny could never reconcile. Just as Shylock hated Antonio for Antonio's ill-concealed disdain of Shylock's religion and his trade of money-lending, Burghley resented Oxford for virtually identical reasons. They were separated by both culture and nature by an unbreachable gulf, Oxford loathing Burghley's hypocrisy, his equivocation, his lust for money and power, and Burghley hating—not understanding—everything Oxford stood for: the feudal doctrine of noble largesse along with the artist's duty to teach and cleanse society. Oxford's demand, as expressed in *As You Like It* by Jaques, for as large a charter as the wind, to blow on whom I please, for so fools have, and they that are most galled with my folly, they most must laugh.

Burghley, bitter over his daughter's death, was in no mood to laugh off Oxford's peccadilloes. Like Shylock, he used legal measures to take the pound of flesh nearest his son-in-law's heart, his theater and publishing enterprise, by forcing him to turn his attention to sheer financial survival.

Antony and Cleopatra

Numerous scholars (among them the mystery writer, Agatha Christie) have commented on the similarities between Shakespeare's Cleopatra and his Dark Lady (Rowse 29), and between their lovers, the Roman general, Mark Antony and the poet of *The Sonnets*. It is interesting that they can see the parallels while knowing nothing about Oxford and the kind of trouble his relationship with Emilia would cause within his Court community and with his in-laws; or the trouble it would have caused her, by preventing her from forming a relationship with a man who could either marry her and give her respectability or, if not marry, then at least keep in style, neither of which Oxford was in any position to offer.

When Emilia wrote of Cleopatra's great beauty as her downfall (above, right), was she apologizing to her community for the mess she and Oxford had made of their relationship and the pain they had caused his legal wife; perhaps both his wives?

Since *The Sonnets* were published in 1609 and Emilia's book was registered the following year (ent. SR October 2 1610. xxv), Rowse thinks it likely that she published as a means of defending herself against their harsh portrayal of her. The general reader would probably have had no clue as to the identity of the woman described in *The Sonnets*, but it wouldn't have been the general reader Emilia would have cared about. Those she cared about would have known immediately, or if not, they would have been quickly informed by someone who did.

If *Shakespeare's Sonnets* was suppressed, as it seems that it was, certainly the most likely agent of its suppression was the Earl of Southampton; Emilia alone would not have had the necessary clout. Freed from the Tower by James, and returned to his rank and possessions, Southampton, by then in his mid-thirties, was determined to shake off the reputation of rebel and traitor that had kept him imprisoned in the Tower for two years. At this stage of his life he would hardly have been pleased to have his youthful involvements with Shakespeare and Emilia Bassano broadcast for anyone to read who could afford to buy them. I think we can be sure he would have used every means at

his disposal—which by then were considerable—to recall *The Sonnets* and prevent their further publication.

Humiliated by the public appearance of these intimate poems, Rowse thinks Emilia fought back with the only weapon she had, her talent. She would replace Shakespeare's version of her with something that would command respect. She would let them know who she really was.

The evidence of the names

When we exclude the generic names Shakespeare took from classical literature, history or the Bible, pun-names like Doll Tear-sheet, or, as with Constable Dull, names given comic characters as a sort of cartoon sketch of their natures, we are left with a handful of names of great interest to the authorship question.

For his protagonists, Shakespeare used certain names a number of times and never used others. Of the names pertinent to our story, we note that he never used either Edward (Oxford's name) or Henry (Southampton's) for any non-historical character; though he did use William, always for nonentities, while, interestingly, John (Oxford's father's name) was reserved for servants or rascals.

Male names used by Shakespeare more than four times each are Claudio and Sebastian; five times each, Angelo and Francis; and seven times each, Luciano or Lucianus. If we include Francisco as a variation of Francis, it, too, increases to seven. But Francis, Francisco, Lucius and Luciano are, in all but one or two cases, minor characters. Antonio, used by Shakespeare seven times, is, in every case, a major or important supporting role. If we include the name Antony, it adds up to a grand total of ten, making Antonio or Antony his favorite male name. We also note that all but one of these Antonios are good characters with noble hearts, and that most are older men, mentors and benefactors to the younger protagonists. Antonio Bassano, the patriarch of the Bassano family, was about the same age as Oxford's father, while of his five sons, four were within a year or two of Oxford's own age.

Only two female names are used more than three times. Catherine, a favorite for queens, is used four times; Catherine's of stature were many in

Twis Beautie bred in Troy the ten years strife,

And carried Helen from her lawful Lord;

Twis Beautie made chaste Lucrece lose her life,

For which proud Tarquins face was so abhorred:

Beautie the cause Antonius wrong'd his wife,

Which could not be decided but by sword:

Great Cleopatras Beauties and defects

Did work Octavias wrongs, and his neglects.

Emilia Lanier (Rowse 85)

Shakespeare's time. But Emilias were not, and yet we find the name Emilia tied for first place for frequent use of female names. Shakespeare used it three times as a female name and once as a male name, Aemilius. If we include the play *Two Noble Kinsmen* as Shakespeare's, the name Emilia, at five uses, moves ahead of all other female names, with only Antonio, Francis, and Luciano ahead in number of uses of names of both sexes.

Two more plays

Another early play shows an interesting connection with the Bassanos through their names. On some rather weak evidence, the pre-Shakespearean play, *The Spanish Tragedy*, was attributed, long after its composition, to Thomas Kyd. Apart from the fact that it was tremendously popular, *The Spanish Tragedy* is intriguing because of the many similarities between its plot and themes and those of *Hamlet*. We can't help but find it of interest that the only three noble-hearted characters in the play: the protagonist, *Jerónimo*, his murdered son, *Andrea*, and the heroine, *Isabella*, have the same names as three of Antonio Bassano's children, all Court musicians or the wife of one, all Emilia's cousins, and all within a year or two of being the same age as the Earl of Oxford.

It is also worth mentioning that the name of Antonio's other daughter is the Italian version of another of Shakespeare's female protagonists, *Lucretia*. Emilia's

father's name, *Baptista*, has also been given to two characters in the plays. Thus we see that Shakespeare (plus Kyd, if you trust the orthodox view) gave many characters the names of several members of the Bassano family, names not typical to the English of that time. This, plus the fact that they are found in works that many scholars feel were written or revised at the same time (late 80s to mid-90s) seems to us well beyond the range of mere coincidence.

But there is still one more early play that offers clues to a relationship between Oxford and Emilia Lanier. The title page of *The Weakest Goeth to the Wall*, published in 1600, states "As it hath been sundry times played by the right honorable Earl of Oxenford, Lord Great Chamberlain of England, his servants. As its form and style follows that of several of the Queen's Mens plays, it was probably written for that company originally in the 1580s. It is a rather silly romance typical of the pre-Shakespearean period, featuring a noble hero in disguise, a clown with a terrible Dutch accent, and a semi-historical French venue of no great validity.

The interesting name here is that of the female lead, a most unusual name, unique so far as we know: *Odillia*. Or rather, we should say, almost unique, for the name Emilia gave her baby girl two years before the play was published, the one who died in 1598, was *Odillia*.

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