

## *The Play's The Thing*

"The Case for Oxford" by Tom Bethell and "The Case for Shakespeare" by Irvin Matus, in *The Atlantic* (Oct. 1991), 745 Boylston St., Boston, Mass. 02116.

No fewer than 58 individuals have been proposed at one time or another as the true author of the works attributed to William Shakespeare (1564–1616) of Stratford. The anti-Stratfordians' current favorite is Edward de Vere (1550–1604), the 17th Earl of Oxford, a courtier who was a scholar, athlete, and poet. Journalist Tom Bethell contends the available evidence supports their claim, but independent scholar Irvin Matus firmly insists that the plays and sonnets were written by the man from Stratford.

In the eyes of anti-Stratfordians, there exists a vast, unbridgeable gap between the apparently unlettered Stratford man and the glorious works that now bear his name. "To credit that amazing piece of virtuosity [*Love's Labour's Lost*] to a butcher boy who left school at 13 or even to one whose education was nothing more than what a grammar school and residence in a little provincial borough could provide," declared J. Dover Wilson, editor of the *New Cambridge Shakespeare*, "is to invite one either to believe in miracles or to disbelieve in the man of Stratford."

Two characteristics in the Shakespeare canon, Bethell argues, "suggest powerfully that its author was not a small-town burgher [such as Shakespeare] but rather a well-traveled nobleman [such as De Vere]. One is the very attitude. The author displays little sympathy for the class of upwardly mobile strivers of which [the Stratford man] was a preeminent member . . . Shakespeare's frequent disgust with court life

sounds like the revulsion of a man who knew it too well." Also, Bethell says, there is "the author's apparent knowledge of foreign lands . . . [It] is implausible that the Stratford man ever went abroad." However, while the man who wrote the plays set in Italy was evidently familiar with its topography, Matus notes that the playwright's characters "are always of contemporary England."

Matus says that "very little in Shakespeare's plays . . . required knowledge beyond materials that were publicly available." Formal schooling was not really a necessity. Ben Jonson (1573–1637), for example, "could not . . . have had much more than a few years of rudimentary schooling before he was put to work, probably at his stepfather's trade, bricklaying. Nevertheless, Jonson would become . . . Britain's most admired playwright in the 17th century" and a leading scholar of the classics. "Evidently," Matus observes, "there may be more to both scholarship and literary genius than a formal education."

The partisans of De Vere and other candidates, Matus says, have failed to demonstrate how any of them gained "the intimate knowledge and experience of theater and drama to create plays that remain the standard by which all other stage works are measured. Those qualifications are possessed uniquely by the man who was an active member of an extraordinary theatrical ensemble—William Shakespeare, gentleman of Stratford."

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## OTHER NATIONS

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### *China's Generation Gap*

"Chinese Youth: The Nineties Generation" by Beverley Hooper, in *Current History* (Sept. 1991), 4225 Main St., Philadelphia, Pa. 19127.

Since the Tiananmen Square massacre in June 1989, little news of open dissent by Chinese university students has reached

the West. But some young people, reports Hooper, of the Asia Research Center at Murdoch University in Western Australia,

have found another way to protest: rock music with anti-establishment lyrics. Teenage rock idol Cui Jian's latest album, "Jiejue" (Resolve), for example, begins with these lines: "There are many problems before us;/There's no way to resolve them./But the fact that we have never had the chance/Is an even greater problem."

Its enthusiasm for defiant rock lyrics, Hooper says, is but one manifestation of the fact that the current generation of Chinese youth is openly behaving in ways that run counter to both socialist and traditional Confucian values.

The nation's 300 million young people (ages 14-25) constitute one-fourth of the population. With almost no memories of the Maoist cult of austerity, Hooper writes, they have "taken to consumer culture with a vengeance." The youths' spare *yuan* have attracted both local manufacturers and multinational corporations. Like their Western peers, young Chinese now crave VCRs, computer games, and stereo systems, "not to mention brand names from Adidas to 'Fun' faded denim." The generation gap is especially wide when it comes to clothing, Hooper adds.

In TV and magazine ads, glamorous young women "drape themselves over motorbikes, sip expensive canned drinks, and tout the latest beauty products." Youth magazines such as Shanghai's *Youth Generation* and Guangzhou's *Golden Generation* now dwell on young romance. Pre-

marital sex is still officially frowned upon, Hooper says, but cohabitation has become widespread among the privileged *gaoganzidi* (the children of high Communist Party officials.) Most Chinese high-school students now attend sex education classes.

Young performers, fashion designers, restaurateurs, and others, Hooper says, make up an "economic and social elite" among the new generation. Most young people live far away from the "glamorous world of hotel bars and health clubs." But television has made many rural youths aware of the seductions of urban life, and millions of them have been pouring into China's big cities—only to find their employment prospects limited. Even high-school graduates face a tight job market, Hooper notes. Officials for years have spoken of *daiye qingnian* ("youth awaiting job assignment"), but they now acknowledge that China has a serious unemployment problem.

China's aging leaders tolerate the new youth culture in the hope that it will serve as an escape valve for the underlying "restlessness and edginess" which they fear "might boil over into demands for change or simple strife." However, before many more years have passed, Hooper believes, the rising economic, social, and political aspirations of China's young people are going to present a powerful challenge to that nation's rulers.

## *Pacifism in One Country*

"Germany, Japan, and the False Glare of War" by Daniel Hamilton and James Clad, in *The Washington Quarterly* (Autumn 1991), Center for Strategic and International Studies, 1800 K St. N.W., Ste. 400, Washington, D.C. 20006; "Japan's Response to the Gulf Crisis: An Analytic Overview" by Inoguchi Takashi and "The Japanese State of Mind: Deliberations on the Gulf Crisis" by Ito Kenichi, in *The Journal of Japanese Studies* (Summer 1991), Thomson Hall DR-05, Univ. of Wash., Seattle, Wash. 98195.

American leaders have looked to Japan as a major partner in shaping and maintaining a "new world order." But the Persian Gulf War showed that—like Germany, the other major partner in the U.S. scheme—the Asian nation is reluctant to assume

such a role. Japan only slowly and spasmodically gave financial aid (about \$10 billion, ultimately) to the U.S.-led multinational forces, and then Prime Minister Toshiki Kaifu's proposal to provide token military support to the war effort was with-