

the De Vere Society

Dedicated to the proposition that the works of Shakespeare were written by Edward de Vere, 17th Earl of Oxford

Review by John Gill , May 2009

My wife Jane, on the distaff side of my *de Vere* marriage, (the opposite side is known as the “spear-side”) loved and was intrigued and fascinated by George Dillon’s one-man play: This is important.

The menials and cleaners in recording studios were at one time known as the “old greys”. When they were caught whistling any new tunes they had picked up while they passed by with their mops and buckets, this was taken as an omen that the song would be a hit. The song had passed the “*old grey whistle test*”. This is important, because an unforced and natural opinion is reliable.

As members of the partisan coterie that is our *de Vere Society* we are often invited to credit a certain amount of dogged lunacy that makes up in effort for what it signally lacks in scholarship; but because we are so few we have to hold our tongues. I say this so that you might not discount my praise when I say of a fellow member that this is a definitive and marvellous work.

George Dillon, on stage as one-man band, impresario, lothario and Horatio has written a remarkable biography of our hero. With little more than Yorick’s skull, a big red book and a beautiful sword, his experience in playing Hamlet on the stage towards the end of the last century informs every crisply penned and spoken line. The understated lighting and the music for the performance were incisive. The whole performance in every single detail is the journeywork of one with a lifetime devoted to the stage, and one with a determination to give Lord Oxford his just dues.

Silent and riveting, the opening swordplay is the work of a master hypnotist. Before long you are taken upon the edge of his rapier into a new and an enlightening world. Any person who, bit by bit, becomes convinced that the husband of Ann Hathaway could do little more with words than sign his name in order to deprive her of a decent bed, knows that it is hard work and a long journey to become steeped in the Elizabethan world enough to divine that another was behind the works of Shake-speare. So this immaculate play is demanding. You will want to see it again. It will

serve as an introduction to the heartbreak that informs the life and work of Edward de Vere, even if you think you know all about it; and because it is such a piece of work I entreat you to check when the play will be performed near you.

George told me that he had written the play in blank verse. This is clear if you have a sight of the text, and it explains how it is that the words on the stage can be delivered with such power. The language is taut; a simplified and succinct “Shakespearean rag” that mixes the text of Hamlet in with the life of Edward de Vere so that it convinces; and in an entertaining and very creative way juggles with the known history of our nobleman.

Mr Dillon wrote the play, designed the adverts, printed the flyers paid for the set. Most of all George acted all the myriad parts, Elizabeth, DV, Ghost, Hamlet etc. He has a beautiful voice, a commanding presence and is a practised and wonderful swordsman.

George Dillon. After George Clooney and Bob Looney, what a marvellous name for a playwright and actor! I first spied him in the midst of the throng all beset with cramp trying to get warm after sitting through the AGM draughts of Castle Hedingham. At the time, he being pierced and penniless, we were pressed into giving him a lift back to the south. He turned out to be a rather earnest companion, theatrically depressed at this time at the course of his life. A year later, I reminded him of this, at *The Surrey History Centre*, the day after we saw his matchless play, but he had forgotten it all.

So to see this play in its finished form defied my expectations. In the context of what passes for drama in the modern theatre it was so startlingly well-crafted that it was a revelation. I now know more of the man and the jumbled wings that we carried south in our car. He had been at work on this play. It was an Icarus that we carried to sanctuary after he had fallen from the skies of inspiration. *The Man Who Was Hamlet* will, I hope be the work that will allow his reputation to soar; a trajectory the more transcendent because it started so low may be seen one day for what it is, a comet we return to, up there with the journeywork of the stars.

This review was written by a member for the De Vere Society newsletter.

For more about the De Vere Society visit: [www. http://www.deveresociety.co.uk/](http://www.deveresociety.co.uk/)