

ANNO DNI ÆTATIS SVÆ 21

1585

QVOD ME NVTRIT
ME DESTRVIT



The Theatre Conference

present :

Edward de Vere, Earl of Oxford
Francis Bacon
Christopher Marlowe
Ferdinando and
William Stanley, future earls of Derby
and
an invited guest

The conference takes place towards the end of May 1593.

Copyright © Christian Lanciai, September 2007.

Oxford Well, however shall we solve this problem? I refuse to meddle with it myself.

Bacon Let me remind you, that you started the whole thing, dear cousin. You can't deny your responsibility.

Oxford And why the hell did you have to get into such a brawl with the authorities, Kit? You could have had a splendid career as the head of the whole theatre venture, if you hadn't made so many rogues your enemies.

Marlowe They picked a quarrel with me. I didn't ask for it. I didn't invite Bradley to duel with me. I didn't provoke the Flushing trouble. I did nothing to start archbishop's Whitgift's inquisition.

Oxford If anyone asked for trouble, you did! You with your pamphlets against the whole Anglican church!

Marlowe I was never caught. No one knows it was me.

Bacon But your atheistic lecture was still somewhat over the top, Kit. You knew very well that no authority in this country would have tolerated anything like it, since all authorities with the crown and Queen on top depend entirely on the Christian faith for their positions.

Marlowe That's why I gave the lecture clandestinely and only to the happy few.

Bacon But you must have been aware of the nature of rumours how nothing can check them.

Marlowe Isn't that what our whole activity is all about? Isn't everything we do 'in secret'? Haven't you, Sir Edward, written every single play of yours and had it produced 'secretly'?

William That's in many ways our very dilemma, that we are always compelled to hide underground with our enterprise. But a worse dilemma is that the authorities are after you, Kit. We must get you out of the way somehow.

Ferdinando He can easily find refuge with our Catholics up in Lancashire.

William It's not enough. The authorities headed by Whitgift want him dead together with the heretic, traitor and spy John Penry.

Marlowe Who is innocent.

William That's not the point. They will hang him.

Marlowe Is it utterly impossible to snatch him out of the gallows? I knew him well. We shared the same criticism against the Church. We were fellow students. I always appraised him greatly.

William I am truly sorry, but it's completely impossible to save him. Father has spoken with both the Queen and Burghley. Whitgift craves his life.

Ferdinando What about the following scheme. Let's take care of Penry's body after the hanging and let it pass as Marlowe's. In that way we can save Marlowe from the inquisition peril by having him publicly declared dead.

William It's risky. Afterwards no one must whisper a word about that he lives, and he can never again use his own name.

Bacon We simply have to protect him and guarantee his safety with an obligation of total silence.

Oxford We are still stuck with the basic problem. Whatever shall we do with all the plays, if not even Marlowe can head them with his name? My name is out of the question, as are yours, Ferdinando and William, since we are nobles. Bacon is involved with the government, so his name can't be used either. You were the perfect playwright, Kit, and could have taken care of all our plays and given them a classical status, and then you get denounced by one of your fine friends for atheism, coining, homosexuality, blasphemy and all the worst crimes in christianity just because you can't shut up but have to boast your intelligence and controversial ideas to give any informer the chance to report the worst possible about you to the highest authority of the realm! From having been our greatest hope you have turned into a total disaster, Christopher Marlowe!

Bacon Take it easy, cousin. Don't be so theatrical. You have got into various trouble spots yourself in your heyday and constantly been banished from court for that reason. You survived only because you were of the country's most ancient nobility.

Oxford But we have a problem on our hands! We can't continue our theatre activities with its fantastic expansion potential without a single marketable name!

William We have Chapman.

Oxford That old fogey! A mouldy academician! No one takes him seriously as a poet. He is only as good as a translator.

Bacon I have another idea. I happen to know a young ambitious theatre amateur from the country, who has escaped from home from a considerably older wife with some too hastily conceived children, three of them, who has come to London to try his luck. He is simple but honest and a splendid reciter. I have heard him. He could take on any part.

Ferdinando You suggest that under his cover as a theatre enthusiast, Marlowe could continue writing plays and go on working on the old ones?

Bacon I have tried the possibility carefully and found it workable.

Oxford Who is this amateur player? He mustn't be stupid, he must be perfectly reliable and be able to sustain whatever part we give him to play, he must be able to keep up appearances under any circumstances.

Bacon He is quite reliable since he is a shrewd business man. He knows the importance of silence when it's best for all.

William Would it be possible to see him?

Bacon I have actually asked him to come here for you to make his acquaintance, if it would please you.

Ferdinando You must be prepared to give up your name, Kit, to let another carry your plays.

Marlowe What's a name? Sir Walter Raleigh has consistently refused to put his name under anything he has written.

Oxford He is not alone. Almost all of us did the same.

William Pity he couldn't be here with us today.

Bacon He knows what's going on. I keep him informed.

Oxford So may we meet this intriguing helper?

Bacon (rises and opens a door) Please enter, William Shakspeare.

(A man enters of clear eyes and open brows, his character giving a clear impression of confidence, honesty and reliability.)

Oxford So this is our man. Do you know what it is all about?

Will (to Marlowe) Your plays are outstanding, Kit Marlowe, and I regret that you can't carry on your activity. I will gladly offer you my name, if it means you can continue writing for us.

Marlowe You seem to be one of those rare persons I could easily co-operate with and trust.

Will I will be at your service out of gratitude for your art.

Ferdinando The case seems to have cleared.

William Yes, I think we have solved the problem.

Bacon Then we just have to get started and organize the transition. We have to inform the Queen and have her with us. You must convince your father, Ferdinando and William, to persuade the Queen. She will have to provide a suitable coroner to take care of the formalities. Marlowe's death must become irrefutable.

Oxford This is a better intrigue than any of our plays.

Bacon Maybe it will be staged one day.

Oxford After my death in that case, and after we all have passed away. We commission Marlowe to write any play except that one.

Bacon What about it, Marlowe? Are you on?

Marlowe Of course.

Bacon Anyone against? Master Shakspere?

Shakspere If only the production of the plays may continue I am sure the enterprise must be exclusively successful.

William Can we count on the Queen?

Oxford She loves the theatre. She can't do without it.

Bacon You are perfectly right, cousin. No one is more certain for our safety than the Queen, since the theatre is developing into the formost propaganda instrument of our government.

Ferdinando Then we are all agreed. Thank heavens for that! You'll manage, Marlowe! *(gives him an encouraging slap)* You can continue the dramatization of the war of the roses in more peace and quiet than ever.

Marlowe That's all I desire: to be able to continue to work in peace.

Oxford That's a common interest to us all.

Bacon The conference is over.

(They break up under more relaxed and relieved auspices.)

This effort to reconstruct the set-up of Shakspere is firstly based on the fact that Bacon was the only one among the Shakespeare candidates who had definite connections with the Shakspere family of Stratford.

Of course, it's only a speculation, but it fits the pieces we already have of the Shakespeare puzzle, constituting and sketching some possible missing ones.

Regard it merely as a theory and just another contribution to the ocean of Shakespeare speculations and theories.

Chris