

## George Peele's Personal Note from Shakespeare

by Robert R. Prechter

In "Who Wrote George Peele's 'Only Extant Letter'?" (Newsletter, Winter 2022) I proposed that that the gift note addressed to Lord Burghley and purportedly signed by George Peele in January 1596—reproduced<sup>1</sup> here as Figure 1—was in fact written by the Earl of Oxford. This article proposes that it was also composed by Shakespeare.

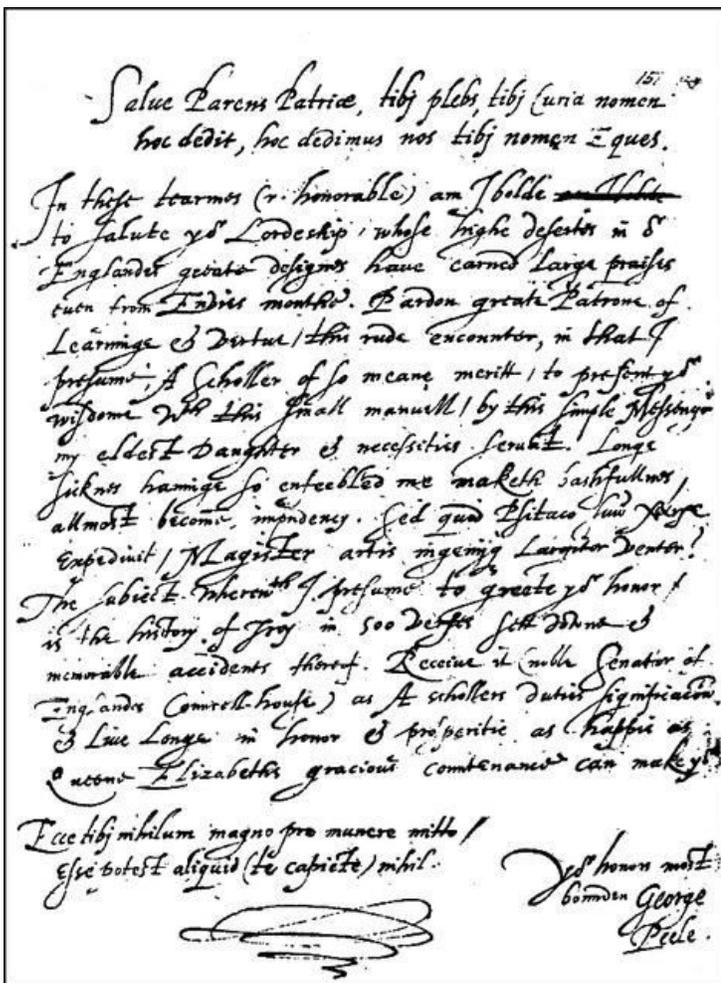


Figure 1

Peele's note is brief. Even if Shakespeare wrote it, one would hardly expect every line to echo passages from the Bard's works. But that is just what we find.

The following matches do not present merely occasional usages of like terms, but rather markedly similar texts and constructions. Let's examine them in turn:

**Peele:** "In these tearmes...am I bolde to salute your Lordship"

**Shakespeare:** "...Makes me the bolder to salute my king / With ruder terms" (2 Henry VI I.i)

**Peele:** "r. honorable...your...high desertes"

**Shakespeare:** "honors on your high deserts" (Richard III I.iii)

**Peele:** "Englandes great designes"

**Shakespeare:** "our great designs" (Antony and Cleopatra II.ii); "no great designs" (Richard III III.iv)

**Peele:** "earned large praises"

**Shakespeare:** "earned praise" (Pericles IV.Pro)

**Peele:** "even from Envies mouth"

**Shakespeare:** "above pale envy's threatening reach" (Titus Andronicus II.i); "envy's reach" (Merchant of Venice IV.i); "envy's hand" (Richard II I.i) [personification]

**Peele:** "Pardon greate Patrone...this rude encounter"

**Shakespeare:** "Apollo, pardon / My great profanenes" (The Winter's Tale III.ii)

**Peele:** "Patrone of learninge & vertue"

**Shakespeare:** "patron of virtue" (Titus Andronicus I.i)

**Peele:** "rude encounter"

**Shakespeare:** "this rude place we live in. Well encounter'd" (Cymbeline III.vi)

**Peele:** "so meane meritt"

**Shakespeare:** "so mean condition" (2 Henry VI V.i)

**Peele:** "to present your wisdom with"

**Shakespeare:** "confine him where / Your wisdom best shall think" (Hamlet III.i)

**Peele:** "this simple Messenger"

**Shakespeare:** "this distemper'd messenger" (All's Well That Ends Well I.iii); "this churlish messenger" (Twelfth Night II.ii)

**Peele:** "necessities servant"

**Shakespeare:** "necessity's sharp pinch" (King Lear II.iv) (personification)

**Peele:** "Longe sicknes...me"

**Shakespeare:** "my long sickness" (Timon of Athens V.i)

**Peele:** "bashfullnes"

**Shakespeare:** "bashfulness" (Midsummer Night's Dream III.ii)

**Peele:** "impudency"

**Shakespeare:** "impudency" (Love's Labour's Lost V.i)

**Peele:** "presume to greete"

**Shakespeare:** "presume to [verb]" (six times)

**Peele:** "sett downe"

**Shakespeare:** "set down" (44 times)

**Peele:** "memorable accidents" (meaning "incidents")

**Shakespeare:** "These happen'd accidents" (The Tempest V.i); "future accidents" (1 Henry VI V.iii);

"this night's accidents" (Midsummer Night's Dream IV.i) (each with a preceding adjective)

**Peele:** "Receive it..."

**Shakespeare:** "Receive it from me" (Cymbeline III.i;

*Othello* III.iii); “Receive it friendly” (*Cymbeline* III.v) (each begins a sentence)

**Peele:** “duties significacion”

*Shakespeare:* “duty’s rites” (*Richard III* IV.i); “duty’s sake” (*Two Gentlemen of Verona* III.i)

**Peele:** “live longe in honor & prosperitie”

*Shakespeare:* “For which live long to thank both heaven and me” (*All’s Well That Ends Well* IV.ii)

(both lines are in iambic pentameter; they could form a rhymed couplet)

**Peele:** “Queen Elizabeths gracious countenance”

*Shakespeare:* “his neigh is like the bidding of a monarch and his countenance enforces homage” (*Henry V* III.vii)

**Peele:** “Yor honors most bounden”

*Shakespeare:* “I rest much bounden to you; fare you well.” (*As You Like It* I.ii)

(in both instances, the speaker takes his leave)

Peele’s dual lines of Latin and Greek may be translated as follows:

But what parrot’s “Vale!” succinctly expressed, “The belly is the teacher of the arts and the bestower of wit”?

The Greek word equating to the exclamation *Vale* in Latin, meaning “be well” or “be strong,” was used in archaic English to mean “farewell.”<sup>22</sup> Peele’s Latin precept “was observed by the Roman satirist Aulus Persius Flaccus.”<sup>23</sup> It is expressed in English as “Necessity is the mother of invention.”<sup>24</sup> Peele implies that poverty prompted his effort. Who else couples *parrot* with a Latin quotation? See for yourself:

*Shakespeare:* Mistress, “*respice finem*,” respect your end; or rather, the prophecy like the parrot, ‘beware the rope’s-end.’ (*The Comedy of Errors* IV.iv)

Even the idea behind Peele’s concluding Latin couplet,

*Ecce tibi nihilum magno pro munere mitto*

*Esse potest aliquid (se capiete) nihil,*

which I have translated as follows, shows up in

Shakespeare:

**Peele:** Lo! I send you nothing great as a gift/

Something it may be, take it as nothing.

*Shakespeare:* “That nothing-gift” (*Cymbeline* III.vi)

That is an impressive set of correspondences.

Figure 2 is a reproduction of W.W. Greg’s<sup>5</sup> rendition of the text of the body of Peele’s letter. I have highlighted the passages linked to Shakespeare. As you can see, the letter echoes the Bard through and through. Most words in the unhighlighted portions show up in Shakespeare, too, but are not particularly special. We even linked the concluding Latin couplet, which Greg’s page omits, to the Bard.

The Shakespearean expressions in Peele’s note are even denser than those of the Earl of Oxford’s own youthful song lyrics,<sup>6</sup> and for a good reason: Oxford was

no more than fifteen when he wrote his lyrics; but when he wrote Peele’s poem he was age forty-five, by which time he had incorporated many of his finest poetic expressions into **Shakespeare**’s plays.

In short, Shakespeare wrote George Peele’s letter. As shown in my previous article, Oxford wrote Peele’s letter. As Oxfordians have demonstrated, Shakespeare is Oxford. So, Peele is Oxford, too.

In these tearmes (r. honorable) am I bolde [am I bolde]  
to falute yo<sup>r</sup> Lordeship/whofe highe defertes in o<sup>r</sup>  
Englandes greate designes haue earned large praifes  
euen from Envies mouthe. Pardon greate Patrone of  
learninge & vertue / this rude encounter, in that I  
prefume, A Scholler of fo meane meritt / to present yo<sup>r</sup>  
widome w<sup>th</sup> this small manuell / by this simple Mefsenr  
my eldest Daughter & necessities seruāt. Longe  
ficknes hauinge fo enfeebled me maketh bashfullnes  
almost become impudency. Sed quid Pfitaco fuū xαίρε  
expediuit / Magister artis ingenijq; largitor venter?  
The subiect wherew<sup>th</sup> I prefume to greete yo<sup>r</sup> honor/  
is the history of Troy in 500 verses fett downe &  
memorable accidents thereof. Receiue it (noble Senator of  
Englandes Councill-houfe) as A schollers duties significaçon  
& liue longe in honor & prosperitie as happie as  
Queene Elizabeths gracious countenance can make yo<sup>r</sup>

## Figure 2

Observe that in the final line of the note, Peele spells *you* as *yow*. Oxford does the same thing in his letters.

## George Peele Could Not Have Written the Note

We can go beyond demonstrating that Oxford wrote Peele’s note and that Shakespeare wrote it. We can show that Peele almost certainly could *not* have written it.

The writer says that his *eldest* daughter would deliver the note and gift to Lord Burghley. My previous article observed that the circumstances pertaining to Oxford, Burghley and Elizabeth Vere at the time are neatly compatible with the scenario that Oxford wrote Peele’s letter and that his daughter Elizabeth delivered it to her grandfather. The use of the word *eldest*, as opposed to *elder*, indicates that the writer had more than two daughters. Oxford had three, and in the summer of 1595 the eldest, Elizabeth, had been staying with him at Hackney while her husband stayed behind with Burghley. In January 1596 she was twenty years old, a

reasonable age for a woman who might travel and serve as a courier.

What we know of George Peele, in contrast, is *incompatible* with the assumption that he wrote the note. Virtually nothing is known of George Peele's circumstances at any time in his life, much less at the time of the letter's composition. But there is a pertinent fact from earlier years.

George's father, James Peele, kept records of his family's major events within the books of Christ's Church Hospital, the school for poor children and orphans for which he clerked. Horne's diagram<sup>7</sup> (see Figure 3) summarizes James's records of family events pertaining to his five children, the spouses of four of them, and fourteen grandchildren by three of them. For George, there is only a blank where children might be, indicating that James never recorded a child for George.

James died on December 30, 1585.<sup>8</sup> The last family event he recorded occurred on April 7, 1583. Presumably, had there been any significant events in the ensuing two and a half years, James would have recorded them. So, we may conclude that George and his wife, who married in 1580, produced no children at least through their first five to six years of marriage, which in turn implies, especially in those days, that they were on the path toward a childless marriage.

Even if one were inclined to try to rescue the orthodox story by proposing that George and his wife suddenly started producing children one after another in 1586, and that all of them were daughters—a 1-in-8 probability—the eldest would have been only nine years old in January 1596, hardly an age to be making crosstown deliveries.

Why, then, have biographers confidently stated, "Peele did have daughters by his first marriage (to Anne Christian of Oxford)..."?<sup>9</sup> Answer: They have assumed from the reference to "my eldest daughter" in the 1596 note that Peele had daughters, so they gave them to him.

**Shakespeare Wrote George Peele's Poems, Too** George Peele's *Anglorum Ferae*, available only in manuscript, celebrates the noble assemblage at a tilt held on November 17, 1595, in honor of the 37<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Queen Elizabeth's accession. The poem begins,

Descende ye sacred daughters of King Jove  
Apollo spreade thy sparklinge wings to mounte,  
And trye some lightsome sweete Castalean springs,  
That warble to their silver windinge waves,  
Making softe musick in their gentle glyde.

These five opening lines sound Shakespearean, but are they Shakespeare? Let's examine them:

*Peele* bids Apollo, "spreade thy sparklinge wings"  
*Shakespeare* speaks of a king whose "arms spread wider than a dragon's wings." (1 *Henry VI* I.i)

*Peele*: "wings to mounte"  
*Shakespeare*: "mount with wings" (*Richard III* V.iii)

*Peele* bids "Apollo" to try "Castalean springs"  
If you search *Shakespeare's* plays and poems, you will not find this language. But you will find it in the dedication to Southampton in *Venus and Adonis*, which begins with a pair of Latin lines that include these words: "Apollo/ Pocula Castalia plena ministret aqua."

*Peele*: "silver...waves"  
*Shakespeare*: "silver waves" (*The Comedy of Errors* III.ii)

*Peele*: "waves...in their gentle glide"  
*Shakespeare*: The current that with gentle murmur glides" (*The Two Gentlemen of Verona* II.vii)

All five of those parallels occur in just four lines of text.

### The Peele Family Tree: No Daughters Recorded for George

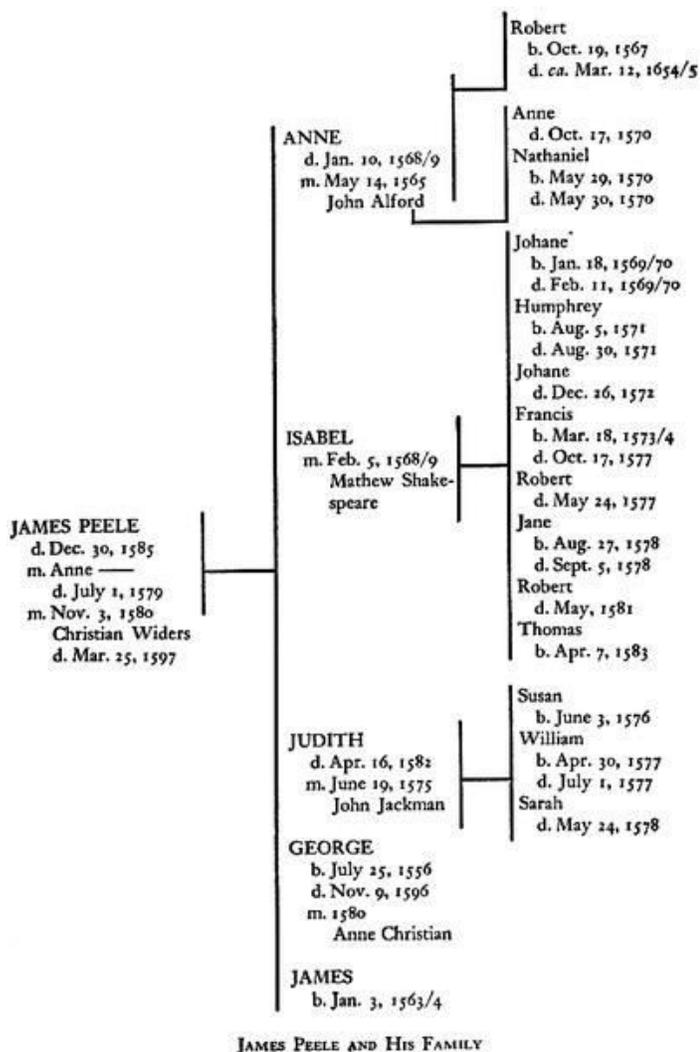


Figure 3

As with Peele's note, this is not a list of incidental terms but of nearly identical thoughts. And once again, they pour forth in a flood. Such parallels continue throughout the rest of the poem and within Peele's other poems as well.

### The Pen Is as Revealing as the Spear

My previous article demonstrated that Oxford's handwriting is strikingly similar to Peele's, notably in cases where their letter forms differ from those of most other writers featured in Greg's book. The similarities are especially impressive given the differences between the plainer writing of Oxford's business letters and the fancier writing of Peele's high poetry and his grandly composed gift note. The boxes shown in Figure 4 display four additional letter formations, drawn from Peele's *Anglorum Feriae* manuscript and two of Oxford's handwritten letters, dated October 31, 1572, and July 7, 1594.

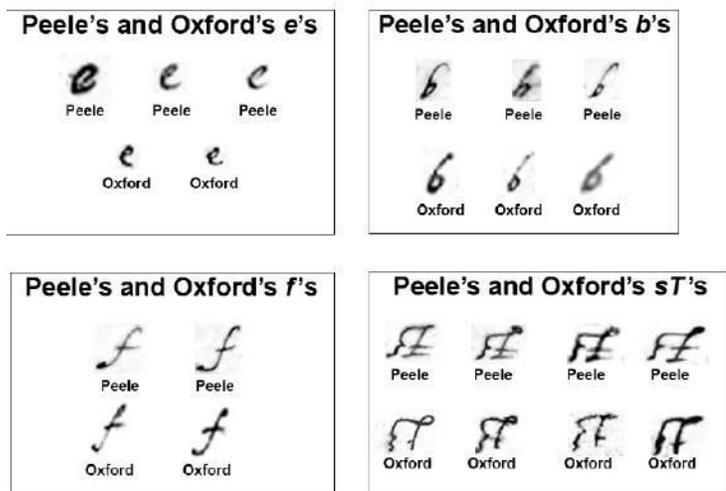


Figure 4

But there is more to handwriting than letters. Glance back at Figure 1; in the bottom left corner Peele concludes his note with a tornado-shaped flourish. The same flourish appears below Peele's signature on the receipt he signed at the University of Oxford in 1583 (discussed in detail in the previous article). If an actual George Peele wrote the note and signed the receipt, surely his expressive doodle would be unique to him, right? It isn't.

Oxfordian Jonathan Foss<sup>10</sup> noticed that someone else drew the same type of expressive swirl beneath his personal signature, namely the Earl of Oxford. His "1575 signature [was] found in the Venetian archive attached to

a petition that the Council of Ten grant him permission to see the secret chambers in the Doge's Palace where he could view paintings by Veronese, Tintoretto, and other Renaissance masters."<sup>11</sup> The document was discovered in 2015 by Michael Delahoyde and his research partner Coleen Moriarty. The full picture is shown in Figure 5. Notice Oxford's distinctive, telltale capital *E*, rendered here twice, which matches Peele's usage as well as Oxford's from his letters, as displayed in the previous article.

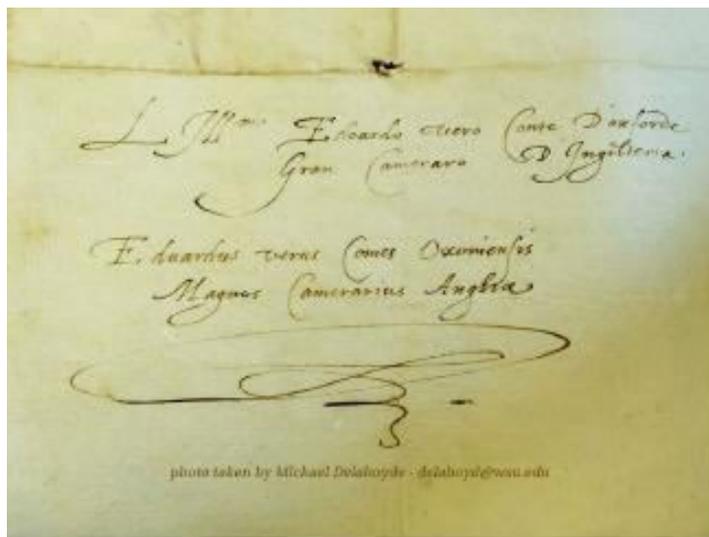


Figure 5

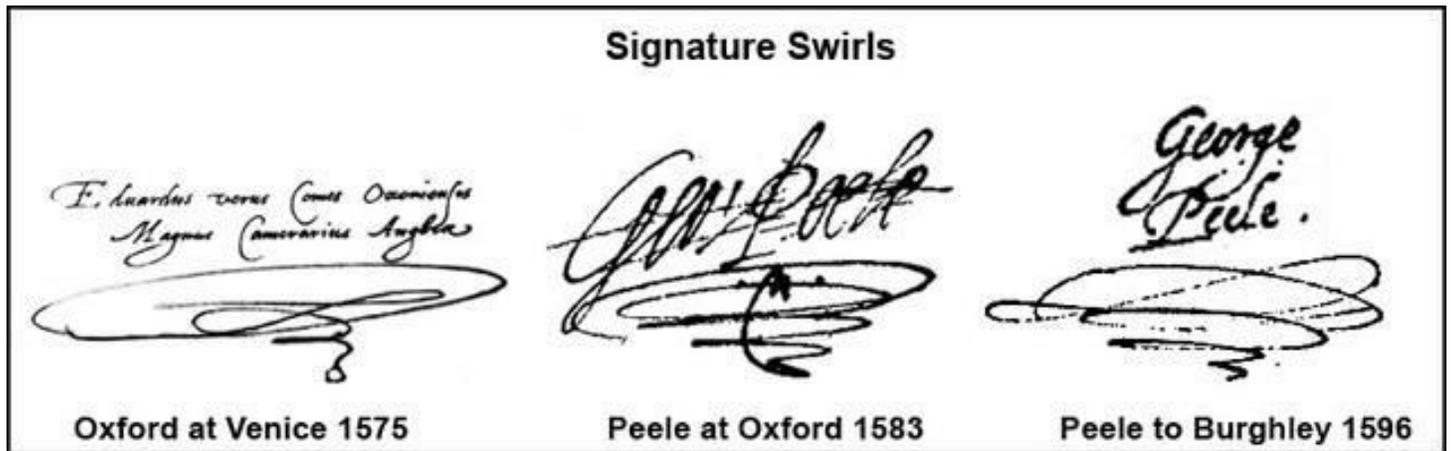
So, the flourish is unique, all right—to the Earl of Oxford. Figure 6 shows all three images, from 1575, 1583 and 1596, a span of twenty-one years.

To conclude, the Earl of Oxford handwrote his name and title at Venice in 1575, George Peele's signature on the receipt of 1583 and Peele's letter to Lord Burghley of 1596. Because scholars agree—correctly—that the handwriting on the note is the same as that on the manuscript, we have further confirmed that Oxford also handwrote Peele's *Anglorum Feriae*, dated 1595.

### A Genuine Smoking Gun

A dream of Oxfordians is that someone will discover a manuscript, in Oxford's hand, of a play or poem by Shakespeare. It hasn't happened yet.

We do, however, have something of matching quality: a manuscript, in Oxford's hand, of a narrative poem titled *Anglorum Feriae, Englandes Hollydayes*, signed in the name of George Peele. The manuscript attests to the fact that Oxford wrote literature under at least one cover name, which is what Oxfordians have long argued he did under the name Shakespeare.

**Figure 6**

[This article is excerpted from the George Peele chapter of *Oxford's Voices* (oxfordsvoices.com). Prechter's video presentation to the Shakespeare Authorship Roundtable offers additional evidence that George Peele was a Voice of the Earl of Oxford. It is posted on YouTube under the title, "George Peele, His Only Surviving Letter."]

## References:

- <sup>1</sup> British Museum, Lansdowne 99, No.54, as published in David H. Horne, *The Life and Minor Works of George Peele*, Yale University Press (1952), 106.  
<sup>2</sup> "Vale," English Dictionary, lexico.com.  
<sup>3</sup> Moderator Ww Ww, "LT-Idioms-Latin," lyricstranslate.com.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> W.W. Greg, ed. *English Literary Autographs: 1550-1650*. Oxford University Press (1932).

<sup>6</sup> Robert Prechter. "Verse Parallels between Oxford and Shakespeare," *The Oxfordian*, Vol. 14 (2012), 148-155. Roger Stritmatter, ed. *The Poems of Edward de Vere...and the Shakespeare Question*. Shakespeare Oxford Fellowship (2019).

<sup>7</sup> Horne, 21.

<sup>8</sup> Horne, 20.

<sup>9</sup> Charles Nicholl. *A Cup of News—The Life of Thomas Nashe*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul (1984), 57.

<sup>10</sup> Jonathan Foss, email June 10, 2022.

<sup>11</sup> Michael Delahoyde, email June 14, 2022.