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Pseudonymous Shakespeare: Rioting Language in the Sidney  
Circle (review)

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projects are subject. The status and prestige the Fo/Rame theater has acquired only makes these trappings more visible. Hence, the analytical production history Taviano offers is both representative and unique. It inspires transcultural theater practices that avoid these trappings and are more attuned to the use of idioms, references, and rhythms, while they also involve teams that include insiders to both cultural arenas. This delineates the book's potential also to help others envisage the more genuine and transformative transcultural theater practices of the future.

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**Penny McCarthy. *Pseudonymous Shakespeare: Rioting Language in the Sidney Circle*. Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 2006. Pp. xxiv + 257 pp. \$94.95.**

“And as no chemic yet th’elixir got, / But glorifies his pregnant pot / If by the way to him befall / Some odoriferous thing, or medicinal”: thus Donne, fondly noting that while alchemists may never succeed, in the course of their efforts they often make useful incidental discoveries—or at least help to pass the time. Penny McCarthy’s *Pseudonymous Shakespeare* might be considered in this light. For 150 years, epitomized by the famous Thomas Looney, clergymen, physicians, computer programmers, actors, judges, and a few (usually nonliterary) scholars have tried to show that Shakespeare did not write his works, or that he was really Bacon, Marlowe, Oxford, Elizabeth I, the Countess of Pembroke (of whom more later), or a committee. McCarthy is not like them. On the contrary, she wants not to take away the writings of the man from Stratford but rather to add to them, and to fill out his early life by attaching him to Leicester and the Sidney Circle and having him become Mary Sidney’s lover and, from the age of ten or eleven, leave pseudonymous writings scattered across the literary landscape. It is a breathtaking ride, and one can see why she comments that “the few scholars” who read drafts of her book “felt disabled from venturing comment” (ix).

However, with or without such help, written with an attractive buoyancy of tone, the book emerged. Here, as fairly as I can put it, is the argument. A particular pseudonym, R. L., found in or attached to diverse works written or published between 1575 and 1601 (xiii), is Shakespeare. The case starts with the account of the Kenilworth entertainment of 1575 and considers a variety of works signed R. L., who turns out to be a young page in the Kenilworth household, in fact, “Shakespeare’s juvenile self” (215); he is promoted by the Leicester

Circle, including the Sidneys and Spenser; the result is the expansion of the Shakespearean corpus not only by the miscellaneous works of R. L. and some of William Smith's, but also three lyrics in the *Shepheards Calendar*, half of *A Poetical Rhapsody*, and others (220). Also belonging to this period of youthful achievement are a number of Shakespeare's plays that most of us would date ten or twenty years later. In the space available to me, I will look at McCarthy's refocusing of our sense of the Leicester/Sidney circle, including some of the more intimate details of the alliance of Philip Sidney and his sister Mary, and the consequences for the dating and order of Shakespeare's plays.

The currently fashionable speculation on Shakespeare's early life sees him as connected with Lancastrian Catholic families, among whom he served a political and dramatic apprenticeship in the shadowy world of English recusancy. McCarthy's alternative sees the (very) young Shakespeare as a key player within the Protestant Dudley/Sidney ambitions to take center stage in Elizabethan politics, which could have even ended in a coup. McCarthy imagines a child, "a page-boy with a talent for music ... a precocious young boy ... the darling of the women" (72-73), his writing, even at that age, becoming one of the potent devices of a Protestant faction looking forward to a "golden age ruled by a philosopher or poet king [Philip Sidney] with young Mary Sidney as quasi-consort" (25). Spenser provided him a very special outlet: at fifteen, McCarthy speculates, Shakespeare contributed Colin's three songs in the April eclogue, which was written in part "to give a platform to a very young and humble poet in the Sidney entourage" (76). And so Colin/Cuddie, E. K.'s "perfecte patternne of a Poete," is the young genius Shakespeare, whose talent was also recognized by Gabriel Harvey, who gave him a virtual Cambridge education so he would "become the court poet of the lord who they still hoped might rule England" (95). Later, the training at least helped him get a position as a schoolmaster (at last, some might think, a familiar landmark in constructing Shakespeare's early life).

In writing a review for a journal specializing in drama, I will put aside the Spenser-Harvey connections with R. L. alias William Smith alias Co(l)lin alias Cuddie alias William Shakespeare for expert Spenserians writing elsewhere. More germane here are McCarthy's speculations, or "supposes," concerning the drama. Despite its members' documentable suspicion of popular drama and especially its characteristic English mixed form, sneered at by Sidney, McCarthy argues that the Leicester Circle gave the budding young dramatist a major role in forwarding its political agenda. Shakespeare accordingly must have written many plays much earlier than generally supposed, even as far back as the late 1570s and early 1580s: in particular, many of the history plays get written by the "new poet" to support his patron's political agenda. Shakespeare is the "prime mover in the overall project," though another participant of this Protestant "project

for a series of Leicesterian plays" (134) was Marlowe. Prince Hal becomes a "Philip [Sidney] figure, consorting with low-life characters such as Shakespeare himself"; Shakespeare is "Fal-staff, like a limp version of 'Shake-spear'" (192–93). For good measure, *Henry VIII* becomes an early play, later turned over to Fletcher for rewriting closer to 1613; *The Tempest* is before 1599; *Macbeth* and *Hamlet* are early, and the whole category of the "late romances" is abandoned—not in itself, in my view, a bad idea conceptually, though for totally different reasons and without necessitating a major rethinking of their dating. Most Shakespeareans will be struck by the novelty of some of McCarthy's "supposes," and may be reminded of Oxfordians' desperate desire to show that all of Shakespeare's plays were written before Oxford's death in 1604, or of Marlovians for whom their poet remained secretly alive, even (maybe) living with the Countess of Pembroke at Wilton.

Which indeed brings me to Mary Sidney. When Shakespeare met her, she was "potentially blighted" (40) by her marriage to the elderly Earl of Pembroke, and McCarthy "supposes" that Mary might have been loved by both "a poet with a spear" (41) and another "red-headed, similar-featured" sojourner in the garden of Wilton (44). She does not discuss how that would make William—at fifteen, no less—her brother's rival for Mary's favors: perhaps Philip just did not know that she was torn between two lovers, one incestuous, one juvenile. "Wait til I finish this page" may not apply only to her reading installments of *Arcadia*. If indeed the "dire secret" (111) of the Sidneys was that brother and sister were lovers, and if Shakespeare saw a little action as well, then perhaps the rival poet of the Sonnets is in fact Philip, or at least his memory (assuming, presumably, he did die in 1586). At least, unlike some (even recent) members of the Looney clan, McCarthy does not argue that Mary wrote Shakespeare's plays, nor that her son William Herbert (Mr. W. H., of course) was in fact Shakespeare's son—a suggestion made in the 1920s. For which relief, much thanks—though I am surprised she doesn't fasten onto that familiar (now, unfortunately undocumented) remark of the Countess in 1603 that "the man Shakespeare is with us" at Wilton. The man as opposed to what he had once been, the boy? Aha—a clue missed.

More seriously, a distinctively Protestant early Shakespeare balances the currently fashionable—and only slightly less speculative—Catholic Shakespeare. And at least McCarthy has him in the Home Counties where, as Puttenham pointed out, he could hear good English spoken to mend his barbarous Warwickshire accent. McCarthy concedes that Shakespeare may have slid back toward papistry in later years. Her supposing on religious affinities raises an interesting point. We may look at what I still want to call Shakespeare's later plays—those written between *All's Well* and *Measure for Measure* (1604?) and

*Henry VIII* (1612?)—and find an intriguing theatrical mixture of Old Religion and New, showing how he was cunningly able to exploit both extremes, playing, as it were, with “young Charbon the puritan and old Poysam the papist” for their theatrical, if not their propagandist, impact.

The book’s great virtue is a buoyant enthusiasm—its accumulation of detail, obsessive looking for clues, seizing on unlikely possibilities, coincidences, and secret connections—so that whenever an R. L., a Will, or William Smith appears, an opportunity for “supposing” arises. Also admirable, or at least enviable, is its author’s confidence that the book will “overthrow the accepted version” and is “more far-reaching than previous claims” (xxiii, 138), involving a complete rethinking of the canon, including *The Faerie Queene* and *Arcadia*. Donne acknowledged that his alchemist might “by the way” on his futile quest produce something valuable and revivifying. McCarthy’s enthusiasm is admirable; like some detective novels, which is the author’s own comparison, her book was a fun read.

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**Michael Wyatt. *The Italian Encounter with Tudor England: A Cultural Politics of Translation*. Cambridge Studies in Renaissance Literature and Culture. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005. Pp. xiii + 371. \$90.00.**

Michael Wyatt’s fascinating new book is in some ways two: an account of the Italian presence in England during the sixteenth century, and an engaging study of John Florio, best known for his translation of Michel de Montaigne’s *Essays*, but discussed here for his Italian grammar books and an Italian dictionary for his fellow Englishmen and women. And yet the two projects are clearly linked. For Wyatt is intent on identifying a surprisingly large number of Italians—the second-generation Florio among them—who played a formidable role in constructing a national identity for Tudor England. This is a group that includes Baldessar Castiglione, author of *The Courtier*; Pietro Torrigiano, who sculpted Henry VII’s tomb in Westminster Abbey; the reformers Cardinal Pole and Bernardo Ochino; and John or “Giovanni” Wolfe, the London publisher of Machiavelli and Pietro Aretino. There are also glassblowers, merchants (who congregated in the streets as though they were piazzas), and actors. But crucial to the construction of “England” was an emerging attraction to one Italian product in particular. This is not Italian glass or paradigms of courtly behavior, but