
Lily's Latin Grammar And The Identity Of Shakespeare

William Lily's Latin *Grammar* was memorized by every Elizabethan schoolboy.

Shakespeare's awareness of that fact is evident in the second scene of Act IV of *Titus Andronicus*. Titus sends a bundle of weapons to Demetrius and Chiron with a scroll on which are written two lines from the *Grammar*:

Dem. What's here? a scroll, and written round about.

Let's see.

[Reads.] *Integer vitae, scelerisque purus,
Non eget Mauri jaculis, nec arcu.*

Chi. O, 'tis a verse in Horace, I know it well,
I read it in the grammar long ago.

Aaron. Ay, just – a verse in Horace, right, you have it.

The reference to the *Grammar* in this scene is perhaps the most egregious anachronism in Shakespeare. What could be more absurd than characters in a Roman play recollecting their childhood study of Lily's Latin *Grammar*? But surely Shakespeare did not just slip up here. An anachronism so obviously out of place must have been deliberately inserted with a view to attracting the audience's attention to something. At least in part, Chiron and Aaron's words make it clear that that 'something' is the manner in which allusions in a play can trigger the recollection of memorized passages in the *Grammar*.

The first lesson in the *Grammar* is on nouns or names. And on the first page of this lesson is found a name – the name Edward -- in the sentence *Edwardus is my proper name*. It is therefore a remarkable coincidence that scenes in two of Shakespeare's plays draw attention very specifically to this page in the *Grammar* containing the name Edward.

The first of these allusions is found in the first scene of Act II of *Henry IV, Part 1*. Gadshill banters with the chamberlain at an inn in Rochester:

Gads. We steal as in a castle, cocksure; we have the receipt of fern-seed,
we walk invisible.

Cham. Nay, by my faith, I think you are more beholding to the night than
to fern-seed for your walking invisible.

Gads. Give me thy hand. Thou shalt have a share in our purchase, as I am
a true man.

Cham. Nay, rather let me have it as you are a false thief.

Gads. Go to, homo is a common name to all men. Bid the ostler bring my
gelding out of the stable. Farewell, you muddy knave.

The words *Homo is a common name to all men* would have been instantly recognizable to any educated Elizabethan as the line in the *Grammar* which distinguishes between proper and common nouns:

A noun substantive either is proper to the thing that it betokeneth, as *Edwardus is my proper name*, or else is common to more, as *Homo is a common name to all men*.

Gadshill's words *Homo is a common name to all men* would thus have immediately reminded any educated member of an Elizabethan audience of the other part of that same sentence in the *Grammar* -- *Edwardus is my proper name*. Gadshill's cryptic reference to walking invisible also assumes significance; as the true author of the Shakespeare plays, Oxford does 'walk invisible'. Similarly, the references to 'stealing' and to 'a true man' are significant in relation to Oxford's surname, Vere, and his motto *Vero Nihil Verius* (*Nothing truer than Vere*). There is certainly a hint in these lines that the authorship of the plays has been stolen from a 'true man', named Edward, who 'walks invisible'.

Were there only a single instance in which attention is directed to this line in Lily's *Latin Grammar*, it could be argued that the reference in *Henry IV, Part 1* is a mere coincidence. But the allusion to the words *Edwardus is my proper name* in the Gadshill scene in *Henry IV, Part 1* does not stand alone. In the first scene of Act IV of *The Merry Wives Of Windsor*, the audience's attention is again directed at great length to the page on which the words *Edwardus is my proper name* are found.

Anders has explicated in detail the relationship between this scene in *Merry Wives* and the first page of the lesson on nouns in the *Grammar*. He writes:

Shakespeare's acquaintance with Lily's *Grammar*, commonly known as the *Accidence*, is satisfactorily proved by the catechetical scene in *The Merry Wives Of Windsor*. Sir Hugh Evans asks the boy, William, 'some questions in his accidence'. The answer to Evans' query, 'How many numbers is in nouns?' will be found on the first page of the grammar proper:

In nouns be two numbers, the singular and the plural. The singular number speaketh of one, as lapis, a stone. The plural number speaketh of more than one, as lapides, stones.

Compare *Merry Wives*, ll. 32:

Evans.	What is <i>lapis</i> , William?
Will.	A stone.
Evans.	And what is 'a stone', William?
Will.	A pebble.
Evans.	No, it is <i>lapis</i> . I pray you, remember in your prain.

Again, ll. 26-30:

Evans. What is 'fair', William?
 Will. *Pulcher*.
 Mrs. Quickly. Polecats! There are fairer things than polecats, sure --.

refer to the same page, where *bonus*, good; *pulcher*, fair, are given as instances of adjectives.

On p. 2 of Lily's *Grammar* we read:

Articles are borrowed of the pronoun, and be thus declined:

Singulariter

Nominativo *hic, haec, hoc*
Genitivo *huius*
Dativo *huic*
Accusativo *hunc, hanc, hoc*
Vocativo *caret*
Ablativo *hoc, hac, hoc*

Pluraliter

Nominativo *hi, hae, haec*
Genitivo *horum, harum, horum*
Dativo *his*
Accusativo *hos, has, hoec*
Vocativo *caret*
Ablativo *his*

Compare with this *The Merry Wives*, ll. 39ff.:

Evans. What is he, William, that does lend articles?
 Will. Articles are borrowed of the pronoun, and be thus declined,
 singulariter, nominativo, hic, haec, hoc.
 Evans. *Nominativo, hig hag, hog*; pray you, mark; *genitivo, hujus*.
 Well, what is your accusative case?
 Will. *Accusativo, hinc*.
 Evans. I pray you, have your remembrance, child. *Accusativo, hung,*
 hang, hog.
 Quickly. 'Hang-hog' is Latin for bacon, I warrant you.
 Evans. Leave your prabbles, 'oman. What is the focative case, William?
 Will. O, -- *vocativo, O*.
 Evans. Remember, William: focative is *caret*.
 Quickly. And that's a good root.
 Evans. 'Oman, forbear.
 Mrs. Page. Peace!

Evans.	What is your genitive case plural, William?
Will.	Genitive case?
Evans.	Ay.
Will.	<i>Genitivo, horum, harum, horum.</i>
Quickly.	Vengeance of Jenny's case! fie on her! never name her, child, If she be a whore.
Evans.	For shame, 'oman, etc.

Anders demonstrates that Shakespeare took great pains in *Merry Wives* to direct attention to a specific page in the *Grammar* which all educated members of his audience knew by heart. Why did he bother to do this? The answer would seem to be that there is more to the scene than meets the eye. Considering its lack of relationship to the rest of the play, the scene in *Merry Wives* seems pointless and irrelevant. However that is not the case if it is being used to draw attention to a key paragraph on the first page on nouns in the *Grammar*, that is, the paragraph in between *pulcher* and *lapis*, the two words which Parson Evans asks William to define, a paragraph in which is found the sentence *Edwardus is my proper name*. And in that context, the contrast between the names Edward [de Vere] and William [Shaksper of Stratford] is surely significant, particularly when young William is depicted in the scene from *Merry Wives* as struggling to learn the most basic rudiments of Latin.

Was Edward de Vere the real Shakespeare? These three allusions to the *Grammar* in three different Shakespeare plays certainly raise the issue in a way which cannot easily be dismissed, particularly in light of all the internal evidence in the Shakespeare plays which establishes that their author was someone with an entirely different education and life experience from William Shaksper of Stratford. These unusual allusions to the *Grammar*, and to the line *Edwardus is my proper name*, require that serious consideration be given to the proposition that the author of Shakespeare's plays was, indeed, someone named Edward, and that the references to the *Grammar* were inserted into the plays for the express purpose of using a page in Lily's Latin *Grammar* memorized by all educated Elizabethans as the vehicle by which Edward de Vere could reveal his authorship of the Shakespeare plays.

Works Cited

Anders, Henry R.D. *Shakespeare's books: A dissertation on Shakespeare's reading and the immediate sources of his works*. New York: AMS Press, 1965.

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