

SOUTHAMPTON'S HAIR

Stephanie Hopkins Hughes

For some years I've been following the development of theories based in large part on discoveries made in Egypt in 1948 at a spot in the desert known as Nag Hammadi, where in 1948 were discovered several versions of the lost gospels of the New Testament, and in part on recent revelations regarding the medieval secret society known as the Knights Templar. This past year (2003) a novel titled *The Da Vinci Code*, based on this line of study, spent many weeks at the top of the NY Times best seller list, and will be appearing shortly as a film directed by Ron Howard. The story line is sufficiently compelling to make this an action adventure page-turner, but most of its appeal comes from the material on which author Dan Brown based his story, material from the same confluence of sources, among them the connections between da Vinci's *The Last Supper*, the Gospel of Mary Magdalen, certain beliefs regarding the descendants of the Merovingian kings of early medieval France, and the mysterious rise and fall of the Knights Templar. It's excitement about this background material that has raised *The Da Vinci Code* above the average page-turner, not its plot or its cheesy style.



The background to the novel is becoming one of the great stories of our time, pieced together during the long post WWII Pax Americana that has allowed so much science to get done, in this case through the work of archaeologists, paleographers, and bible scholars. The story is so big that it takes a great deal of patience to piece it together. Attempts have been made by a variety of writers, from pop journalists like the authors of the 1982 best-seller *Holy Blood, Holy Grail*, and also by genuine scholars like Dr. Eileen Pagels of Princeton University. Brown's novel is a third attempt to make the material accessible by putting it into an action-adventure thriller, *a la* Indiana Jones.

In the end the reader of Brown's book is left with little more than a sensation of having seen a glimpse of something interesting. Much like the story of Oxford and Shakespeare, the story itself is just too big for a single book, particularly a corny best-seller.

I wrote the original version of this paper in July, 2002, shortly after the discovery of the portrait of the Earl of Southampton (above), and well before Dan Brown's novel hit the best seller charts (March 2003). The Southampton portrait is the one previously identified as of a woman because of the long hair, the feminine collar and the feminine attitude.

Many of you know the former Oxfordian researcher John Rollett, and some may recall his posts to Nina Green's cyber-salon a few years back regarding the fact that the young Earl of

Southampton was heralded upon his arrival at Elizabeth's Court with particular fervor. Rollett and others who purvey the Royal Incest theory, like to think that this was due to secret knowledge that Southampton was the illegitimate child of the Queen and (her illegitimate son) Oxford and thus was the true heir to the English throne.¹ There are numerous arguments why this solution is unlikely² but so far there's been no other explanation for what seems like unusual excitement over Southampton. The arrival at Court of an attractive and wealthy young peer was always a cause for excitement—the Court community was small and such arrivals were infrequent. So could there have been some other reason for this enthusiasm?

A number of recent books on the Templars deal with a long-held underground belief in Europe that the world would be saved when a descendant of the medieval Merovingian kings sat on a European throne once again. According to these books, the Merovingian kings did not allow scissors to touch their hair. The fact that Southampton wore his hair so long—a trait symbolic of the Merovingian kings—may have been seen by some of the more romantic aristocratic elements of Court society as potentially this long awaited redeemer; hardly a plan, but perhaps a communal fantasy shared over a bowl of hot sack and pipefuls of tobacco.

To cram this immense topic into the nutshell of a very short paper, please bear with me as we go back—way back—in time. And as we go, please keep in mind that I speak about this, not to promote these beliefs, but to examine them. The essential facts to keep in mind here are the power that such ideas can exercise over the minds of the disenfranchised, and how very disenfranchised many members of the old nobility were feeling in the middle years of the sixteenth century. This is less about facts than about feelings and beliefs.

Mary Magdalene and John the Baptist

Dan Brown's book is based in large part on a book that was popular some years ago titled *Holy Blood, Holy Grail*, in which is described a cult that arose in southern France in the dim reaches of the past and that, according to the book, is still in existence, one originally derived from the teachings of John the Baptist. This belief holds that it was from John that Jesus acquired his mission. According to this theory, when Herod Antipas arrested and then executed John, Jesus took over as leader of John's congregation, or rather, of part of it. The central core continued to follow John's teaching through another of his lieutenants, known as Simon Magus—Simon the Magician—a clue to the nature of John's teaching.

This group did not disappear or get absorbed into other systems, but continued to spread the Baptist's teachings through the nations of the Near East after his death, after Jesus's death, and after Paul's mission. In fact it continued to spread throughout the rise of the Catholic Church to supreme political power. According to this view, John the Baptist was what is

¹ Rollet has reversed himself in recent years, claiming no longer to be an Oxfordian (though it seems that he remains fascinated by the Royal Incest theory).

² Paul Hammer suggests that Southampton's popularity in 1595 may have been a function of the effort by anti-Essex courtiers to provide the Queen with a new favorite while Essex was in hot water over his relationship with Elizabeth Southwell (320 fn). This may be so, but just as Southampton would have none of Burghley's (and Oxford's?) efforts to marry him to Elizabeth Vere, so he would reject any effort to use him to diminish Essex, his adored surrogate brother.

known as an “adept,” a teacher of “the mysteries,” one of the many so-called pagan religions that, according to the Old Testament, were so obnoxious to Jehovah.

In point of fact, the mystery religions were less religions than they were the study of what we would term magic, what the Arabs termed alchemy, and what in the Far East evolved into systems for controlling the mind and body, techniques still practised today by yogis, Buddhist monks, masters of Chi Kung, and magicians like Houdini and David Blaine.

While the broad outer ring of adherents sought the usual solaces of religion, an inner core of initiates studied secrets of natural science, mathematics, astrology, methods of healing, and, most secret of all, techniques for separating the personality from the physical body that allowed spiritual martyrs, when captured and tortured by the Inquisition, to endure the agonies of crucifixion and burning at the stake.

According to those who have studied the ancient texts found at Nag Hammadi, Jesus may have studied similar teachings during his youth in Egypt. Egypt was at that time a confluence of peoples and beliefs from many lands. In particular, Alexandria, with its great library and museum, drew teachers of many faiths from Anatolia, Greece, Palestine, Persia, India, possibly even China. Chief among these systems was Egypt’s State religion which focussed on the story and teachings of the goddess Isis and her consort Osiris.

It may have been while Jesus was still in Egypt that he met Mary Magdalene. The daughter of a prominent Egyptian family, she had been raised in the Isis religion. When Jesus moved back to Judea, to the land of his forbears, Mary and members of her family (including Martha and Mary’s brother Lazarus) accompanied him. (Some researchers see evidence that Mary and her family were Jews, not Egyptians, but the presence of so many tenets of the Isis faith are hard to explain any other way.) They joined the community of ascetic adepts that regarded John the Baptist as their leader. Mary and Jesus were married—the marriage at Cana in Galilee—and had children. After John was captured, accused of treason and beheaded, the upper echelon of John’s followers made Simon Magus their chief, so Jesus was forced to enroll a new set of disciples from a local community of fishermen in Galilea.

When Jesus began teaching on his own, he combined the Baptist’s techniques for self-control, healing, and casting out demons with the compassion of Mary’s Isis religion, source of such concepts as turning the other cheek and ministering to those suffering from disease, hunger, madness, imprisonment and poverty, no matter how low on the social scale or what their ethnic background or religion.

But Jesus was not merely a spreader of the teachings of Mary and the Baptist. Although his heart had been opened by them, what must have been his powerful personal charisma soon drew others to him. As he grew in popularity among the people, both Romans and leaders in the orthodox Jewish community began to fear his increasing political power. They determined to eliminate, not just Jesus, but his radical teachings, which smacked too much of pagan systems like that of Isis and the Baptist.³ (Please understand that I’m not trying to convert anyone to a radical view of the New Testament. I’m simply capsulising a number of books on the subject as background to the cult of the Templars and the blood of the Merovingian kings.)

We have a very interesting confluence of influences here, many of them in direct conflict with each other.

³ There have been a plethora of books in the past few years on this and related topics. The citations and bibliographies in those quoted here will lead anyone who is interested to the rest.

Mary's religion

Following the death and resurrection of Jesus, his followers split into two groups; the apostles, who followed Peter and continued to preach throughout Palestine and the near East what they understood of Jesus's message, while Mary's followers sailed with her westward across the sea to the shores of Southern France. There she rose to a position of leadership in the Isis- worshipping community that then lined the shores of the western Mediterranean, a community made up of many different kinds of peoples from many different backgrounds, but probably mainly Cathaginians who practised the Isis religion. After her death she was exalted as the incarnation of the goddess Isis herself.

Although Carthage and its Isis temples were destroyed by the Romans in 149 BC, this area in southern France still follows the traditions of the Mary cult, which is, it seems fairly obvious from the evidence presented, centered—not on Jesus's mother, the Virgin Mary, as the Church would have it—but on Mary Magdalene (Picknett 92-117). They believe it is the Magdalen who adorns the major altars of churches and cathedrals in this area, as opposed to the crucifix, found elsewhere on the main altar, while the baby in her arms represents, not Jesus, but his son, whose descendants were destined to rule France, Spain, and Germany as the Merovingian kings. It was from this area that the culture of Courtly love with its Isis-like exaltation of The Feminine spread throughout Europe during the Middle Ages by French troubadours and later by German minnesingers. Although mainstream Christianity helped to organize the wild tribes of the north into political units under Barons and Kings, it was the goddess, with her love of gardens, leisure, art, beauty, good manners, poetry and music, who brought true civilization first to the Middle East, then, through Spain and Italy, to Europe.

Despite the fact that the militant religions of Islam in Spain and the Near East and militant Christianity in Italy and Northern France destroyed the temples of the Isis religion and crushed its proponents, its primary tenets—tolerance for persons of other races and beliefs, genuine equality for women, mistrust of hierarchy and doctrine—were kept alive by a variety of cults that began popping up in Europe and around the Mediterranean as the increasingly powerful Catholic Church enforced the patriarchal doctrines promulgated by Peter and Paul. The Marian cults were labeled heresies by the Church, whose chief political purpose, once it gained control of Europe, consisted largely of stamping them out. Every single one of the various heresies, whatever their names or their focus, are basically offshoots of, or a reemergence of, the Marian heresy.

Thus cult followers who wished to avoid being burnt at the stake took their beliefs underground, where they formed secret societies. One of the earliest of these, one that survived the longest and eventually rose to extreme heights of power, was the Knights Templar.

The Templars

At the point where the Knights took on a public presence with a name and a function, they appeared as a denomination of Christian friars who wore the cross as their symbol, and whose purpose was to provide police protection for Christians on pilgrimages to the Holy Land. Many of them were no more than this; but among an inner circle there arose another purpose, it may even have been their original purpose, which was based on the beliefs of John the Baptist and related esoteric studies. Whatever the Templars found in their eastern journeys, possibly including documents and relics, they preserved in their home castles in Aragon in southern

France and northeastern Spain, the Languedoc region bordering on the Mediterranean where the Mary cult was strongest. The knowledge and ideas they brought back to Europe from the Holy Land, tales of the fabulous wealth of Damascus and Constantinople, examples of fine art, information on advances in science and technology—keep in mind that this was the period of the great Arabic Renaissance—roused the greed of the popes and other European aristocrats who raised armies to take by force what had been acquired earlier by western travelers through peaceful fellowship and trade.

Although these ancestors settled in southern France, it seems their forbears were descendants of the Sicambrian Franks, a civilized Saxon (or, more likely, Celtic) people who had moved from their original homeland east of the Rhine (possibly from Arcadia in northern Greece) into France and southern Germany in the 5th century.

The Merovingian kings were said to be descended from one “Merovée,” who came to power in the mid-5th century and who was credited with a supernatural birth and magical powers. It was his grandson, Clovis the First, who spread the Merovingian reign to most of France. The Merovingians continued to rule France and southern Germany for a century or so until Dagobert II was murdered by his minister, Pepin the Fat, whose son was Charles Martel, the hero of the 732 AD battle of Poitiers, decisive in preventing the “Saracens,” soldiers of Islam, from conquering France. His son, Pepin III, established the Carolingian dynasty.

Anyway, somewhere in these “begats” the bloodline of Christ mixed with this family of early French monarchs (the period isn’t called the Dark Ages for nothing). However it came about, followers of the Mary cult of the mid-Middle Ages believed (as apparently some still believe) that the Kingdom of Heaven on earth as preached by John the Baptist and/or Jesus and/or Mary Magdalene, would come to pass only when a ruler of Merovingian descent, that is, a descendant of Jesus, sat on the throne of France, from which he would rule all of Europe, or, even more marvelously, from Jerusalem itself. Versions of this vision would continue to fuel the evangelical nature of the later Crusades. It’s also the secret that lay at the heart of the mystic vision that fueled the quest for the Holy Grail.

The Holy Grail

The Grail is familiar to readers of Arthurian legends as a mystical chalice that glows with an inner light. In regular Christian symbolology it’s supposed to be the cup that Jesus shared with his disciples at the Last Supper, saying that the wine in it was his blood. Although this makes sense as having descended from an ancient Jewish (Essene?) Passover tradition, to the Mary cult it has a deeper meaning. To them the chalice represents the womb of Mary Magdalene, which contained the blood of Jesus in the form of his children, blood which the cult believed was (and still is) sacred and was/is meant eventually to rule humankind. So to see the chalice is to have a vision of Mary in which she reveals the truth.

This was the mystery into which mythical knights like Galahad and Parsifal were initiated in magical chapels buried deep in the forests of France and Germany. The visions, sacred quests, sacred wounds, etc. experienced by these knights of legend were stages in the revelation of the mystery, as told by mendicant priests of the Mary cult, who revealed only to the chosen few by word of mouth how the events described in these tales were actually descriptions of ancient rites of initiation into the mystery religions, belief systems that stemmed from the teachings of Jesus, Mary and the Baptist, systems that predated them by many millennia.

The enthusiasm of these wandering knights for this perplexing quest may be better understood if it was not a search for an object, nor even primarily a search for a more deeply truthful belief system, so much as for a method for acquiring techniques that gave what we would term a range of magical powers, among them the defeat of disease, old age, and death. Note how these heroes were always running into women (nuns?) in forest chapels who healed them with mystical potions, dispensed no doubt from expensive chalices. It may be that by the time these tales were committed to writing in the Middle Ages by men like Chretien de Troyes and Sir Thomas Mallory, the keys to their deeper meaning had been lost or, as recent study suggests, purposely obscured. In any case, they are lost to us today, though scholars working through the materials from Nag Hammadi may be tracing their outlines.

As the Templars got accustomed to dealing with wealthy money-lenders and financiers from Turkey, Syria, Palestine and Egypt, as well as the leaders of the European proto-nations, they found themselves in the banking business (their notes of credit are thought to have been the first paper money in the West). Drawn at their highest levels from the educated aristocracy, the Templars eventually became so influential that the French king, envious of their wealth and afraid of their power, banned them and imprisoned and executed their leaders. Those who survived transferred their bases of operations to Germany and Scotland, where their descendants continued to function out of underground cells.

The Elizabethan Templars

While the monarchs of Europe were struggling to reduce the power and influence of their noble constituents, the secret Templar rituals and beliefs were being transferred to several new organizations that turned a more modern if blank external face to the world while maintaining as best they could their secret core. Among these organizations were the “Lodges” of the Freemasons (whose symbol was the square and the compass representing material truth) and the Rosicrucians (whose symbol was the “rosy cross,” combining the symbols of Mary Magdalene and John the Baptist, the Rose and the Cross). These continued to draw members from the highest levels of the social and intellectual elite, as can be seen by the representation of Freemasons in the founding of such institutions as the Royal Academy of Science in London in the seventeenth century and the creation of the US Constitution in the eighteenth.

In today’s secular world, knowledge and beliefs that were once considered dangerous are so easily transmitted through New Age bookstores, mega-stores and websites that secret organizations like the Masons and the Rosicrucians, though they continue out of long-standing tradition, are no longer so necessary as they were during the Inquisitions of the Renaissance and Reformation, for during Shakespeare and Queen Elizabeth’s time this knowledge was still forbidden. Efforts by men like Giordano Bruno to speak openly about it usually ended, as did Bruno himself, at the stake. It was Bruno’s teaching that intrigued Sir Walter Raleigh and led to his 1594 examination by the Crown (i.e., Robert Cecil) on charges of “atheism.” Statements credited to Christopher Marlowe, however crude, can also be seen to echo this teaching, while Francis Bacon’s writings on science were regarded by the seventeenth-century Freemasons who founded the Royal Society as fundamental to their purpose.

Mary Old England

That the Mary cult was once pervasive in England can be seen in the many ways the English use the word. Shakespeare reflects the habit of his time in the way he uses “Marry” for emphasis, as in “Wilt thou be pleased? Marry, will I!” which the OED connects to the Mary cult. Spelled the same way, the word *marry* and *marriage*, they say is Provençal in origin, which takes us again to the region of the Marian heresy. Then of course there is also the enduring “merry” that, like so many bits and pieces of ancient culture, is mostly relegated to the winter holidays, but that shows another aspect of the word and the way it came to Britain. Spelled *merry*, it means having a good time. What seems obvious is that, however you spell it, it’s still the same word.

The Puritan rage to destroy merry-making rituals such as bringing in the yule log, kissing under the mistletoe, decorating an evergreen tree at Christmas, viewing satires on Twelfth Night, or dancing around the maypole on May Day—short for “Mary’s Day”—had far more to do with the age-old battle of the Church against the Mary cult and other local nature deities—mostly female—than with their supposedly wicked or licentious nature.

So what does all this have to do with Southampton?

Henry the Seventh, at pains to establish a connection to the semi-sacred Plantagenet family, hereditary rulers of England since 1066, created the Tudor Rose by combining the red rose of the House of Lancaster with the white rose of the Plantagenet House of York. It was during his reign that the third Earl of Southampton’s great-uncle John Writh (or Wrythe), Garter King of Arms, moved his family up a notch in the social scale by manufacturing an elaborate new pedigree and an elaborate new name to go along with it (Green 18-37). By combining the W-R-I-T-H of his family name with R-O-S-E, a tribute to his Tudor monarch’s new symbol, finished off with the euphonious flourish of “ley,” he arrived at W-R-I-O-T-H-E-S-LEY—pronounced “Rosely.”

The name is almost impossible to pronounce as written, but this would not have been a problem in the early sixteenth century, since only a few clerks would ever have had to speak it without having heard it spoken first. When spoken, the anglicizing of French names, such as “Beacham” for *Beauchamps*, or “Sellinger” for *St. Leger*, and even some English names, such as “Suthuck” for *Southwark*, or “Mannering” for *Mainwaring*, allowed something that looked like *Wriothesley* on the page to be pronounced simply as “Rosely.” (The pronunciation advocated by Wikipedia, “Risley,” may have developed from later readings, but that it was intended to be pronounced that way by its originator makes no sense at all.)

Knowledge of heraldry and symbols obtained through their long association with the College of Arms, an association possibly extending back as far as Henry V, also gave the Wriths-slash-Roseleys ample opportunity to become familiar with the complex pedigrees of the English nobility. As one goes back in time, the English aristocracy and the French aristocracy soon blend into one. The cult of the blood of Jesus and the Merovingian Kings would have been well known to the English Catholic nobility, most of whom were originally of Norman descent, the area from which the early Merovingian kings arose during the Dark Ages. For someone like the Wriths, who knew what to look for, it would have been easy to tell which English families carried the sacred bloodline.

The Earls of Southampton

It was not John Wriothesley, Henry VIII's creative Garter King, who raised the Wriothesley family to the peerage, but his nephew Thomas, who rose to power by doing Henry VIII's dirty work for forty years. This Thomas rid his master of (in order) his first Queen, Katherine of Aragon, his minister Cardinal Wolsey, his second Queen Anne Boleyn, the Catholic monasteries, his third Queen Catherine Howard, his second minister Thomas Cromwell, and Oxford's uncle by marriage, the poet Earl of Surrey. Only Henry's last Queen, Anne Parr, managed to outfox the dangerous Thomas Wriothesley—a tribute to her intelligence and strong survival instincts.



During the feeding frenzy that followed Henry's death, while estates and honors were being gobbled up by the greedy and unworthy, Thomas "Rosely" turned down the Earldom of



Winchester, demanding instead that he be given the earldom of Southampton (254). Martin Green believes he chose Southampton because he wished to incorporate the rose symbol from the shield of the Town of Southampton into his armorial bearings, further augmenting his rose connection with the Tudors (33). Drawings of Tudor roses described as painted red, white and silver that date from the era of Henry VIII can be seen in sketches made of the Southampton estate in Hampshire, Tichfield manor, in 1737 (Green 280-7). A shield bearing two such roses from that same period, still seen above a doorway at Tichfield,⁴ (left) escaped destruction when others like it were hammered out in 1601 following the attainment of the third Earl for his connection with the Essex Rebellion, while Tudor roses are to be seen all over the tomb of the second Earl, built by his son in 1594.

Another possibility (not mentioned by Green) is that the first Earl of Southampton may also have chosen this locale because it placed him in close proximity to a family that he knew,

⁴ This scuttles the notion that "the Tudor Rose" only became attached to the third Earl during Elizabeth's reign.

through his association with the College of Heraldry, carried the sacred bloodline, possibly the Montagues, a family that, unlike most of the others, was within his reach.

It seems obvious that the first Earl had his sights set on the Montagues early on. The Southampton title had been given originally by Henry VIII to Lord Admiral Fitzwilliam, who died without issue in 1542. Although the title went extinct, Fitzwilliam's estates passed to his relative, Sir Anthony Browne, Viscount Montague, whose grandfather, though a humble sheriff, had married a Fitzalan, a descendant of the royal Plantagenets. When the first Earl of Southampton married his son Henry to Viscount Montague's daughter (Mary Browne), he did the Montagues the favor of returning the Southampton earldom to their issue. It may be that he knew that in return his own family would benefit by acquiring the sacred Merovingian bloodline. If so, the third Earl, Henry Wriothesley, prospective son-in-law of the Earl of Oxford and Shakespeare's patron, would have been the first male of the Wriothesley family who could claim descent from the Merovingian kings of France.

Southampton House

There is another item to add to this notion that the first Earl of Southampton may have been thinking dynastically along these lines, one that has to do with the Southampton residence in London. Located on the southeastern corner of the intersection of Chancery Lane with High Holborn, the original estate was created by the Knights Templar back in 1128. Some sixty years later, when they moved to their present establishment on the Thames, just below Fleet Street, they sold the Holborn property to the Bishop of Lincoln (the main house was known for centuries as the Bishop of Lincoln's Inn). In 1547 the Bishop of Lincoln conveyed the property to John Dudley, Earl of Warwick, who shortly after gave it to the first Earl of Southampton in exchange for his London house.

That the first Earl of Southampton, who, due to his family's long connection with the College of Arms, must have known a great deal about the Templars and the descendants of Meroving, arranged to exchange his City home for a Templar site of such antiquity, suggests he had particular knowledge regarding the Knights and their penchant for embellishing their properties with occult secrets in the form of symbolic decorations, floor mosaics, and so forth, and for hiding important documents, possibly even treasure, in crypts within the walls.

“Hath not thy rose a thorn, Plantagenet”?

Green suggests that the famous Temple Garden scene in *Henry VI Pt. I* during which the Lancastrians choose the red rose and the Yorkists the white, takes place in the garden of this former property of the Templars, citing as evidence the line “Within the Temple-hall we were too loud; the garden here is more convenient” (2.4.3-4). Green urges that Shakespeare spent time in this garden while visiting the teenaged Earl of Southampton, during the period in the early '90s that he was writing the *Sonnets* (Schaar). We know that Henry “Rosely” enrolled at Gray's Inn upon turning sixteen in 1589, and since Gray's Inn was a short walk from the corner of Chancery Lane and Holborn, it seems altogether likely that it was in this mansion, with its long history and its garden, planted centuries earlier by the Templars, that he was living at the time that Shakespeare was writing the *Sonnets*, and that he wrote, or rewrote, *Henry the Sixth Part One*.

This was the period that Oxford was in trouble financially and was forced to sell his home in Bishopsgate and, if as we believe, he was England's great theater entrepreneur, to look

to others to fund his theater projects. So it is not unreasonable to suggest that, during the years when Shakespeare was writing the *Sonnets* and the patron and dedicatee of the sonnets was the young Earl of Southampton, more or less on his own and, by seventeen, of an age to contract debts from moneylenders. If it was Oxford, more or less homeless at the time, who wrote the first seventeen sonnets, the so-called marriage sonnets, for “Rosely” for his seventeenth birthday, October 1590, in an effort to tempt him into marrying his daughter Elizabeth, sonnets filled with gardens and roses, it is also likely that, as Green suggests of Shakespeare,



he would have been well acquainted with Southampton House on Chancery Lane, with its ancient garden, fragrant with roses planted by Templars who, as everyone who studies roses knows, brought cuttings back to France and England from the gardens of Damascus.⁵

Truth or Nonsense?

Is this the answer to the strangely romantic response to Southampton’s arrival at Court, with its seeming hints at royalty? If so, it will be hard to prove. Certainly it must sound like nonsense to a pragmatic twentieth-century reader for whom fifteen hundred years would leave a descendant with such a tiny percentage of any kind of ancient blood that to claim special characteristics seems laughable, even if Southampton could claim Merovingian descent or the Merovingian kings did carry the blood of Christ.

Whether any of this is true or not is really beside the point. We’re talking here about the kind of beliefs that are far more potent and long-lived than facts. If anything comes clear from reading ancient Greek romances and their sixteenth-century imitations by Spenser, Greene, Sidney, and Shakespeare, it’s that the old adage “blood will tell” was still a deeply-held belief for the educated nobility and upper gentry. In the old romances, shepherds and country maids that show especial beauty or nobility of character invariably turn out to be princes and princesses in disguise.

⁵ Unfortunately we have no room in this short article for Green’s evidence for the connection between Southampton House and the Temple Garden scene, which is compelling.

Having Merovingian blood may have been a benefit in Medieval France, but in Reformation England, run by men with little or no claim to fancy bloodlines, it would have been something to keep to oneself. Still, whether kept to themselves or not, the Grail cult was just the sort of thing a repressed Catholic nobility would be likely to take seriously. Consider how the Confederate aristocracy took to the Ku Klux Klan after the Civil War, donning white robes with red crosses identical to those worn by the Templars. Such a passion, flourishing in secret, would add to the Catholic threat to the Protestant Crown as perceived by the Cecils. That it was one they couldn't broach openly only made it the more dangerous.

The apparent enthusiasm for Southampton when he first came to Court may have been no more than the same kind of excitement that the Court in the old fairy tale *Sleeping Beauty* had over the birth of Princess Aurora. If there was more to it than this, perhaps certain members of the old aristocratic Catholic community believed that the handsome young peer carried the sacred blood of Christ in his veins. One mark of the Merovingian kings was hair which had never been touched by scissors, something that was not often seen in paintings of the nobility at that time, but that we see in all portraits of the youthful Southampton. It may also explain the saccharine expression in his recently discovered portrait, his hand on his heart like a Medieval saint. It may also help to explain the otherwise strange animosity that the Queen exhibited towards Southampton, reacting as she did with fury whenever Essex showed him any favor. Having to compete with a youth who was considered, and may have considered himself, a descendant of Christ, would have been irritating to say the least.

This may also explain in part why, despite the obvious signs that he was heading into stormy political waters, the fourth Duke of Norfolk continued to consider marriage to Mary Queen of Scots. If anyone at that time carried the sacred blood it was certainly Mary of Guise, and Norfolk, after losing three wives to the grim reaper, was still without an heir. Though he himself had been tutored for a few years by the intensely Protestant John Foxe during the Protestant reign of Edward VI, Norfolk's family were all Catholic and the dangerous idea that by marrying the Scottish Queen his children would carry the sacred blood of Christ may have been more tempting to the poor fellow than a life of humiliation, forced to play second fiddle to upstarts like Robert Dudley and William Cecil.

Works cited

- Baigent, Michael, Richard Leigh, and Henry Lincoln. *Holy Blood, Holy Grail*. London: Jonathon Cape, 1982.
- Green, Martin. *Wriothesley's Roses in Shakespeare's Sonnets, Poems, and Plays*. Baltimore: Clevedon, 1993.
- Hammer, Paul E.J. *The Polarisation of Elizabethan Politics: The Political Career of Robert Devereux, 2nd Earl of Essex, 1585-1597*. Cambridge: CUP, 1999.
- Kinney, Jay, ed. *The Inner West: An Introduction to the Hidden Wisdom of the West*. Los Angeles: Tarcher, 2004.
- Picknett, Lynn. *Mary Magdalene*. New York: Basic Books, 2003.
- Schaar, Claes. *Elizabethan Sonnet Themes and the Dating of Shakespeare's Sonnets*. (1962). New York: AMS, 1973