

Review
The Man Who was Never SHAKESPEARE
by A.J. Pointon

reviewed by Ren Draya

A.J. Pointon's *The Man Who was Never SHAKESPEARE* (2011) joins a modest but growing number of volumes from Parapress in England. These are impressive books. Each is set up handsomely, with effective cover illustrations, many helpful charts and photos -- all in all, reader-accessible tools. As Shakespeare authorship questions are increasingly in the public eye and as I review *The Man Who was Never SHAKESPEARE*, I am prompted to start with a question: for whom is the book intended? Does Pointon hope to reach readers just embarking on authorship investigations? Or is this book intended for the ardent, experienced researcher?

Pointon's main thesis is a simple one: Shakspere and Shakespeare were two separate people. He does not seek to uncover the true author; his book "is dedicated primarily to Shakspere himself, seeking to give him back his true identity, as far as we can, and to understand the reality of the life he must have led in Stratford and London" (3). Fair enough.

Although there have been other attempts to provide a life of Shakspere -- see, for example, Alan Robinson's "The Real William Shaksper" in the *De Vere Society Newsletter* of January 2004 -- Pointon's chapters 1-12 do a good job of tracing Shakspere's family and following him as a young married man and then a businessman, both in Stratford and London. One of the most useful facets of *The Man Who was Never SHAKESPEARE* appears at the very end of the book: a list of dates and events in the life of Shakspere. Appendix I ("William Shakspere -- the Recorded Facts") offers a time line similar to and expanded from that published in the *De Vere Society Newsletter* of July 2004 by Eddi Jolli and Kevin Gilvary. Appendix J presents the Shakspere family tree. I would recommend placing these two appendices at the start of the book.

Much of Shakspere's life has been charted in Diana Price's *Shakespeare's Unorthodox Biography* (2001); in one of the very few nods to his sources, Pointon does acknowledge Price (166-71). To her ten points of evidence comparing Shakspere's known life to those of his literary contemporaries, he adds two items: the absence of records of connections between a Shakespeare or a Shakspere and other writers, and the absence of any descriptions of Shakespeare or Shakspere by other writers (171-72).

Pointon also holds that, in his time, “Shakespeare was not thought to be the actual name of a real person” (114) and that the men behind the publication of the First Folio, led by the “skilled, indeed cunning” Ben Jonson (115), deliberately chose William Shakspere — partly because both Shakspere and Shakespeare were dead by 1623. Pointon’s Chapter 13 discussion of the compiling of the First Folio and his analysis of Jonson’s dedicatory poem would certainly confuse a reader new to the authorship question. For more seasoned authorship hounds, Pointon’s remarks need careful attribution, for the topic has been discussed by many other writers.

Considering the entire book, how much of *The Man Who was Never SHAKESPEARE* is new? Because it does not include *any* chapter notes, a reader must sift through assertions and scan the bibliography in order to locate possible sources and to judge the accuracy of Pointon’s claims. He says that “hard evidence” (200) shows Shakspere was not the writer, but readers will wish for specifics as to the sources for such evidence.

Many of the points in Pointon’s book have been covered elsewhere. A few examples will suffice: “Greene’s Groatsworth of Wit” (see Frank Davis’ article in the 2009 *Oxfordian* and a score of other discussions); the six extant signatures of Shakspere (see Richard Whalen’s *Shakespeare: Who Was He? The Oxford Challenge to the Bard of Avon* [1994] and references in many authorship articles and books); the Stratford church monument (ditto); the various portraits of Shakespeare (see the various articles and presentations by Barbara Burris, and Mark Anderson’s *Shakespeare By Another Name* [2005], Appendix D). Too often, Pointon says something like, “It has been noted how, in 1622, a Henry Peacham effectively identified ‘Shakespeare’ as someone who had been hidden by a pseudonym...” (195). My quibble is that Pointon seldom tells his readers *where* anything has been noted. Peacham, for example, has been discussed by a number of Oxfordians, including Peter W. Dickson in *The Shakespeare Oxford Newsletter* of Fall 1998. Bald assertions smack of the Stratfordians’ (Pointon calls them Orthodox scholars) way of doing things.

Thus, if *The Man Who was Never SHAKESPEARE* emphasized the life of William Shakspere of Stratford and directed readers to sources for the material found in Chapters 13-14 (“The Theft of Shakespeare’s Identity”), it would be an appealing book for newcomers to the authorship question. Chapter 15 provides a useful summary, but it, too, omits citations. For all readers, including authorship buffs, the book needs an expanded bibliography, complete attributions, and a more logical organization to the appendices.

Letter

To the Editor:

Following the presentation of my *Brief Chronicles III* paper, “Shakespeare’s Greater Greek: *Macbeth* and Aeschylus’ *Oresteia*,” at the 2011 Joint Conference of the Shakespeare Fellowship and the Shakespeare Oxford Society in Washington, DC, I received an intriguing inquiry from Dr. Richard Waugaman regarding the reliability of my argument that Lady Macbeth’s exclamation, “Out damned spot!” is a reference to Clytemnestra’s cursed blood spot as described by Chorus of *The Agamemnon*. Dr. Waugaman was interested in knowing the Greek words that refer to the image of the “damned spot,” which he found to be very significant. “Are we sure,” he asked, “that the intertextuality is solely in one direction? Is it possible that translators of the Greek into English were influenced by Shakespeare?”

Since neither Dr. Waugaman nor I read Greek, I pursued the question by assembling a collection of translations of this choric passage from Aeschylus’ *Agamemnon* to test his hypothesis. Here is the text from E.D.A. Morshead’s translation of *The Agamemnon* from *The Complete Greek Drama* (1938), edited by Whitney Oates and Eugene O’Neill, Jr., which was the primary translation I used in my analysis:

Bold is thy craft and proud
Thy confidence, thy vaunting loud;
Thy soul, that chose a murd’ress fate,
Is all with blood elate –
Maddened to know
The blood not yet avenged, the *damned spot*
Crimson upon thy brow.
But fate prepares for thee thy lot. –
Smitten as thou didst smite, without a friend,
To meet thy end. (1429-35)

Textual comparisons of the same choric passage from a range of other 20th century translations, however, raise questions about Morshead’s choice of “damned spot” in describing Clytemnestra’s bloody brow. Noteworthy are

the variations of English translated text regarding Clytemnestra's attitude, murderous actions, facial blood stain, and ill-fate. No other translator from this series used terms similar to "damned spot."

Gilbert Murray (1920):

Thy thought, it is very proud;
 Thy breath is the scorner's breath;
Is not the madness loud
 In thy heart being drunk with death?
Yea, and above thy brow
 A star of the wet blood burneth!
Oh, doom shall have yet her day,
The last friend cast away,
Where lie doth answer lie
 And a stab for a stab returned!

Richmond Lattimore (1953):

Great your design, your speech is a clamor of pride.
Swung to the red act drives the fury within your brain
signed clear in the splash of blood over your eyes.
Yet to come is stroke given for stroke
vengeless, forlorn of friends.

Peter Vellacott (1960):

Such boasts show folly in a crafty mind.
So surely as your robe blazons your crime
In those red drops, shall your head bow low
Under a bloody stroke. Wait but the time:
Friendless, dishonoured, outcast, you shall find
Your debt fall due, and suffer blow for blow.

Peter Vellacott (1960):

Woman! – what poison cropped from the soil
Or strained from the heaving sea, what nursed you,
drove you insane? You brave the curse of Greece.
You have cut away and flung away and now

The people cast you off to exile,
Broken with our hate.

Robert Fagles (1977):

Mad with ambition,
 Shrilling pride! – some Fury
Crazed with the carnage rages through your brain –
 I can see the flecks of blood inflame your eyes!
But vengeance comes – you’ll loose your loved ones,
Stroke by painful stroke.

David Grene & Wendy O’Flaherty (1989):

You think big thoughts, and you scream proud defiance,
as though the bloody smear of your success
had maddened your mind.
The smear of blood – I can see it in your eyes.
But still you must pay stroke for stroke
with no friend to take your part.

Dr. Waugaman is correct in that Morshead’s translation of Aeschylus shows evidence of bidirectional intertextuality. As a translator, Morshead, unlike other translators in this series, seems to have been influenced in his choice of words by those of Shakespeare’s Lady Macbeth. The “damned spot,” Waugaman cleverly suggested, represents a “reciprocal influence of ancient and more recent texts on each other.”

The importance of this cannot be ignored in the context of establishing intertextual links between Shakespeare and the Greek and Latin playwrights. More than one translation must be consulted when focusing on specific intertextual word associations. Nonetheless, the image of this inexpiable blood stain of royal assassination, the stain that cannot be removed by all the waters of the world, appears in all three of the translations I consulted of the opening Chorus of *The Choephoroi* (antistrophe 3):

E.D.A. Morshead (1938):

Though in one channel ran Earth’s every stream,
 Laving the hand defiled from murder’s stain,
 It were in vain.

Peter Vellacott (1960):

So, though all streams should yield
Their purity to swell one cleansing flood,
Their force must fail, their power to purge be vain
For hands that bear the stain
Of unrequited blood.

Robert Fagles (1977):

All the streams of the world,
All channels run into one
To cleanse a man's red hands will swell the bloody tide.

Shakespeare's description of the indelible stain on Macbeth's hands actually comes closer to Fagles' translation of this passage because he includes the image of a sea made bloody by contamination.

What hands are here? Ha! They pluck out mine eyes.
Will all great Neptune's ocean wash this blood
Clean from my hand? No, this my hand will rather
The multitudinous seas incarnadine,
Making the green one red. (2.2.56-60)

The bloodstain of assassination that cannot be purified by all the waters of the heavens is also alluded to in *Hamlet*, Shakespeare's other Aeschylean tragedy. Claudius's "cursed hand" is tainted with a "brother's blood" such that there is "not rain enough in the sweet heavens to wash it white as snow."

Roger Stritmatter has also pointed out that this passage may echo a similar image from Seneca's *Hippolytus*, and that other Shakespeare scholars, including John William Cunliffe, author of *The Influence of Seneca on Elizabethan Tragedy* (1893), have considered this passage to be a very close parallel to Hippolytus's lines in Seneca. Here are the lines in question from John Studley's 1567 translation of *Hippolytus*, which was published in Thomas Newton's edition *Seneca: His Tenne Tragedies* (1581):

What bathing lukewarme Tanais may I defilede obtaine,
Whose clensing watry Channell pure may washe mee cleane againe?
Or what Meotis muddy meare, with rough Barbarian wave

That boardes on Pontus roring Sea? not Neptune groundsire grave
 With all his Ocean foulding floud can purge and wash away
 This dunghill foule of stane: O woode, O salvage beast I say:

Hippolytus refers here to the unforgiveable sin of committing adultery with his stepmother, Phaedra. Thus the passage does not refer to the indelible stain of bloody assassination, which is the case for Aeschylus and Shakespeare.

I owe thanks to both Richard Waugaman and Roger Stritmatter for recognizing terminology that points to a general conundrum in establishing intertextual connections between Shakespeare and translated classical sources. The reliability of echoed plot, dramaturgy, themes and images appears to be far more solid than textual parallels that rely on a precise choice of words or expressions. Philological speculations based on translated texts also clearly benefit from consulting more than one interpretive source.

Aeschylean themes haunt Shakespeare's *Macbeth*: the ghost, the weird sisters as Furies, the allusions to the trammel net, the poisoned breast, avian augury, and the stain of assassination that bloodies the sea. Over the past century Cunliffe and others have too often limited their search for Shakespeare's classical dramatic inspiration to Seneca. I predict that in the 21st century scholars will again discover the importance of the Greek dramatists as primary sources for Shakespeare.

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 Jacksonville, Ore.

The emblem on our title page is sampled from *La Fauconnerie de messire Arthelouche de Alagone*, printed by Enguilbert de Marnef, et les Bouchetz, freres, Potiers, 1567. Readers familiar with the technical history of printing may find the legend of special interest.



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