

Farewell....and Hello Again.

othing better commends a writing to an editor than one that follows the standards established by the journal, including, but not limited to, adherence to the journal's style sheet. A good article, moreover, conducts a *thorough* and *impartial* job of canvassing the relevant scholarship – what has been said before, by others, about the topic being considered. After a judicious summary, it offers something unexpected or novel, raising new points of fact or applying new methods of interpretation to resolve outstanding ambiguities or problems. Still better, the submission that can turn the history of the scholarship on a topic to advantage in an interpretation or a debate will always win against one that is seen to ignore vital sources of possible contradiction or interpretative conflict for fear that these perspectives may fail to support the author's primary contentions. Above all, a good academic article is self-critical – that is, it displays a constant vigilance with respect to the possibility of error and a humility about what is still not known about a topic.¹ Dealing with significant contrary evidence by conspicuous omission does not work in the long run.

That may sound harsh, but at age fifty-eight, after eight issues of *BC*, and nineteen issues of *Shakespeare Matters*, I feel I deserve my chance to say it.

The Oxfordian movement has seen styles come and go over time as different editors have assumed the responsibility of editing the various publications that now are official bibliographical entries in the history of the Shakespeare Underground (a term, for the record, I first used in 1991), as included in James A. Warren's *Index to Oxfordian Publications* (2015) and other authorship bibliographies.

When I joined the Shakespeare Oxford Society in 1991, Morse Johnson was still editing the newsletter on an IBM Selectric typewriter. His issues were full of great heart and vitality. Morse republished old materials that were difficult to find assembled anywhere else but contained much enlightenment, as well as a lively exchange of often very good articles, letters to the editor, and an occasional flight of fiction, by an ever-shifting mosaic of writers. The movement had been recently re-energized by the publication of Charlton Ogburn's *The Mysterious William Shakespeare*, the archival work and publishing of Ruth Loyd Miller, the 1987 Moot Court at American University organized by David Lloyd Kreeger, and major authorship stories in *The Atlantic* and *The New Yorker*. Yet Johnson produced the newsletter on a Selectric, aided, as I recall, by his law firm secretary.

This was in 1991, almost a decade into the microcomputer revolution, which was putting professional desktop publishing tools, of the kind first used by Bill Boyle after he took over the job of editing the newsletter in 1996, into the hands of millions of desktop designers. The succession of the job to Mr. Boyle was controversial, but as much as I admired Morse Johnson and felt grateful for his many years of unreimbursed service to the organization as newsletter editor, I also thought we needed a publication that looked more like the one Boyle produced starting with issue 32:1.

It was quite an issue for a new editor to handle. The volume reported on several controversial events within the Oxfordian community, including the decision of the Shakespeare Oxford Society (SOS) board of trustees to rescind its invitation to Joseph Sobran to speak at the 19th annual SOS conference in Greensboro, NC, on account of objections to some of Sobran's political beliefs that had nothing to do with authorship – just the sort of controversy that can splinter a small vanguard in a literary revolution to smithereens, especially coming on top of a generational transition and threats of financial lawsuits over creatively managed accounting procedures.

By contrast, things seem very sedate and responsible today. The SOS and the Shakespeare Fellowship have merged to become the Shakespeare Oxford Fellowship, which has good membership growth and has embarked, among other great ideas, on a “How I Became an Oxfordian” series on its website, under the general editorship of Bob Meyers, a distinguished Washington, DC, journalist and author of *Like Normal People* (1978), which tells the true story of how his “mentally retarded” brother and girlfriend broke the stigma against marriages among the differently abled. The book made Bob's brother and his wife into romantic heroes for millions of readers, and the Oxfordian series Bob is editing has had the same impact of suddenly turning those weird, otherworldly, “Shakespeare conspiracy theorists” into normal people, with histories, who think about the world, about literature, and about history or biography or psychology or drama, or all of those things, and discuss and write articles about them. In fact, by the last most accurate estimate, in James Warren's *An Index to Oxfordian Publications* (3rd edition, 2015), Oxfordians have written and published more than 6,000 articles, and 300 books or pamphlets over the last 95 years.

I mean, think about it! 6,000 articles, and 300 *books*!

I am proud that *Brief Chronicles* can march in such an equipage, and over the past several years we've been publishing I've greatly enjoyed the opportunity to produce issues in which I take some personal satisfaction, whether from the quality of the contributions or the pleasure of designing the volumes so that each embodies a uniqueness and aesthetic sensitivity to the forms of ideas they contain. Since our first volume in Fall of 2009 we have published, already, 104 articles or reviews, over a space of about seven years. I believe that among these are several – at least – of the most important articles ever written on their respective aspects of the authorship question. Among my favorites are two of the most adventurous, articles that rigorously pursued the “outside the box” topic of the many uses of early modern literary indirection, Robert Debotel and K.C. Ligon's “Francis Meres and the Earl of

Oxford” (2009) and Nina Green’s “Eduardus is My Propre Name” (2010), but there are many others that will of course resonate across time and will very likely continue to influence the discourse of early modern authorship for a long time indeed.

Gary Goldstein and I started *Brief Chronicles*, as the Shakespeare Fellowship itself was started, from necessity. In 2009 there was no credible alternative venue for the larger questions of Shakespearean authorship to be treated with the professionalism they deserve; today Chris Pannell and his editors produce an *Oxfordian* that requires no competition or alternative. In that circumstance, it hardly seems a useful employment of the limited resources of our movement to continue to publish two annual journals, each of which depends on submissions from a still-limited pool of researchers prepared to advance authorship studies at their best. Moreover, as SOF President Tom Regnier reminded me in recent conversation, our work is rapidly going mainstream. Every time orthodox authorities try to shut down the discussion (often by changing the channel), others begin to see the problem the Stratfordians are creating for themselves. These scholars are shifting from unexamined opposition to the post-Stratfordian thinking, moving towards endorsing a more open and scholarly debate on authorship. For verification we need look no further than the 2016 issue of the Italian *Journal of Early Modern Studies*, an orthodox academic journal, which includes contributions on authorship by Ros Barber, William Leahy, and Diana Price.² More and more, Oxfordians and other authorship skeptics are able to publish their work in mainstream literary journals like *Notes and Queries*, *Cahiers Élisabéthains*, or *Critical Survey*, among others. Without the responsibility of producing an annual journal, I hope to contribute on a more regular freelance basis for future issues of *The Oxfordian* among other publications.

Setting aside an endeavor involving the large emotional and intellectual investment that has been put into *Brief Chronicles* is not easy. Despite the occasional trials, I believe the series has established a permanent and significant place in the history of authorship studies. Your editor, on the other hand, is increasingly desirous to devote more time to his own writing projects, which include several books and a flotilla of unpublished and sometimes only half-conceived articles, all remaining “murdered in the waste bottom of my chests” from a lack of proper attention. Naturally I am grateful to the trustees of both the SF and the SOF, who entrusted me with the responsibility to lead production of the journal and always graciously overlooked any faults that could not be remedied prior to publication. To each member of our editorial board, many thanks for your good name, your expertise, and your passion. Our many fine contributors movers and shakers have included Gary Goldstein, Michael Delahoyde, Earl Showerman, and Alex McNeil, without whom *Brief Chronicles* could never have existed – and, of course I must thank Lynne Kositsky, who first gave the journal a “local habitation and a name.”

Endnotes

¹ Michael Delahoyde, “On Being Wrong,” *Brief Chronicles V* (2014), 1-10.

² Tom Regnier, “Price, Barber, and Leahy Counter Stratfordian Myths in Mainstream Journal” Shakespeareoxfordfellowship.org, March 21, 2016.