

“Is that True?”

Contested Will: Who Wrote Shakespeare?

by James Shapiro

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reviewed by Warren Hope

This is the kind of argumentation one associates with political maneuvering rather than a serious quest for the truth on great issues and it makes one suspect that he is not very easy in his own mind about the case. —J.Thomas Looney on the tactics of Professor Oscar Campbell

We are indebted to both James Shapiro and Alan Nelson for establishing a new phase in the history of the Shakespeare authorship question through the publication of two books—first Alan Nelson’s *Monstrous Adversary* (2003) and now James Shapiro’s *Contested Will*. They are both grotesque books, reminiscent of gargoyles without the attractiveness, but they are grotesque for a reason. The authors treat evidence as if they were preparing show trials for some nightmarish dictatorship not because they are demonic or dumb, but because they are expressions of the painful change that must take place if the study of Shakespeare is to be put on a rational footing.

Although they perform the function of advancing the debate, they do so unintentionally and unconsciously, almost as if they are expressions of some Shakespeare authorship *zeitgeist*, or hybrids thrown up by the reconciliation of opposites in the evolution of an idea. Readers interested in a critique of Nelson’s pseudo-biography of Oxford should consult Peter Moore’s “Demonology 101,” or the review essays by K.C. Ligon, Roger Stritmatter, or Richard Whalen. Those wanting a good, traditional book review of Shapiro’s treatment of the authorship question should read William S. Niederkorn’s excellent review in the April issue of *The Brooklyn*

Rail. I'd like to do something different here; I'd like to use some thoughts on Shapiro's treatment of Looney and the Oxford case as a way to get at some larger issues.

Although Supreme Court Justice John Paul Stevens will be remembered for many of his judicial opinions, to my mind one of his best "dissents" is the one that showed him open to Looney's case for Oxford as Shakespeare. Unfortunately, Shapiro's clear aim is to stigmatize Looney's world view and that of anyone who accepts his hypothesis as "dead set against the forces of democracy and modernity," as holders of a "retrograde vision" that "comes too close for comfort to Freud's account of the Nazi rise to power in 1933." For Shapiro, this world view necessarily includes questionable attitudes toward Jews that, he suggests, Looney held.

Nieder Korn is right to point out that this tactic cheapens the debate about authorship because it is an *ad hominem* attack: it provides an example of the logical fallacies that English teachers point out in freshman writing classes. But there is more at issue here. Because of his faith in the Stratford cult, Shapiro distorts not only Looney's arguments, but also Shakespeare's work.

James Shapiro decided to write this book because he had run into many who doubted that Will Shakspeare of Stratford wrote the plays and poems of Shakespeare when he went on tour to promote his last book, *A Year in the Life of William Shakespeare: 1599*. (At least, that is what he said in the promotional material in the back of the paperback edition of that book). But he was quick to point out that he did not plan to join the debate. It is refreshing to have a college professor frankly and publicly announce that he is going to research and write a book on a subject about which he has a completely closed mind.

"It's an exasperating question, for the evidence is overwhelmingly conclusive that only William Shakespeare of Stratford could have written these plays and poems. I gradually came to understand that at the heart of this 'authorship controversy' was a different set of questions with which I had not yet adequately wrestled. When and why did people start doubting Shakespeare's authorship? Why has this been a mostly American phenomenon? What does it reveal about notions of genius, evidence, and the allure of conspiracy theories? And why have such notable figures as Sigmund Freud, Charlie Chaplin, Malcolm X, and Mark Twain subscribed to this myth?"

It is characteristic of Professor Shapiro that it is not enough to say there is sufficient evidence to justify thinking Will of Stratford wrote the Shakespearean plays and poems. He insists that "only William Shakespeare of Stratford could" have written them. This is a difficult position to maintain when you also insist that parts of some of the plays were written by John Fletcher. Blindness to this kind of inconsistency is a sign that we are dealing here with a statement of faith rather than an application of reason to a merely human, mortal problem.

In *Contested Will* itself Shapiro doesn't refer to his prior book tour, unless that is what he means when he writes of "audience members at popular lectures." Instead he tells the story of a fourth-grader who asked a question after he talked to the boy's class about Shakespeare's life and work: "My brother told me that Shakespeare really didn't write *Romeo and Juliet*. Is that true?" It's as if this small boy's words made Shapiro realize just how widespread the doubts about Shakespeare's identity had

become and moved him to write this book.

An odd thing about this anecdote is that, through it, Shapiro provides himself with a motive for taking up the authorship question that is similar to the one that launched Looney on his search for Shakespeare. Looney became more and more convinced that the life of the Stratford man as we know it from the records and documents does not reflect that of the author of the plays and poems. As a teacher, Looney found it increasingly difficult to present as facts statements that he could not longer believe were true. Almost a century later, Shapiro implies that he felt moved to rush to the defense of schoolchildren and protect them from the myths of the people he describes as “rejecters of Shakespeare.”

Another logical fallacy that Shapiro demonstrates is what is known in freshman writing classes as “either/or thinking,” and this is one of the ways in which he is very different from Looney. For instance, Shapiro gives the impression that Shakespeare wrote plays either as dramatic performances or as books to be read. He himself prefers performances—either live performances or movies. He admits to becoming bored in high school by teachers taking classes through close readings of the texts. For a time, he thought he disliked, if not actually hated, Shakespeare’s plays. On the other hand, he later fell in love with Shakespeare’s work when he was able to see the plays on stage, especially in London. It follows that the idea of Shakespeare as a man of the theater appeals to him, and he writes with obvious pleasure about Shakespeare’s role as an actor, playwright, and shareholder in the Lord Chamberlain’s Men. It also follows that the idea of Shakespeare writing entertainments for pay appeals to him. Why should he have wished to do anything else?

Fair enough. But Looney argues that the kind of man Shapiro pictures could not have written the plays of Shakespeare. Instead, Looney concluded that Shakespeare, the pen name of Edward de Vere, Earl of Oxford, wrote plays for performance, plays that would divert the court or those who paid to see them in a theater, but he also rewrote and reworked them so that they would also satisfy those who wished to linger over them on the printed page. And in this way, Shakespeare would achieve the two purposes the ancient world assigned to literature—to delight and enlighten readers and theatergoers.

Of course it would be a good thing for the author if performances generated money (Oxford certainly needed it), but as Shapiro points out, while the publication of the plays might establish in the public mind the name William Shakespeare, the author would not derive any income from those publications directly. The “copyrights” (it’s misleading to think of copyright as the term is now used) would belong to the Chamberlain’s Men, not the author, whoever he was. The motive for reworking and rewriting plays so that they become not only an afternoon’s pastime but also lasting literature would not be money. It is directly related to the question of the author’s audience.

Shapiro gives the impression that Shakespeare must have written either for his contemporaries or for posterity. For all of his pseudo-learned labeling of Shakespeare as an “early modern writer,” he pays scant attention to the influence of printing on writers of the time. Plays performed at public theaters could influence

the thought and behavior of an audience that included illiterates as well as the learned. Shakespeare clearly wrote for his contemporaries who made up an audience and would wish to have something for all of them in his plays. On the other hand, he was aware that the writers of the ancient world spoke to him, even though they had written long before the invention of the printing press. Because of the press' ability to make multiple identical copies of a text, increasing the likelihood that his own voice might reach future readers, he also wrote for them. He said as much: "Not monuments, nor the gilded palaces/Of princes shall outlive this powerful rhyme."

Shapiro gives the impression that Shakespeare must have written his sonnets either as autobiography ("a very modern thing to do," he says) or, in the words of Giles Fletcher, "only to try my humour." It is ridiculous to suggest that Shakespeare's sonnets are autobiographical in the sense that he wrote his entire life story in them. On the other hand, it is much more ridiculous to insist they are works of fiction—expressing feelings the author never felt, written to people who did not exist while assuming a mask, a persona, and not speaking in his own voice. It is far more reasonable to think that a poet might well use sonnets in much the same way that Montaigne in France used the essay—writing to understand himself and his situation and to relieve his feelings.

"That time of year thou may'st in me behold" is not the kind of line that was written to begin a sonnet that had no contact with the poet's life and did not have as its primary audience the 'thou' being addressed. It is not reasonable to think it was written merely to try one's humor with one eye on the possibility of selling it to Thomas Thorpe more than a decade after the fad for sonnet sequences had peaked. I also think Thorpe's use of the words "ever-living" to describe the author means—as Looney said in 1920—that the author was dead by 1609.

It is worth pointing out that Shapiro refers to Sidney's sonnet sequence *Astrophel and Stella* without considering the question of whether it is "autobiographical." It is enough to say that Sidney did not realize that he was an early modern writer when he concluded a sonnet on how to go about writing with "Fool,' said my Muse to me, 'look in thy heart and write.'" Peter Moore shows that the "conspiracy of silence" concerning the identification of Stella as Lady Penelope Rich was maintained until 1691, and the evidence to establish that identification was not pieced together into a persuasive argument by scholars until the mid-nineteenth century, that is, until the time when the authorship question really began.

Moore appropriately ends his piece: "The Stella cover-up offers remarkable parallels to what we infer concerning the Earl of Oxford and William Shakespeare. It should become the standard response to sneers about conspiracy theories." (See "The Stella Cover-Up" in Peter R. Moore, *The Lame Storyteller, Poor and Despised*.) It should also be noted that Sidney's sonnet sequence was not published until after his death. The sonnets had circulated in manuscript until then, a practice that separated Sidney, a knight and courtier, from poets who published their sonnet sequences in their lifetimes, but also a practice that connected Elizabethan court poets with those of the reign of Henry VIII, especially Wyatt and Surrey, the first English sonneteers and translators or adapters of Petrarch.

Shapiro's passage on the sonnets also raises the question of censorship in Shakespeare's time. He says that Giles Fletcher took to writing sonnets for a practical, political reason: "Fletcher had hoped to write a history of Elizabeth's reign, but shelved plans for that after Lord Burghley refused to approve such a politically sensitive project."

Shapiro does not pause here to point out that the statesman engaging in this quasi-official censorship—"Hark, a word in your ear!"—was William Cecil, Lord Burghley, the father-in-law of Edward de Vere, Earl of Oxford, and the contemporary of Shakespeare, who is widely thought to be the model for Polonius by both Stratfordians and Oxfordians. Shapiro is naturally opposed to identifying actual people as models for fictional characters in plays—according to him, early modern writers just didn't do such things and we only think they did because modern writers do and we are used to reading modern writers.

It is almost as important to remember the tendency of human nature to stay fundamentally the same as it is to be aware that the sameness expresses itself in different ways in different times and places. Printing permitted writers to deal with potential censors by the use of pen names. If the identity of Stella provides one parallel with the authorship question, the scholarship that has tried to determine the identity of Martin Mar-prelate is another. The Martin Mar-prelate pamphlets first appeared at about the time Shakespeare is traditionally thought to have turned up in London and begun his career in the theater.

While I have not kept up with the literature on the subject, I remember once being almost certain that Martin Mar-prelate was the pen name of John Penry, a Welsh priest who worked hard for the poor of Wales. Further reading made it seem more likely that Penry served as compositor and editor, and was active in hiding the press that produced the pamphlets by moving it around the countryside; the texts were written by another man who could stay put and had more leisure and whose wit and style matched that of the pamphlets. In any case, the unmasking of this Elizabethan writer continues to this day. If it is hard to reach consensus on who Martin Mar-prelate was, it is not surprising that it is difficult to reach agreement on who Shakespeare was. But the first step is to admit the possibility that the name could be a pen name.

Shapiro misrepresents Looney most when he discusses Shakespeare's attitude toward money. He says that Looney took a large, general position on the relationship between money and writing, that he believes "great authors don't write for money." Although this remains a widely held view, a commonplace, I don't recall Looney saying anything of the kind. In fact, Looney went out of his way to make the point that money deserves respect as an important social convenience.

There is nothing in Looney's "retrograde vision" that calls for a return to the barter system. Looney also points out that there are times in history when too great a concern with money and its accumulation throws society out of whack, throws the time out of joint, and that Shakespeare lived in such a time. The contempt expressed in the plays for money and those who give it too much attention is not merely an expression of aristocratic disdain, but rather a recognition that its overemphasis does

social harm, preventing the efficient flow and distribution of the good things in life. He recognized that an excessive generosity, an overt carelessness about what others worried over and clung to, was the way to counter this social harm, even if it meant others would think the spendthrift a fool. Shakespeare gives voice to the attitude with the words, “Nor care I who doth feed upon my cost.”

The speech Looney focused on is Polonius’s advice to Laertes with its famous phrase, “Neither a borrower nor a lender be.” He chose it because it used to be taught as an expression of Shakespeare’s own philosophy, not the philosophy of Polonius, a character in a play. As Looney showed, Polonius’s attitude toward money was connected with individualism of a particular kind, the kind embodied in the words that high school students used to memorize: “To thine own self be true ...and thou can’st not be false to any man.” As Looney showed, however, if you are true only to yourself, you cannot be true to anyone who disagrees with you or differs from you.

In short, Looney used this speech to show that Shakespeare recognized that too great a concern for money and too great a concern for self did harm to society. The opposite of Polonius in the play is, of course, Hamlet. He reflects his attitude toward money when he bitterly mutters “Thrift, thrift, Horatio,” as a sardonic way to tell his friend why his mother married his uncle so soon after his father’s death—using the food purchased for the funeral of his father to feed the guests at their wedding. The contrast between Polonius and Hamlet on the question of the use of money is reflected in the way they would treat the players when they arrive. Hamlet urges Polonius to “see them well bestowed” and let them “be well used.” Polonius counters that he “will use them according to their desert” and so gives Hamlet (and us if we are willing to learn) a chance to instruct Polonius:

God’s bodkin, man much better! Use every man after his desert and who shall scape whipping? Use them after your own honor and dignity. The less they deserve, the more merit is in your bounty.

Shapiro is clearly put off and misled by Looney’s language. Looney uses words like “noble” and “ideal,” and opposes what he calls materialism. But the materialist, Karl Marx, thought along lines similar to those of Looney so far as the question of Shakespeare on money is concerned. The early biographer of Marx Franz Mehring says that Marx did not let his sympathy for the working class prejudice him against Shakespeare’s aristocratic outlook; Marx himself used speeches from *Timon of Athens* to analyze the social harm the misuse of money can do. Looney did not, like Marx, call for the abolition of money. He simply wanted to see humankind take a rational approach to the use of it as an instrument of social convenience. It was the revolutionary socialist William Morris, not Looney, who pictured a medieval utopian future that flourished without money or machinery.

We seem to be getting far afield from the Shakespeare authorship question, but that is as it should be. As Delia Bacon first argued, the question arose because the misidentification of the author kept readers and playgoers from seeing and learning fully what is in the plays. Professor Shapiro himself provides a good example.

In *A Year in the Life of William Shakespeare: 1599*, Shapiro has little patience with, and in fact attacked, Edmund Spenser for his service to the Elizabethan state in Ireland:

Where Shakespeare had purchased a house in his native Stratford, Spenser had moved into a castle on stolen Irish land. And what had it got him? It's hard not to conclude that for Shakespeare, Spenser had built on sand. Premature interment at Chaucer's feet was poor compensation for so badly misreading history. Spenser had rewritten the course of English epic and pastoral. Shakespeare would soon enough take a turn at rewriting each in *Henry the Fifth* and *As You Like It*—and would have appreciated the vote of confidence in an anonymous university play staged later this year in which a character announces: "Let this duncified world esteem of Spenser and Chaucer, I'll worship sweet Mr. Shakespeare."

It is not just that Shapiro here provides evidence that Shakespeare worship did not start in the eighteenth century and usher in a history of error of which the authorship question is a part; he establishes a false opposition between Spenser and Shakespeare and suggests we must choose one or the other. He is aware that Shakespeare paid tribute to Spenser in sonnet 106 (or at least he thought so in the bad old days when he wrote *1599*, and still thought early modern writers might express real emotions about real people). But he also insists: "Spenser ...had chosen paths Shakespeare had rejected. He had pursued his poetic fortune through aristocratic—even royal—patronage..."

Shapiro's Shakespeare is the opposite of Looney's—anti-aristocratic, anti-feudal, untainted by Catholicism, and able to avoid the yoke of patronage and to flourish thanks to the capitalism that was breaking up the old establishment and offering opportunities to a clever, energetic man with a grammar school education who became an entrepreneur in a new but rapidly growing entertainment business. In Looney's time, people worried about misreading history for fear the human race would be doomed to repeat; in our time misreading history might lead an individual to miss a career opportunity. It is Shapiro's self-identification with his Shakespeare that causes him to misrepresent Looney to such an extent that it almost constitutes character assassination.

Shapiro says that Looney suggests that Shylock was modeled on William Shaksper of Stratford. I have no recollection of any such suggestion and when I briefly tried to find it I couldn't. That doesn't mean it isn't there. Whenever I reread Looney I am surprised at the things I've forgotten—although I've never thought of *Shakespeare Identified* as my bible, as Shapiro insists all Oxfordians do.

But I do recall that even though my teacher and friend, Bronson Feldman, thought it likely that Oxford had been forced to humiliate himself by borrowing money from Will Shaksper, he said and wrote that Shylock was based on Michael Lok, a merchant (Lok's father had been Henry VIII's mercer) who was ruined by

investing in Frobisher's voyages in search of a northwest passage to India and China. The Queen and Burghley contributed to Lok's ruin by refusing to pay promised amounts when the search proved futile. Lok was placed in a debtor's cell in the Fleet and his children were forced to beg in the streets. By 1596, Lok was indeed a merchant in Venice, trading with what was then called the Levant, and writing to Elizabeth to commend yet another chance to invest in an adventure that promised to produce fabulous riches. Oxford was also a big loser through investments in Frobisher's voyages; Feldman, in his *Hamlet Himself*, finds these losses reflected in Hamlet being "but mad north-north west..." In any case, it is this, along with Looney's view that Shakespeare combined Catholic leanings with skepticism, that leads Shapiro to take a pronounced interest in Looney's statements about Jews.

This explains Shapiro's devoting the first section of his chapter on Oxford to Freud. Rather than considering Sigmund Freud as an Oxfordian in the context of Looney, which follows the historical evidence, Looney's Oxfordian theory is presented in a Freudian context. Shapiro feels obliged to explain why "one of the great modern minds turned against Shakespeare." Clinging to the belief that that anyone who thinks that the name William Shakespeare may have been a pen name is "turning against Shakespeare" would be funny if it didn't cause so much harm — especially to Professor Shapiro himself, but also to anyone who is silly enough to take this accusation seriously. I quote the relevant passage from *Contested Will*:

Looney's daughter, Mrs. Evelyn Bodell, reported that a few days before he died on 17 January 1944, her father confided, "My great aim in life has been to work for the religious and moral unity of mankind; and along with this, in later years, there has been my desire to see Edward de Vere established as the author of the Shakespearean plays—and the Jewish problem settled." This last phrase can be easily misread, especially in 1944 when it was becoming clearer what horrors the Nazis had inflicted on the Jews (among the victims were four of Freud's five sisters, who died in extermination camps). What Looney meant by this is clarified in a letter he sent to Freud in July 1938, shortly after he had fled Vienna and arrived in London. Rather than discussing the Shakespeare problem, Looney wanted to enlist Freud's support in resolving the Jewish one. He explains that he writes as a Positivist, as a nationalist, and as someone with no quarrel with dictatorship.

While highly critical of the Nazis, Looney is also impatient with the Jews' refusal to abandon their racial distinctiveness and assimilate fully into the nation-states in which they lived—the ultimate source, to Looney, of their persecution. He rejects the possibility of a Jewish homeland as impractical; the only solution, from his Positivist perspective, is their "fusion," which, sooner or later, "must come." Looney might have added that Oxford had foreseen as much in having both Shylock and Jessica "fuse" through conversion with the dominant Venetian society by the end of *The Merchant*

of Venice. Looney was consistent to the end. He had begun his authorship quest decades earlier, after equating Shakespeare of Stratford's "acquisitive disposition" and "habitual petty money transactions" with Shylock's. For Looney, the idea that a money-hungry author had written the great plays was impossible. His originality, then, was in suggesting that while Shakespeare of Stratford was portrayed in Shylock, the play's true author, the Earl of Oxford, had painted his self-portrait in Antonio. Looney's solution to the authorship problem, like the solution of the play's "Jewish problem," and indeed, "the religious and moral unity of mankind," was of a piece.

I regret that Professor Shapiro chose not to include the letter that Looney wrote to Freud in July 1938. There is no way to be sure that Looney's mind had not been changed or at least influenced by events that occurred between July 1938 and January 1944. He wrote Freud before the Kristallnacht pogrom of November 9-10, 1938, when a hundred Jews were killed and 177 synagogues were burned down and destroyed. Furthermore, whatever Looney wrote Freud, it did not seem to affect their relationship or cause Freud to change his mind about Looney's solution to the authorship question. More to the point, Shapiro does publish another statement, but separates it from his discussion of the subject and banishes it to his Bibliographical Essay. This statement of Looney's dates from June 10, 1939 and reflects his idea that politics, like money, was a social convenience that should be treated with respect but not overemphasized:

To me, however, it does not appear to be a struggle between democracy and dictatorship so much as between material force and spiritual interests. In the centuries that lie ahead, when the words Nazi and Hitler are remembered only with feelings of disgust and aversion and as synonyms for cruelty and bad faith, Shakespeare, Wordsworth, Tennyson & Shelly [sic] will continue to be honoured as expressions of what is most enduring and characteristic of Humanity.

Shapiro's legitimate but piddling use of the bracketed "sic" here is the result of his consulting a reprinted version of the statement rather than any difficulty on Looney's part to spell Shelley's name correctly. It is also worth pointing out that Looney made this statement months before the pact between Hitler and Stalin and the start of World War II in Europe on September 1, 1939, with the Nazi invasion of Poland. Sixteen days later the Soviets invaded Poland from the east. The next year, on April 23, 1940, the Nazis staged an official birthday celebration for William Shakespeare in Weimar. Being a Stratfordian is no guarantee of an enlightened outlook.

In the end, no matter what Looney's opinions were, those who share his view on the identity of Shakespeare do not necessarily share his opinion on any other subject. But to smear indiscriminately all Oxfordians is precisely Shapiro's aim:

Looney's Oxfordianism was a package deal. You couldn't easily accept the candidate but reject the method. You also had to accept

a portrait of the artist concocted largely of fantasy and projection, one wildly at odds with the facts of Edward de Vere's life. Looney had concluded that the story of the plays' authorship and the feudal, antidemocratic, and deeply authoritarian values of those plays were inseparable; to accept his solution to the authorship controversy meant subscribing to this troubling assumption as well.

Shapiro substitutes this attempt to smear all present and future Oxfordians for a rational refutation of a rational case. A key to the approach is his reliance for the facts of Oxford's life on Alan Nelson's *Monstrous Adversary*. Shapiro says Nelson's description of Oxford's life is harsh and authoritative, which must be Stratfordian for malicious and untrustworthy. It is clear that Shapiro and Nelson, the good cop/bad cop of academic Shakespearean studies, represent a new phase in the history of the authorship controversy. First silence, then ridicule, and now attack—the academic Stratfordians have exhausted the three main ways that people in power use to respond to threatening ideas. What should we expect from them next?

Shapiro has already announced his next book, *The Year of Lear: 1606*, a title that brings up another way he misrepresents Looney's work. He writes:

The greatest challenge Looney had to meet was the problem of Oxford's death in 1604, since so many of Shakespeare's great Jacobean plays were not yet written, including *Macbeth*, *King Lear*, *Coriolanus*, *Antony and Cleopatra*, *Timon of Athens*, *Pericles*, *The Winter's Tale*, *Cymbeline*, and *Henry the Eighth*. Looney concluded that these plays were written before Oxford died (and posthumously released one by one to the play-going public) or left incomplete and touched up by lesser writers (which explains why they contain allusions to sources or events that took place after Oxford had died). It was a canny two-part strategy, one that could refute almost any counterclaim.

The last sentence offers another reason for Shapiro's complete misunderstanding of Looney's work and character. Looney was neither a professor with a strategy for shaking grants and fellowships from the academic plum tree nor a faculty advisor to a debating team who wished to train students to win arguments whether they believed what they were saying or not. He was making a serious effort to understand questions that had made chaos of Shakespearean studies, chaos that continues to this day and supports armies of academics. Professor Shapiro states as a fact that these plays were written after Oxford's death; his adherence to the Stratford cult means that he must follow the chronology of the plays established by E.K. Chambers (or a variation of it concocted to keep the dates extending beyond Oxford's lifetime).

Looney, alas, did not live long enough to learn the revealed truth according to Chambers and so had to stumble along in the dark, relying on the authorities who had tackled the subject up to his own time and on his own good common sense

and honesty. Based on subject matter, versification, and a sense of the playwright's development, Looney argued that a number of these so-called late plays had much more in common with early ones than with those that were certainly late. *The Winter's Tale* and *Pericles*, for instance, seem more at home with *A Midsummer Night's Dream* rather than with *Macbeth*. No less an authority than the English poet Samuel Taylor Coleridge had proposed a similar grouping of the plays, as Shapiro knows because he reports on it. Coleridge's view does not mean much to Shapiro, though, because he was only a poet, not a professional Shakespeare scholar.

Before Shapiro rushes into print insisting that *King Lear* was written in 1606, I hope he will read Abraham Bronson Feldman's evidence showing that Robert Armin, the clown thought to have played Lear's fool, was a servant of the Earl of Oxford. Armin wrote that he served a Lord in Hackney; Feldman argued, persuasively to my mind, that the only Lord then living in Hackney who had connections with the theater was Oxford.

In 1599 Shapiro deals effectively with the shift in the Lord Chamberlain's men that took place when William Kemp, the dancer and comedian, left the company and was replaced by Armin. He shows how this change in personnel was reflected in a shift in Shakespeare's comic roles and convincingly argues that the author had to be familiar with the actors' strengths and weaknesses to write parts that would make the most of their talents. If I'm not mistaken, Alan Nelson in his *Monstrous Adversary* showed that when Kemp was a servant of the Earl of Leicester he crossed paths with Oxford in Holland.

If Shapiro gives himself a chance, he might come to imagine that those visits of the clown to King's Place to divert his master, when his master was drawing closer to death, might make a more likely source for the relationship between Lear and his fool than anything going on in 1606. By the way, Lear's allowing the fool to enter the hut and escape the storm before he himself did, shows what Looney meant by the feudal ideal—the strong and powerful feeling duty bound to protect the weak and helpless.

Stratfordians refused to consider this kind of thing—Feldman first published his evidence in the fall 1947 *Shakespeare Fellowship Quarterly*—because they mixed it up with another quibble over names. I hate to think how much ink has been spilt to try to show either that Oxford as Lord Great Chamberlain could not have been the patron of the Lord Chamberlain's players, or that because various other courtiers held the title Lord Chamberlain, it was impossible for Oxford to have had any role or influence in it. If Burghley could keep a man from writing a book with a word, Oxford and his friends could easily have arranged for Oxford to write for and work with the players whether they wore his livery or another's. It is in this company or cry of players, that included both Robert Armin and William Shakspeare and maintained its links with their Lord in Hackney, that we can start to understand the ground which might lead to a resolution of the authorship problem.

William Shakspeare could buy New Place in Stratford in 1597 and go back and forth from Stratford to London while working in the theater and Edward de Vere, earl of Oxford, could reside at King's Place and write and revise plays and work with the players in much the same way that Hamlet does. But for work to progress in that

direction, it will be necessary to stop treating the authorship question as a religious quarrel, demonizing those with differing views, and instead admit that we are all ignorant despite our best efforts, but that if we work together while on this whirling mud ball, moving through infinite space, we just might leave the next generation a little less ignorant. To my mind, the hero of *Contested Will* is the fourth-grader, who asked: “My brother told me that Shakespeare really didn’t write *Romeo and Juliet*. Is that true?” That youngster can serve as a model of scholarship — he cited his source, quoted him fully and accurately, and then asked the most relevant follow up question. Professor Shapiro doesn’t tell us how he responded, and that might be just as well. But if he goes ahead with his *Year of Lear: 1606*, I hope he’ll have the good fortune to run into a kid who will raise his hand and say, “My brother told me William Shakespeare died in 1604 and you believe he wrote a play in 1606. Is that true?”

I write this in memory of Charles Wisner Barrell, Craig Huston, Ruth Loyd Miller, and Bronson Feldman.