

Book Reviews

The Shakespeare Controversy

2nd Edition

By Warren Hope and Kim Holston

Jefferson: NC, McFarland, 2009

Reviewed by R. Thomas Hunter

I knew I liked this book from its first words. “For too long” Delia Bacon has been misunderstood and misrepresented as has her symbolic function for Shakespeare authorship studies: “an unworldly pursuit of truth that produces gifts for a world that is indifferent or hostile to them.” Anyone who has labored in the vineyards of authorship study knows how well that statement expresses their experience.

The second accomplishment of authors Warren Hope and Kim Holston in the early pages of *The Shakespeare Controversy* is to help untangle the web of Ms. Bacon’s seminal work, which first articulated the authorship issue and gave birth to subsequent generations of research, reading, and speculation, *The Philosophy of the Plays of Shakespeare Unfolded*.

Thus, from its very beginning, the authors of this recently revised history of the Shakespeare authorship controversy provide an engaging and a very necessary primer into the history of the controversy and its progression toward Edward De Vere, the 17th Earl of Oxford as the true author of Shakespeare’s works. It is at the same time more complete, more reasonable, and more readable than anything Stratfordian Professor Samuel Shoenbaum, who tended toward hysteria whenever he addressed authorship literature, ever provided in his histories of Shakespearean biography. Indeed in their introduction, the authors remark on how histories of authorship produced by the traditional camp have all been afflicted with “a dreary sameness...[that] there is no Shakespeare authorship question, really, only a gabble of cranks who think there is. It is as if dwellers on the flat earth decided to write up the evolution of the notion that the world is round” (xi). I like the authors’ confident

statement that this is “a view that will pass.”

This second edition of *The Shakespeare Controversy* updates the history of the controversy from 1975 to 2009. Significant work has taken place during that time, such as Bronson Feldman’s *Hamlet Himself*, 1977, which seems to be currently unavailable, Charlton Ogburn’s *The Mysterious William Shakespeare*, 1984, revised in 1995, and Mark Anderson’s “*Shakespeare*” by *Another Name*, 2005, and the work of researchers such as Peter Moore, Nina Green, Christopher Paul, Roger Stritmatter, Richard Whalen and Joseph Sobran.

The authors also rightfully include Gary Goldstein’s *The Elizabethan Review*, published from 1993 to 1999, an important development as the first independent, peer-reviewed authorship journal open to all contributions about the authorship issue in general but leaning decidedly toward Oxford. Colleges and universities around the world became regular subscribers. The authors do not go into what happened to it and why, but its demise most certainly leaves a void.

They also update the Stratfordian side by paying too much attention to Irwin Matus and Alan Nelson, although detailed discussion of the latter is really necessary in order to give some idea of Nelson’s monstrous hatchet job of scholarship prompted by his clearly hostile attitude toward Oxford, which compels him to misread and to misrepresent the evidence. Whereas Nelson’s contribution to documentation of Oxford’s life had been gratefully acknowledged previously by Oxfordians, Nelson’s 2003 volume now calls into question the very accuracy of all of his work, as has been demonstrated in great detail by Nina Green and Robert Brazil, whose contributions to understanding Nelson the authors woefully omit.

Such is also the case with an ostensibly friendly writer such as Daphne Pearson, the accuracy of whose 2005 biography of Oxford, especially its financial detail, has been called into serious question by documented analysis from Nina Green and Christopher Paul. Since the book was based on Pearson’s PhD dissertation on Oxford from 2000, the multiplier effect of misinformation appeared first in Nelson’s book, which apparently relied on it since it so well fit his image of Oxford’s profligacy. Oxfordians have shown that not only did Oxford not have as much money to lose as Nelson, Pearson and others have argued, but that much of it was spent by the Queen and her paramour Robert Dudley, Earl of Leicester.

The authors cover important developments such as the 1991 *Atlantic Monthly* debate pitting Tom Bethell against Irwin Matus, the still memorable 1989 PBS Frontline special which brought the debate and the name of Oxford to the forefront of this popular television show, and the 1987 Moot Court verdict for Shakespeare by Supreme Court Justices Brennan, Blackmun and Stevens. Sadly, the new edition of *The Shakespeare Controversy* was already at press by the time the *Wall Street Journal* in April of this year printed its front page special on Justice Stevens’ more recent judgment for Oxford “beyond a reasonable doubt.”

The update also gives important attention to Diana Price’s agnostic *Shakespeare’s Unorthodox Biography*, which the authors put in the tradition of George Greenwood. There is also homage paid to works proffering new candidates to consider, including Sir Henry Neville (Bill Rubenstein and Brenda James) and Mary

Sidney Herbert (Robin Williams).

Two final invaluable features: First, it is most helpful that the authors not only provide the quotes which we have relied on from such forerunners as Twain, Whitman, Freud, Chaplin and many, many others, but also exactly where to find them. Second, the well annotated 86 page bibliography provides a treasure trove of authorship sources with generous commentary that provides an endless stream of information and enjoyment. For one small example, the entry for Stanley Wells' "There's No Doubt It's Will" quotes Wells betraying his ignorance about the use of pen-names in Elizabethan times.

One of the few lapses of judgment in this book is the authors' decision to pit Mark Anderson's well-reasoned, detailed biography of Oxford against Bill Bryson's folksy, misinformed biography of the traditional Shakespeare in order to show the state of the debate. The words "the sublime and the ridiculous" come to mind. The risk is the overconfidence Oxfordians might feel in the comparison which in truth is apt in the sense that so often Oxfordians are left questioning the Stratfordian response with: "Is this all you have to offer?" The problem is that still, for the casual public who do not want anyone to take their Shakespeare from them, Bryson is enough.

The updated section of the revised *The Shakespeare Controversy* brings us full circle to the original work's treatment of Delia Bacon with the news of a new edition of her *Philosophy of Shakespeare's Plays Unfolded*, edited by Elliott Baker and retitled *Shakespeare's Philosophy Unfolded* to reflect the simpler, more coherent unfolding of her argument, whose original complexity and obfuscation forced even the most willing reader to put down the book before its mission was accomplished.

Even though Bacon's book is treated as an icon of authorship literature, it is important to understand that its point was more to explicate meaning of the plays than to identify their aristocratic author. It is enough for her to rail against "that booby" of Stratford as she did in front of Thomas Carlyle in person. "It was then that he began to shriek," she wrote. "You could have heard him a mile." [8] She was perhaps the first to insist on the difference between Shakspeare, the booby, and Shakespeare, the author. Nevertheless, to Delia Bacon, the difference was important more for literary reasons than for biographical ones. She insisted that the full philosophy of Shakespeare's work would be missed if we thought of Shakspeare as the author. Her erstwhile moral and financial supporter, Nathaniel Hawthorne, was more taken with her analysis of the philosophy of Shakespeare's plays than with the authorship premise which gave them substance.

What I have taken from Hope and Holston about Delia Bacon is that my experience with her dense, offputting, tangled prose wasn't just me. They insist that dogged determination in reading Delia Bacon will be worth it, that it is difficult but rewarding. I am still working on the rewarding part. "She must be read in her annoying, illuminating entirety," they write, although that was before Elliott Baker's edition.

Delia Bacon may not have begun the authorship debate, but it is clear that hers is the first systematic, detailed and developed inquiry into Shakespeare based

on the premises that Shakspeare didn't write it and that consequently the works must be appreciated for possibilities much greater than his lowly genius could provide. Who Shakespeare was, biographically, becomes the province of the rest of Hope and Holston's book, which travels through the development of the arguments for Sir Francis Bacon, Marlowe, Rutland, Derby and others, although rather tangentially, before arriving at its pre-ordained destination, the 17th Earl of Oxford.

Proponents of these positions, such as Walt Whitman and Mark Twain, almost overshadow the subject matter itself, but it is fascinating to see how their opinions developed, such as the influence on Whitman of William Douglass O'Connor, who almost single-handedly picked up the torch of Delia Bacon from Hawthorne's faltering hands and handed it off to Whitman. Here are Whitman's fascinating thoughts about authorship. He noticed that the term "gentle" as often applied to Shakespeare may have signified "high-blood bearing." He looked for aristocratic attitude by the author and found it everywhere, characters and incidents which "read the aristocratic vanity of the young noblemen and gentlemen...the hero is always of high lineage" (27), leading finally to the famous "wolfish earls" quote in *November Boughs*, 1888.

Whitman never committed to Francis Bacon as did O'Connor. Neither did Mark Twain. But Twain produced the long essay *Is Shakespeare Dead?* in 1909, which must be read by any authorship student. There Twain rejects Shakspeare from his personal experience of story telling on the riverboats, of being an author himself, and even more to the point, of being an author using a pen-name. He rejects Shakspeare with all of the humor and passion of Mark Twain at his best. Twain may not employ scholarship, but his use of knowledge, experience and just plain common sense is unrivaled by any Stratfordian apologist I have ever read. He could not commit to Francis Bacon as the author, because it had not been proven. But he did contribute one of the most important keys to unlocking the authorship mystery: the author's experience. Even a genius cannot create personal experience out of nothing. Whitman identified Shakespeare's aristocratic attitude. Twain identified the aristocratic experience generating Shakespeare's plays and poems. Alas, the man from Stratford "hadn't any history to record." Twain's greater concern was human folly: "he felt humanity degraded itself, and caused itself severe problems, when it pretended to know what it merely believed." [38] Twain thought the old Shakespeare was good for another 300 years. It is now 100 years later, and the gulf between knowing and believing seems as wide as ever.

Hope and Holston follow the authorship path through Francis Bacon via Mrs. Henry Pott, one of the early practitioners of placing quotes from her candidate next to quotes from Shakespeare and "proving" identity through similarities which often aren't there. The method has been used for Oxford, too. In attempting to produce scientific support for their man, many Baconians turned to Ignatius Donnelly and supposed secret messages from the Bard to future generations via ciphers. The idea had some legitimacy since Elizabethan authors did communicate this way to protect themselves. The problem is that cipher methods ultimately seem arbitrary if not whimsical and formulas contorted in order to construct messages which often

appear themselves to be of dubious value. Suffice it to say that the authorship crowd ultimately had as little patience for ciphers as I do and generally moved on to the more scholarly pursuits of research and documentation.

What is interesting about Donnelly is how the method of his first chapter, "William Shakspeare Did Not Write the Plays," is precursor to Looney's method, a point unfortunately left by Hope and Holston to the reader to make for himself: "comparing the characteristics of the author as they have been established by scholars and critics with what has been determined about the life of William Shakspeare." Looney, of course makes the comparison with the life of Edward de Vere.

The authors do find importance in that first chapter of Donnelly's work in which he "tracks down a single quotation in order to establish the author's classical learning" which had been dismissed by traditional scholars as erroneous and demonstrates how the scholar's concept of the author can lead to wrong conclusions: "They feel free to leap to the conclusion that Shakespeare is in error, misunderstood something, or simply made things up because they do not expect him to know any better" (46). Donnelly thus effectively showed what is becoming a mainstay of the Oxfordian position, that traditional scholars attribute the unknown to genius, having no idea how great Shakespeare's genius really was.

Also he shows that statements in the First Folio, "primary documents that defenders of the legend invariably point to...are self-contradictory and fraudulent." (50) Unfortunately, Donnelly's manic focus on ciphers "set back for years to come the cause he sought to serve" in Hope and Holston's estimate. He also went on to claim for Bacon prodigious amounts of the literature of the time, including *Don Quixote*, another danger we have seen among some supporters of Oxford. However, "as a result of Donnelly's work, the faith in the Stratford legend was permanently shaken and a solution to the authorship question was closer than it had ever been before" (56).

The chief virtue of *The Shakespeare Controversy* is to recount the history of anti-Stratfordian, then Oxfordian, scholarship, especially in terms of its quality when compared to the Stratfordians. The authors portray the growing doubt about the incumbent Bard from John Aubrey to David Garrick, Washington Irving, and ultimately Henry James in his short story "The Birthplace." They portray the reasonable arguments of Sir George Greenwood in the mounting case against Shakspeare and contrast it with the "darkening pall of professionalism" taking over early in the 20th century, which installed the voice of the authority of tradition and the establishment to take precedence over evidence accumulated by "amateur" challengers. Included is the work of Samuel Butler (early dating of the Sonnets) and Frank Harris (Shakespeare's aristocratic attitude), examples of groundbreaking work constricted by Stratfordian shackles. Charlie Chaplin was no professional scholar, but his experience taught him that "in the work of the greatest of geniuses humble beginnings will reveal themselves somewhere--but one cannot trace the slightest sign of them in Shakespeare" (82).

Hope and Holston may be forgiven for giving short shrift to the histories of the development of arguments for other candidates, including Marlowe, Rutland,

Derby,

John Florio, and Robert Burton. Indeed their ultimate purpose in bringing them up at all is that the plethora of candidates allowed the Strats to hoot and jeer in derision at half-baked ideas about Shakespeare's identity which at the very least lacked focus and coherence.

The appearance of J. Thomas Looney on the scene in 1920 could not have been better timed. Combing the works for characteristics of the author and then casting a net over the Elizabethan age for a candidate who fulfilled those characteristics brought a common sense method to the search, resulting for the first time in "a rational account of the origin and composition of Shakespeare's plays and poems" (105). In *De Vere*, Looney accomplished the "marriage of Shakespeare's life and verse" which Emerson despaired of ever achieving in 1850 (111). Looney's Shakespeare is "an originator, rather than an imitator," "a thinker of the first order" (111), in other words, that very author whom careful readers had suspected to reside in the literature all along despite the imaginings of traditional scholars and academics.

Looney was attacked for having a funny name and for being an amateur in the challenging business of Shakespeare scholarship. The subsequent story of the Shakespeare Fellowship, and researchers like B.R. Ward, H.H. Holland, B.M. Ward, Canon Gerald Rendall, and Charles Wisner Barrell is a story of amateurs and their larger humanistic purpose and concern for the truth against professionals like Samuel Schoenbaum and Frank W. Wadsworth, whose ethic saw Shakespeare in terms of self-interest and defending the establishment's version of the truth. The claim of "professionalism" being the refuge of Stratfordian scoundrels, the authors give case histories comparing the sound scholarship of the amateurs with the misinformation, misrepresentations and outright errors of the professionals.

In their original introduction, Hope and Holston claim this for their book:

The result is a kind of inversion of the history of the subject as it has been written to date. People who have been denounced as lunatics are seen as truth-seekers. Great writers who have been said to have spoken ironically on this subject are taken at their word. Cranks become respected authorities and respected authorities become mere cranks. A whole host of people who have been torn from their contexts and misrepresented are put back where they belong and permitted to show at least a glimpse of their true colors. (xii)

I am pleased to report that this result, the story of the inversion of the established order in Shakespeare studies, is amply achieved by Hope and Holston, though we know there is some way to go for its final accomplishment. When you despair of that ever happening, and you will time and again, reach for this book. But then, if you haven't done so yet, you might do so now.

This book, even before being updated, was a valuable primer on how the Shakespeare authorship controversy has taken shape. The present update is a must read. A wise man has said that we need to know where we have been to know where

we are going. This book supplies a history filled with anecdotes and insights which in turn inspire a certain confidence about what has been experienced and accomplished by Oxfordians that is good for the soul. The recent news about Supreme Court Justices Stevens and Scalia in the *Wall St. Journal* of April 17, 2009 is enough to start thinking about a third edition. The authors and their publisher might consider that this very helpful resource should be updated more often than every 17 years.

In any event, the authors should be forgiven for their sense of frustration that the authorship controversy hasn't progressed farther than it has in that period of time. In the preface to the new edition, they write, "The controversy seems to be moving less to a clearcut resolution than to a general acceptance of the legitimacy of the scholarly pursuit of the question," and reference the successful Declaration of Reasonable Doubt. I beg to differ. First of all is the huge increase in circumstantial evidence brought to light over that period of time. Even more, given the size and the intransigence of the opposition, Oxfordians have made amazing strides in advancing their case, the recognition of the legitimacy of the issue chief among them. We have to believe that the headlines announcing Justice Stevens' and Scalia's decision favoring the Earl of Oxford are only symptomatic of the cracks developing in the Stratfordian position. Forgive me for believing that the third edition of this book will have much to report.

***The Muse as Therapist: A New Poetic Paradigm for
Psychotherapy***

by Heward Wilkinson,

London: Karnac Books. xxxii+258 pages. £20.99.

Reviewed by Richard M. Waugaman, M.D.

Heward Wilkinson is a British psychotherapist who has written an intriguing book, subtitled "A New Poetic Paradigm for Psychotherapy." Why am I reviewing it for this journal? Because in his longest chapter, which Wilkinson calls "the passionate centre of the book," he argues that Edward de Vere was the concealed author of the works of Shakespeare. He admits that de Vere's "powerful poetic ghost has... taken over the organizational energy of [this] book" (xvi). I will return to his chapter on de Vere shortly. First, I need to tell you more about the book, so you will understand why de Vere enjoys pride of place in it.

Wilkinson worries that the profession of psychotherapy suffers from excessive medicalization, as illustrated by the current infatuation with neuroscience on the part of many psychoanalysts. He therefore wants to demonstrate that the arts are equally fundamental to our understanding of the process of psychotherapy. I strongly agree with him on this score. He chooses poetry among the arts as "most accessible" to the argument he