



## Editorial

### Breaking the Log Jam

It's not Nixon in China, but this issue of *The Oxfordian* represents a good-faith attempt to overcome the logjam in Shakespeare authorship studies. For too long advocates on one side especially have sneered, jeered and gibbered at the other, ululating with stopped ears while their opponents tried reasonably to talk. As a member of that camp I'm embarrassed by its tenured yahoos, and even more upset at the way their misrepresentations have been allowed to cauterize debate.

Raised in the liberal tradition of the 'free market of ideas,' where truth competes with its simulacrum, I have always found argument by adjective ('ridiculous,' 'ignorant,' etc.) troubling and unacceptable. It seems particularly unhelpful in an area of inquiry bedeviled by blank spots, ambiguities and the need, if the debate is to be advanced, to make plausible assumptions. Shakespeare/Shakspeare's education, access to a good library, sexual orientation(s), acquaintance with the law, familiarity with unpublished manuscripts, etc., all fall within the zone of speculation. Nonetheless he obviously was educated, did read widely, experienced romantic attachments, understood fine legal distinctions, knew a lot

about Italy and was acquainted with documents of surprising obscurity.

We can't verse-and-chapter the supporting data because they are not there, but nor can scientists definitively 'prove' the Big Bang, the existence of quarks, or that Salieri did not murder Mozart. Such things can nonetheless be inferred and treated as overwhelmingly likely. The question is, how did a relatively uneducated boy from a provincial town come by any of it?

It is of course the case, as Vickers remarks in '*Counterfeiting Shakespeare*' (xviii), that the acceptance of an authorial ascription is as much a political matter as a scholarly one. This accounts for a good deal of the debate's heat, at least on the institutional side: truth has consequences. Promotions, pay raises and professional acceptance, all reasonable ambitions, hang in the balance. Publically rejecting what seems *prima facie* to be an absurd and even crackpot notion is an easy choice.

It does not follow that those who query the traditional hypothesis ought to sink to the occasion in the manner of their opponents. The final attribution of the plays

and poems will not be settled by popular vote or institutional silencing, but by clear, concrete and irrefutable evidence. Arriving at it includes objectively scrutinizing the data and analyses produced by people we think we disagree with.

The current issue of *The Oxfordian* tries to honor these principles—that's my brief, as I understand it, and personal inclination. One hopes that Reasonable Doubters everywhere will take a closer look and that the articles will prove a resource for the Schools of Attribution Studies beginning quietly to sprout on both sides of the Atlantic. Together with the endorsements of some famous people, these developments contribute to the growing respectability of the authorship debate.

Despite its bulk and interest—approximately double the usual issue length, representing 2008 and 2009—the new *Oxfordian* will not be to everyone's taste. There are those who still feel that the journal should advocate aggressively. Others believe its pages should be reserved for the membership and friends, ironically complementing the academic silencing of Oxfordians referred to earlier. Proponents 'know' it's nonsense to suggest that the Earl of Derby or Amelia Lanier or Marlowe, etc., wrote the plays, so why give their advocates precious space?

One answer is that *The Oxfordian's* out-reach and readership is likely to be increased. That at least is among our objectives. Concrete responses like Ramon Jiménez's re-statement of the case for Oxford, or Stephanie Hughes' commentary at the end of the Open Forum section, will keep the debate alive and real. Future issues under my editorship will gladly publish counter-statements, counter-counter statements and so on, until some kind of authorial consensus emerges.

The pages that follow fall into three spatially unequal sections. Most notable is the Open

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Reviews books and articles of specific interest to Oxfordian readers. Writes a column for the next issue.

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Forum, a new feature in which supporters of non-Oxfordian candidates are allowed their say. This includes advocates for Mr W.S. himself, represented by David Kathman, one of his most articulate and informed supporters, and also the lesser-known Mr W.S., William Stanley, sixth earl of Derby, represented by John Raithel. Others given a platform include John Hudson on Amelia Bassano Lanier, and Peter Farey on Marlowe.

A second section, one I would like to encourage, is an extended Letters to the Editor column in which people can contribute intellectually reasoned statements about aspects of the authorship question (or indeed any Renaissance-drama matter) without the stringent scholarly requirements of an actual essay. Matthew Cosolotto's thoughts about the 400th anniversary of the Sonnets are well placed in such a forum. Alan Saunders, who claims that it is impossible to make the case for Fulke Greville in any other way, represents the column at its most useful.

The final section of this *Oxfordian* includes a series of solidly researched general articles which should prove of considerable interest to the Shakespearean community as a whole. Feedback and commentary are, as always, welcome.

*Michael Egan*



**Ipswich Grammar School, founded by Cardinal Wolsey in 1528. The original burned down. Shown above is the 19th-century reconstruction. See Robin Fox's 'Shakespeare, Oxford and the Grammar School Question,' page 111.**