

Auditing the Stylometricians: Elliott, Valenza and the Claremont Shakespeare Authorship Clinic

John M. Shahan and Richard F. Whalen

Introduction

This is our response to 'My Other Car is a Shakespeare' (*The Oxfordian*, Vol. X, 2007), by Professors Ward E. Y. Elliott and Robert J. Valenza, faculty advisors to the Shakespeare Authorship Clinic at Claremont McKenna College. They wrote 'Other Car' in response to our 'Apples to Oranges in Bard



Claremont McKenna College, California

Stylometrics: Elliott and Valenza fail to eliminate Oxford' (*The Oxfordian*, Vol. IX, 2006). 'Apples to Oranges' criticizes their stylometric research methods and challenges their claim to have eliminated Oxford as a viable candidate, as presented in 'Oxford by the Numbers: What Are the Odds that the Earl of Oxford Could Have Written Shakespeare's Poems and Plays?' in *The Tennessee Law Review* (72:1 Fall 2004). This is the sixth in a series of articles and letters to the editor of *The Oxfordian*, starting in 2000, in which Elliott and Valenza have presented and defended their results and conclusions, while we have persistently challenged them.

Part One rebuts 'Other Car' (2007). It deals with all of the issues we raised in 'Apples to Oranges' that Elliott and Valenza addressed in 'Other Car,' and some we raised that they ignored. *Part One* concludes that their rebuttals are without merit, and that we were correct in saying that the results of their study do not eliminate Oxford as a Shakespeare claimant.

Part Two addresses some of Elliott's and Valenza's many mischaracterizations of our stated positions, and then considers whether they also mischaracterize their own statistical results. *Part Two* concludes that they do indeed, again calling into question the validity of their claim to have eliminated Oxford.

Part One: Rebuttal to 'Other Car'

Overview

The heart of our argument is that stylometrics cannot eliminate Oxford because the small verse sample attributed to him was written much earlier than the mature verse of Shakespeare—decades earlier in most cases—so any stylistic differences between the two could be developmental. Like every writer, Shakespeare grew up; Oxford's early style may have blossomed over time into Shakespeare's mature style.

Elliott and Valenza reject this. They assume that Oxford's last published poems were written about when Shakespeare's works began to appear. They say that such stylistic development implies a sudden, massive, improbable metamorphosis in his forties, akin to 'a grub turning into a butterfly.'¹ But their dates assume that all of his known verses were written in the year of publication. They provide no basis for this key assumption, and ignore the disagreement of their own expert.

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Based on this mistaken assumption, they say he wrote his known verses between the ages of 22 and 44. The evidence says he wrote half by

age 16, and the rest probably in his 20s—plenty of time for a more mature style to have developed.

They also disregard the well-known contemporary praise for the quality and quantity of Oxford's writing. This should tell them that he probably wrote much more than has come down to us in his name, and that they have an incomplete, unrepresentative sample. Instead they assume that their small sample of verse is representative of his entire output, again ignoring the opinion of their own expert.

Limited to a small sample, they inappropriately combine all of his verses into a single comparison block, despite their variety, and despite the fact that half are song lyrics—a different genre from his poems. This confounds any relationship that may exist between Oxford's known verse and Shakespeare's mature poems.

As if these flaws were not sufficient, Elliott and Valenza ignore the many similarities between Oxford's writing style and Shakespeare's. They focus instead on so-called 'silver bullet' differences (said to disprove common authorship), as opposed to 'smoking gun' similarities (supporting common authorship). This greatly exacerbates the problem of non-comparable inputs, biasing the outcome toward rejection of Oxford. Of course there will be stylistic differences between works written decades apart, but why so many similarities? Focusing on differences minimizes the risk of false positives, but increases the risk of false negatives.

Elliott and Valenza disregard all of these objections and conclude that the two styles do not match. What they are really saying is that ‘Shakespeare’s’ early style should closely resemble his mature style, despite the fact he was the most versatile and inventive wordsmith who ever lived, and his style clearly changes over time.

Contrary to what Elliott and Valenza suggest, we have offered no stylometric argument for Oxford as Shakespeare. Rather, we argue that they cannot eliminate him because they cannot rule out the alternative explanation that Oxford’s known works are Shakespeare’s juvenilia. The burden is on them to prove their claim to have eliminated Oxford, not on us to prove a positive case for him.

Nor have we ever said, again contrary to what they claim, that they should not be comparing Oxford’s known verse to that in the canon. We say specifically in ‘Apples to Oranges’ that we do not oppose comparison, just unwarranted conclusions based on it. Of course they should compare them, since any close match would be powerful evidence for common authorship. But almost any mismatch could be due to developmental factors.

Elliott’s and Valenza’s study cannot rule out this alternative explanation for any observed differences. On this basis alone their conclusion that Oxford can be eliminated is unwarranted.

The Elimination Claim

When challenged, Elliott and Valenza first denied that they had ever intended to claim that they’ve ‘eliminated’ Oxford. In ‘Other Car’ they wrote:

When dealing with a single candidate like Oxford, we have tried to stay away from words like ‘elimination,’ to avoid over-claiming our case, and to let the strong evidence speak for itself.²

If, in fact, they ‘tried’ to avoid any claim of elimination, they clearly failed. In ‘And Then There Were None,’ they say that they’ve ‘eliminated,’ and ‘ruled out,’ every claimant they tested, including Oxford (1996, 31). In ‘Oxford by the Numbers’ they repeat the claim, saying that ‘Neither [Oxford], nor any other claimant we tested, is the true Shakespeare.’ They add that they’ve ‘shortened the plausible, testable claimant list from thirty-seven to zero,’ noting with some satisfaction that their students ‘received worldwide media attention...when they announced that their tests eliminated Oxford.’ They say that their findings ‘prove’ that Oxford ‘couldn’t possibly’ be guilty of such a thing as writing *Hamlet* (2004, 330-332).

The belated hedging in ‘Other Car’ quoted above is thus disingenuous and, more important, without consequence or recognition in the field of attribution studies. In the recent *RSC Shakespeare* edition (2007), for example, Bate and Rasmussen maintain that stylometric tests ‘conclusively rule out every alternative [authorship]

candidate' other than Shakespeare of Stratford. This includes Oxford, of course. Elliott and Valenza have yet to issue any demurrals, qualifications or corrections.

Songs vs. Poems

Elliott and Valenza know that their sample of Oxford's 'poems' is really a mix of eight songs and eight lyric poems in a variety of forms. In their law-review article they admit that 'any or all of [Oxford's works in *The Paradise of Dainty Devices*] could be song lyrics, not poems proper, and, hence, not suitable for comparison with poems' (2004, 392). Yet they did no separate comparison of songs to songs, or of poems to poems, instead bundling them all into a single sample to compare with Shakespeare's narrative, lyric, and even dramatic verse. When called on this (2006, 114), they reply evasively that 'arguing something is not the same as proving it' (2007, 142).

The evidence, however, is clear. We know they are song lyrics because Henry Disle, the original publisher of *The Paradise of Dainty Devices*, the book in which they appeared, described them in his prefatory epistle as: 'ditties...made to be set to any song in five parts or sung to instrument.'³ Harvard Professor Hyder Rollins, the modern-day editor of *The Paradise*, did not question this (3-4). The burden is on Elliott and Valenza to prove otherwise if they reject the academic consensus.

Elliott and Valenza don't even try, arguing instead that even discounting the songs, Oxford's verse 'would still be a gross mismatch with Shakespeare' (2007, 143). They did no statistical comparison for songs, claiming that 'The disparities are so 'glaring' they can only wonder what led [Shahan and Whalen] to ask 'for their oddly-conceived...song- to-song comparison in the first place' (2007, 146).

In fact, we never asked for such a comparison. Rather, we stated specifically that

[Although] the genre problem might be addressed in a reanalysis of their data...the other problems are such that this would not salvage their results. (2006, 115)

We called attention to the 'genre issue' because it is such a blatant error, given their supposed expertise, not because we thought a reanalysis would change the results. The error illustrates Elliott's and Valenza's methodological carelessness. If they choose to redo their analysis, that's fine; but we never said we thought the outcome of any such reanalysis would show a match between Oxford and Shakespeare. There are still those 'other problems.' Elliott and Valenza evidently want to ignore them, and deal with the genre problem in isolation, but it can't be done.

As will be seen in the next section, Oxford's song lyrics were written by 1566, when he was just 16. Yet Elliott and Valenza want to compare them with songs that appeared in the plays decades later, expecting a match. They even say that

Shakespeare's songs are 'worldly,' but '[not] Oxford's' (*ibid*). What teenager's songs are 'worldly,' of all things? It isn't even an objectively measurable trait.

The Dating Problem

Again, the heart of our argument is that Oxford's known verse was written much earlier than Shakespeare's, so differences between them could be developmental. Elliott and Valenza incorrectly assume that all of Oxford's known verse was written between the ages of 22 and 44, i.e., between 1572 and 1594 (2004, 323, 394). But this is based on publication dates, which give only the latest possible dates that they could have been written. In fact it's well established that Oxford wrote the eight songs in *The Paradise* (1576) by age 16, because—again according to Henry Disle's preface—Richard Edwards collected them before he died in 1566, Oxford's sixteenth year.⁴ Again Hyder Rollins agrees (1927, lix). Elliott and Valenza provide no justification for assuming otherwise.⁵

There is also no reason to assume that Oxford's remaining eight known poems were written in their year of publication. One appeared in 1573, and the others in anthologies of the 1580s or early 1590s. In *The Elizabethan Courtier Poets*, May dates them primarily to the 1570s, and saw little reason to date any of them later than the 1580s (270). This was a guess. They could easily all date to the 1570s. The point is that he never suggests any was written in the year of publication.

Elliott's and Valenza's assumption directly contradicts what their own expert says about the practices of Elizabethan courtier poets. May writes:

...for most courtiers, complete and reliable canons and texts have not been determined. These authors seldom published poetry because the writing of verse was considered to be a questionable practice during at least the first half of Elizabeth's reign...As a result, the bulk of courtier verse filtered into the vast, unpredictable network of manuscript circulation. To this manuscript tradition we are indebted for the survival...of whole bodies of work... [including that of] the earl of Oxford.⁶

Nor is this the only place in *Courtier Poets* where these facts are mentioned—see also 59, 67-8, and 270. How did Elliott's and Valenza's miss these references? Instead they present themselves as their own authorities, denying on the basis of personal experience that early styles develop, and even that Elizabethan courtier poets did not publish:

It does not match what we know about our own stylistic development, nor that of our poetically inclined students, friends, and relatives. It doesn't match what we know of other great poets...Pope, Browning, Milton, Spenser, Donne, Byron, Keats, Shelley, Tennyson, Frost, Eliot, Robert Penn Warren, and John Crowe Ransom. All of these not only wrote polished, publishable poems, but got them

into print when they were 21 or younger. We would be surprised if most of these gifted, college-age writers were publishing poems that had spent years in a drawer or in private circulation to friends.⁷

Here again we see Elliott and Valenza comparing apples to oranges. None of the above poets was a prominent nobleman writing under the strictures of the Elizabethan court. None had to worry about whether it was socially acceptable for members of their class to be known as poets. Shakespeare clearly chafed under some restriction, complaining in Sonnet 66 of art being ‘tongue-tied by authority.’ Elliott and Valenza also ignore the fact that Oxford did write polished, publishable poems by the time he was ‘21 or younger,’ indeed doing so by age sixteen.

But addressing quality, Elliott’s and Valenza’s insistence that great poets don’t write inferior verse in their youth (or maturity) is incorrect. In *Origins of Genius*, for example, Dean Keith Simonton reports

a positive correlation between the quantity and quality of works produced...[so] those with the most masterpieces will [also] be those with the most ignored and neglected products! The most supreme creative geniuses must have their careers punctuated with wasted efforts.’⁸

Simonton quotes W.H. Auden, who wrote: ‘Chances are that in the course of a lifetime the major poet will write more bad poems than the minor.’⁹

Again based on personal observation, Elliott and Valenza claim expertise in the timing of play-publication during Elizabethan times. Although the issue is the dating of Oxford’s verse (since no dramas in his own name survive), they treat the question of play-dating as analogous. The idea that Oxford’s verse was written years or decades before appearing in print elicits this: ‘Maybe, but there are problems with this theory. It is particularly improbable with plays’ (2007, 146). Elliott and Valenza add:

These long lags do not ring true to us. It is almost like asking us to suppose that Oxford, because he wished to hide his authorship of Shakespeare’s plays, must have hidden the plays for twelve years. Showbiz people do not often do that. Most people who write or produce shows want them performed for an audience, measure their success by how their shows perform at the box office, and do what they can to get their plays noticed on opening night. Here in Claremont, just up the road from Hollywood and Disneyland, we hear tons about this season’s releases, ounces, at most, about last season’s, and nothing at all about whatever was the rage twelve years ago. Who would suppose that Elizabethans in showbiz, even if they were trying hard to hide the authorship of new plays, would routinely keep their plays under wraps for twelve years before word leaked out and someone managed to get them registered, printed, reviewed, or recorded?¹⁰

Again they cite no authorities, and refer to none of the voluminous literature on the Elizabethan theatre. Indeed, they do not seem to know much about the period, so they keep extrapolating from their personal experiences. These are examples of ‘presentism,’ i.e., contemporary perspectives, attitudes and assumptions imposed upon the past.

Elliott and Valenza used this same approach in another article in *The Oxfordian* (2000, 81). Shahan rebutted it in the next issue (2001, 160-1). Elliott later agreed that Shahan had indeed ‘provided...plausible speculation as to why Oxford might not have wished to rush his plays onto the public stage’ (2003, 160). But he and Valenza repeated the argument a year later (2004, 381), then referred to it again in ‘Other Car,’ as if it were still viable, and they had never acknowledged Shahan’s refutation.

Our response now is the same as then:

The Hollywood-Disneyland model of ‘Elizabethans in show-biz’ might not be the best analog for understanding motives and behaviors during those times. England was an absolute monarchy, rigidly segregated by class, and a virtual police state during a time of war and great religious conflict. There was no freedom of religion, speech, or of the press. Plays had to be approved by the state censor, the Master of the Revels...There was no public theater in London...because the Puritan city fathers would not allow it. So disreputable were plays...that in his bequest establishing the Bodleian Library, Thomas Bodley expressly excluded plays from works to be included.¹¹

Given the above, it’s hardly surprising that a nobleman might have chosen to keep secret his identity as a playwright. In ‘Shakespeare’s Audience: A Reassessment of the Stratfordian View,’ Whalen points out that over two-thirds of all documented performances of Shakespeare’s plays were not in the public theaters at all, but rather at court, Oxford and Cambridge, the private Blackfriars Theatre, the Inns of Court, or the houses of the nobility.¹² These venues would have provided opportunities for Oxford to see his plays performed without putting them in the wider domain, or revealing their authorship. Whalen further notes that records of court performances often did not identify the play.¹³ Many performances of unknown works could thus have been Oxford’s. As Elliott and Valenza surely know, most published dramas from the period are anonymous, including Shakespeare’s first six. How does any of this fit their Hollywood-Disneyland model?

Elliott and Valenza seem unaware that the earliest mention of three of Shakespeare’s plays was in the First Folio. So even in the traditional scenario some of his plays were ‘kept under wraps for years.’ If they would like a modern instance, we offer Eugene O’Neill’s *A Long Day’s Journey into Night*. So even today, not every playwright is as single-mindedly focused on ‘the box office’ as they assume.

Elliott and Valenza quote Oxford's own words to deny that he adhered to a court tradition against publishing poems. They note that, '...when (Oxford) published *Cardanus Comforte*, apparently against the author's wishes, he abjured 'the concealment of so worthy a work' and thought it 'an unpardonable error, to have murdered the same in the waste bottoms of my chests.' Elliott and Valenza comment: 'This is hardly the language of someone who shrinks from publication'¹⁴

Here again we have apples and oranges. Oxford's words are taken wholly out of context. He is commenting on a specific work by his friend, Thomas Bedingfield. There's no indication that he meant the comment to apply generally, or to himself. Bedingfield was less prominent at court than Oxford, and so had greater latitude. Second, the work is a translation, not original work. Translations were accepted, even encouraged. The aristocratic taboo was against publishing one's own work.

Oxford's stated aversion to 'murdering' worthy works doesn't mean that he would have been incautious about publishing his own. This is especially so if he had good reason to hold them back, or to publish them anonymously or under a pseudonym.

Third, it's a work of philosophy, not poetry: as noted, courtiers rarely published poetry, because writing 'verse' was seen as a dubious practice (May, *supra*).

Oxford's stated aversion to 'murdering' worthy works doesn't mean that he would have been incautious about publishing his own. This is especially so if he had good reason to hold them back, or to publish them anonymously or under a pseudonym. If he was Shakespeare, though, he clearly did manage to get his works into print, despite having a need for personal concealment.

Elliott and Valenza are grasping at straws, arguing with their own expert, Steven May. They are in denial because if Oxford's known verse was written in his teens and twenties, they no longer have any basis for claiming that the developmental hypothesis implies a sudden, highly improbable 'grub-to-butterfly' metamorphosis in his forties. It would be a plausible rate of change for a great writer. They offer no good reason to assume that Oxford's known verse was written in the year of publication. Nor do they explain why they never discussed this critical issue in earlier reports, ignoring it even after Shahan pointed it out (2001, 156).

The Sampling Problem

Here the issue is whether the sixteen works that Steven May said were 'definitely' Oxford's are a representative sample of his total output, making it possible to generalize the results of statistical tests and reach valid conclusions. May thought not:

In all likelihood these...poems amount to no more than a good sampling of de Vere's total output in light of the contemporary praise of his writing. Both Webbe and Puttenham rank him first among the courtier poets, an eminence he probably would not

have been granted, despite his reputation as a patron, by virtue of a mere handful of lyrics.¹⁵

We named five people who praised Oxford for his writing: Gabriel Harvey (1578), William Webbe (1586), George Puttenham (1589), Francis Meres (1598), and Henry Peacham (1622). Elliott and Valenza note that three of these—Webbe, Puttenham and Meres—also praised others in a similar fashion. ‘Extravagant superlatives for the higher nobility,’ they say, are ‘flattery’ to be ‘taken with a pinch of salt.’

We don’t believe everything we read on a dust jacket... and we would commend a similar skepticism to Messrs. Shahan and Whalen.¹⁶

Their own expert, Steven May, didn’t dismiss the praise as ‘dust-jacket’ flattery. Note too that they don’t provide extended quotes of this alleged flattery. It’s easy to mischaracterize what you won’t allow the reader to see. It is true that Oxford was wealthy and influential enough to be worth flattering, but that was also true of other courtiers, most

of whom were not praised in a like manner. Robert Dudley, for example, was wealthier and more

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influential at court, and also well known for his patronage. He had more works dedicated to him than any other courtier (Oxford was second), and undoubtedly got his share of flattery. But it was not for his writing. Even a sycophant must have something to hang his hat on. We invite Elliott and Valenza to produce any known example of a courtier being flattered for non-existent writing.

Elliott and Valenza also characterize the praise for Oxford’s verse as ‘rumors,’ but they do it in a backhanded way, never providing any evidence. They say that, ‘Shahan and Whalen argue...that our tests are so inappropriate for juvenile poems like Oxford’s that their rumors must outweigh them’ (2007, 151). They refer to ‘rumored Oxford Ephemera where there is ... plenty of inferred light for methods like theirs’ (ibid). Apart from the fact that the praise does not sound like rumors, the idea conflicts with the claim that it was all flattery. How can praise be so ‘extravagant’ that it must be flattery, while at the same time so tentative that it must be rumor? None of the five quoted above was tentative or equivocal in praising Oxford. No one else, including May, dismisses any of it as ‘rumor.’

It’s true that Webbe also praised others, but not in the same terms for their verse: ‘In the rare devices of poetry [the Earl of Oxford] may be considered the most excellent among the rest.’¹⁷ Meres salutes others for many things in *Palladis*

Tamia, but he lists Oxford first ‘among the best for comedy’ (Chambers, 2:194-5). Elliott and Valenza have no comedy in their Oxford sample, so clearly something is missing (unless they want to say Meres was wrong, or a flatterer of non-writers for their writing).

They point out that Meres listed both Oxford and Shakespeare, which ‘clearly suggests that Meres thought of them as two different persons’ (148). Perhaps so, and this same misperception continues to the present day. But if Meres was in on the truth, would he have blown the cover in print? What sort of ‘flattery’ is that?

Elliott and Valenza say that for Puttenham, ‘Oxford was one of more than twenty ‘chief lanterns of light,’ all of whom were outshone by the Queen’¹⁸ True enough, though they choose not to quote either of the following from Puttenham, for obvious reasons:

I know very many notable gentlemen in the Court that have written commendably, and suppressed it again, or else suffered it to be published without their own names on it: as if it were a discredit for a gentleman to seem learned.¹⁹

And more specifically,

many courtiers have written excellently well as it would appear if their doings could be found out and made public with the rest, of which number is first that noble gentleman, Edward Earl of Oxford.²⁰

These observations go to the heart of the sampling question: Oxford must have had unpublished works in 1589. Note too that Puttenham is speaking from first-hand knowledge—‘I know very many notable gentlemen ...’—and not ‘rumors.’

Elliott and Valenza ignore Harvey’s praise for Oxford before the Queen and court: ‘witness how greatly thou dost excel in letters. I have seen many Latin verses of thine, yea, even more of English’ (1975, 65-6). Note that Harvey comments on both the quality and quantity of Oxford’s verse, supporting our claim that Elliott’s and Valenza’s sample is incomplete. Is it likely that Harvey made this all up, flattering Oxford before a Queen and court who knew it was not true? Who is being naïve here?

Notice also that Harvey calls on the Queen and court to ‘witness’ how greatly Oxford excels in letters, claiming to have personally seen many of his Latin and English verses. He does not say, ‘Rumors have it that Oxford has been writing.’ Harvey’s words are more appropriately described as a testament, addressed to an audience capable of judging. By calling on them to ‘witness’ how greatly Oxford excels in letters, Harvey invites his audience to read the writing themselves, or recall that they have done so. This would be meaningless had the writings merely been rumored.

Elliott and Valenza also ignore Henry Peacham, again for obvious reasons. Peacham listed seven of the best Elizabethan poets, placing Oxford first, while omitting ‘Shakespeare.’ It is also hard to argue that in 1622 he was ‘flattering’ a writer who had been dead eighteen years:

In the time of our late Queen Elizabeth, which was truly a Golden Age (for such a world of refined wits, excellent spirits it produced, whose like are hardly to be hoped for in any succeeding age) above others who honored poesy with their pennes and practice (to omit her Majestie, who had a singular gift herein) were Edward de Vere, Earl of Oxford, the Lord Buckhurst, Henry Lord Paget, our Phoenix, the noble Sir Philip Sidney, M. Edward Dyer, M. Edmund Spenser, M. Samuel Daniel, with sundry others ...²¹

Elliott and Valenza may say that the above ordering is by rank, not achievement, and that this explains why Oxford appears first. The relevant point, however, is that it’s very unlikely that he would appear at all, so long after his death in 1604, if he’d produced no more than the few verses in Elliott’s and Valenz’s sample. Nearly 20 years after his passing, he was still regarded as a major court poet.

Finally, as will be seen below, Elliott and Valenza repeatedly denigrate the ‘quality’ of Oxford’s verse, despite the fact quality is subjective. To hear them describe it, one would think it is so bad that none could tolerate having to hear it. But if so, how to account for the high praise of so many of his contemporaries?

If Oxford’s known verse is so bad, all of this praise must be for other writings, not those we have! This puts Elliott and Valenza in the absurd position of having to dismiss the praise from all five independent contemporary observers as untrue. Had they accepted that Oxford was a fairly good poet, just stylistically different from Shakespeare, they wouldn’t be in this fix. They could have let the praise of Oxford’s contemporaries stand, merely claiming stylistic differences. But having insisted that Oxford’s poetry is bad, they’re stuck—‘hoist with their own petard.’

They’ve made it very difficult to argue that their Oxford verse sample is valid. To salvage their study, they must deny not only that he wrote good verse but that he wrote anything else at all! Otherwise, their sample is incomplete and invalid. The burden is on them to prove their sample is valid, and they’ve failed the test.

The Clincher

Elliott and Valenza offer no defense in ‘Other Car’ of what they had earlier called their ‘clincher,’—a comparison between just six lines of Oxford’s teen song lyrics from *The Paradise*, on the subject of a good name lost, and two lines in *King Lear* on the same subject. Even though they were surely written about forty years apart, Elliott and Valenza ask, ‘How could anyone suppose that the two passages were

written by the same person?’ (2004, 392-3). They find it unremarkable that the young Oxford wrote passionately about an issue that later concerned Shakespeare.

The Documents

Not content to rely on the results of their own study, Elliott and Valenza claim that, ‘By the light of the documents, Shakespeare looks much more like the Stratford man than the Earl of Oxford’ (2004, 394). In ‘Apples to Oranges’ we ask them to specify to what ‘documents’ they refer, pointing out that, ‘This may be [their] view, but it is a moot point which hasn’t been established in the context of their law-review article’ (2006, 122-3). They specify no documents in ‘Other Car’ to back up their claim. Just one points to the Stratford man, and that was seven years after he died. The fact that they fall back on such claims suggests a lack of confidence in their own results.

The Authorities

We also note in ‘Apples to Oranges’ that, when challenged on methodological questions, Elliott and Valenza ‘fall back on appeals to authority,’ but the authorities they choose are Alan Nelson, Steven May, Irvin Matus, Terry Ross and David Kathman. None is a stylometrician, statistician or research-design expert, and at least four of them are authorship partisans pursuing an anti-Oxfordian agenda. Their choice of ‘authorities’ suggests they are part of an anti-Oxfordian camp.

In ‘Other Car,’ they again cite no authority in research design, statistics or stylometrics. The closest they come is a reference to Francis Bacon, who, they say, ‘also liked to use the observable to explain the not-so-observable, not the other way around’ (2007, 149). But they neither quote Bacon, nor explain the relevance of the comment. It seems to refer to the unobservable works praised by Oxford’s contemporaries; but the praise is observable, even though the works may not be. They apparently want to ignore the praise, but we doubt that Bacon would have.

Silver Bullets or Fairy Tales?

‘Other Car’ does not defend one of Elliott’s and Valenza’s central assumptions—that differences ‘disprove’ common authorship: ‘differences are more important than similarities by many orders of magnitude’ (2004, 337). ‘Orders of magnitude’ sounds scientific, but there’s nothing backing it up. Why are differences ‘many’ orders of magnitude more important, and not just a few, one, or none?

Elliott and Valenza use this unsubstantiated claim to cull measures showing similarities from their study and focus on differences. MacDonald P. Jackson, however, points out that this assumption increases the risk of ‘false negatives’ (2004, 2), in this case meaning incorrect rejections of Shakespeare candidates.

Elliott and Valenza have no way to estimate the rate of false negatives for their methods. It probably isn't zero, yet the way they describe it suggests otherwise:

Fitting [Cinderella's] tiny slipper does not prove you are Cinderella nearly as conclusively as not fitting the tiny slipper proves you are not Cinderella...Hence, our distinguishing stock-in-trade has been 'silver bullet' negative evidence that tends to disprove common authorship by showing differences, rather than 'smoking gun' positive evidence used by most other analysts to prove common authorship with similarities... (2004, 337)

They add, echoing Simpson defense attorney Johnnie Cochran: 'If the shoe don't fit, you must give it a rejection,' a formula they describe as 'our working motto.'²² While this is an unfortunate association, it's a classic example of a false negative. It is hard to argue that Cinderella's tiny feet couldn't grow, or that Oxford's early style couldn't change. As we note in 'Apples':

The test of a metaphor is the extent to which it holds up when looked at in the real-world situation to which it is supposed to apply. The 'Cinderella' metaphor fails the test. It assumes that both foot sizes and writing styles are immutable, neither of which is true...Comparing the juvenilia of a claimant to the mature works of Shakespeare, and calling all differences 'silver bullets,' is absurd ...It suggests that there is no alternative explanation, so the 'bullet' must be on target, and the claimant couldn't have been Shakespeare...By making apples-to-oranges comparisons, and then focusing on differences, Elliott and Valenza stacked the deck.²³

Untestable Claimants

Elliott and Valenza have acknowledged that an absence of comparable works is an insurmountable obstacle to their stylometric methods, but they make no mention of it in 'Other Car'. Here is how they put it in their law-review article:

...the net effect of the grub defense is to move...Oxford out of the category of 'testable' claimants...Oxford falls instead into the category of 'untestable' claimants like the Rosicrucians and the Earls of Derby and Rutland, from whom no poems or plays have survived. No amount of stylometric testing can confirm *or deny* claims based on what the untestable claimant might have written.²⁴

Yes, obviously, and we wish our opponents would heed their own advice and withdraw their unwarranted claim to have 'eliminated' Oxford.

In fact, however, Oxford's claim is only 'untestable' using their methods which, as we've seen, ignore similarities. If Oxford's known verse was all written by the mid-1570s, which seems likely, why does any of it resemble Shakespeare's verse?

It clearly does in several ways, as Looney points out in *'Shakespeare' Identified*, Chapter VIII. The similarities of styles and themes are among the reasons leading him to suspect de Vere was Shakespeare in the first place.²⁵ Stylometric methods that take similarities into account could yet provide strong support for Oxford.

The Gap Problem, and a Phony Bet

Elliott and Valenza point out that there are two apparent gaps under the Oxford scenario: a productivity gap between his known output and Shakespeare's, and a 'fifteen-year' gap between his last poem (if written in 1575) and Shakespeare's first plays, conventionally dated around 1590. Neither of these apparent 'gaps' is new, and both beg the question by assuming that 'Shakespeare's' works are not Oxford's. If he wrote the canon, there is no productivity gap; if he started earlier than the conventional dating, there is no fifteen-year gap.

Elliott and Valenza know that the dates are in dispute. Elliott has described them as 'conjectural' and 'highly conjectural' (2003, 156, 159). The fact that they know this, and note it themselves when it suits their purpose, doesn't keep them from implying otherwise when it does not, as in the introduction to their law-review article (2004, 323).

Elliott and Valenza challenge us to say which of the 'Oxford Apocrypha' we think he wrote (2007, 150). By this they mean anonymous plays, or those attributed to other authors. They also ask about works they call 'the Oxford Ephemera—hypothetical works which might once have added to [his] reputation but since have disappeared, not having been published or saved' (*ibid*). Neither of us has expressed an opinion about either. Our position has been that Oxford wrote the works in the Shakespeare canon, starting earlier than in the orthodox dating.

The issue is a red herring; but, nevertheless, Elliott and Valenza boast of having:

offered a thousand-dollar bet, since raised to a thousand pounds, that no one can find an untested non-Shakespeare play that [their] computers and standard procedures would identify as a Shakespeare could-be...more than 200 such plays exist, but no one has accepted our bet.²⁶

There are two big problems with this challenge. First, it assumes their methods are valid; second, they get to decide who won. Having thus stacked the deck, it's hardly surprising that takers have been few.

Few, but not none. In 2005, a Shakespeare scholar did in fact accept their wager: the non-Oxfordian editor of this journal, who put forward *Richard II, Part One*. Elliott quickly backed off, raising a series of procedural objections, in the end insisting that each side limit itself to no more than six pages of evidence. This of course suits aggregate statistical summaries, but not the more nuanced analyses of descriptive stylistic comparison. The matter was thus never put to the test.

Nonetheless Elliott and Valenza claim two years later that ‘no one has accepted our bet,’²⁷ adding: ‘Why hasn’t anyone done so? Is it because they still don’t trust our tests?’²⁸ Yes, that’s one reason. Their model is not nearly so widely accepted as they would have readers believe. What they have done here is offer a side bet on a relatively peripheral issue to distract attention from the main question of whether their conclusion against Oxford is valid. We say the £1,000 bet should deal directly with that question. The winner should be decided by a panel of neutral experts knowledgeable both in quantitative methods and critical analysis, with no restriction on evidence or arguments.

Although we decline their phony wager relating to the plays that belong in the canon, we think others might profitably accept, on reasonable terms like those we’ve proposed. Several apocryphal plays probably belong in the canon, in addition to *The Tragedy of Richard II, Part One*. These include *Edward III*, increasingly accepted even by orthodox scholars, plus the five anonymous dramas attributed to Shake-

spere by Ramon Jiménez: *The Famous Victories of Henry the Fifth*; *The True Tragedy*

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of Richard the Third; *The Troublesome Raigne of John, King of England*; *The True Chronicle History of King Leir*, and *The Taming of a Shrew*.²⁹

All seven of these plays appear to fall at or near the beginning of Shakespeare’s career. To the extent that the canon is pushed back in time, the case for Shakspeare fades, while that for Oxford strengthens. It’s highly unlikely that Shakspeare could have written so many plays so early in his career—eight by 1594 just according to the orthodox dates that Elliott and Valenza used (2001, 93), plus these additional seven. That’s a total of fifteen by age thirty. Oxford, on the other hand, was forty-four in 1594. That’s a much more realistic pace, even for a very great playwright.

Whalen has shown that nothing proves that any canonical play was written after Oxford died in 1604 (*Oxfordian*, 2007); and as-yet-unexplained evidence points to early authorship of some plays. For example, in a previous *Oxfordian* (2000, 93), Elliott and Valenza listed dates that they claimed were ‘first clear mentions’ of all the plays. They showed *Hamlet* at 1602, but Shahan noted that there are references to *Hamlet* in 1589, 1594 and 1596. He pointed out that ‘orthodox scholars say the early references are not to Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*, but to an ‘Ur-*Hamlet*,’ but that ‘there’s no evidence that anyone else did write such a play’ (2001, 160). Elliott replied that Shahan had ‘provided interesting evidence on a possible Ur-*Hamlet* well before 1602’ (2003, 160). Elliott has yet to explain why he says that it is an

Ur-*Hamlet*. His ‘first clear mentions’ are apparently limited to those that support orthodox dates, and earlier mentions get redefined as referring to some other play.

Elliott and Valenza cite many poets who wrote accomplished verse in their teens and twenties, but not great dramas. Outstanding playwrights are rare, and tend to be older and more experienced, i.e., ‘wordly.’ The first Oxfordian said it well:

[W]e are asked to believe that a young man (aged twenty-six in 1590) began his career with the composition of masterpieces without any apparent preparation, and kept pouring out plays spontaneously at a most amazing rate. He appears before us at the age of twenty-nine as the author of a superb poem of no less than twelve hundred lines, and leaves no trace of slight youthful effusions...If, however, we can disabuse our minds of fantastic notions of genius...we shall be inclined rather to view the outpouring of dramas from the year 1590 onwards as the work of a more matured man, who had had the requisite intellectual and dramatic preparation, and who was elaborating, finishing off and letting loose a flood of dramas that he had been accumulating and working at during many preceding years.³⁰

Looney adds:

When in 1855 Walt Whitman gave to the world his *Leaves of Grass*, Emerson greeted the work and its writer in these words: ‘I find it the most extraordinary piece of wit and wisdom that America has yet contributed...I greet you at the beginning of a great career, which yet must have had a long foreground somewhere.’ This concluding surmise was merely common sense, and perfectly true...If by the year 1592, by which time we are assured that the stream of dramas was in full flood, Shakespeare was manifesting an exceptional facility in the production of works that were both great literature and great stage plays, there had been ‘a long foreground somewhere.’³¹

If Looney is right, and the Shakespeare canon was written by his ‘more matured man,’ both gaps disappear.

In Sum

John Maynard Keynes once said, ‘When the facts change, I change my mind. What do you do, sir?’ Elliott and Valenza assume that Oxford wrote all of his known verses between the ages of 22 and 44, but the facts say he wrote at least half of them by age 16, and the rest probably in his 20s. The facts have changed, but Elliott and Valenza refuse to change their minds, continuing to insist that only a grub-to-butterfly metamorphosis late in life could turn Oxford into Shakespeare. In fact, Oxford had plenty of time to change, even if Elliott and Valenza won’t.

They assume that their small Oxford verse sample is representative of his work, even though we have shown that there are good reasons to think he wrote much more than has come down to us in his name. Ignoring all evidence to the contrary,

they continue to generalize their results to Oxford's entire output, as if sampling issues had not been raised. And they hold to the idea that 'differences disprove common authorship,' even though authorial styles clearly evolve over time.

The burden is on them to prove their claim, and they've failed to meet that burden. Their rebuttals to 'Apples' are without merit, and we therefore conclude that we were correct in saying that the results of their study do not eliminate Oxford.

Part Two: Masters of Mischaracterization

Style vs. Quality

As its name suggests, stylometrics is concerned with the measurement of writing styles, not aesthetics. Beauty is in the eye of the beholder, so the quality of writing cannot be assessed objectively. Since quality is subjective, there's no such thing as 'quality metrics.' Elliott and Valenza surely know this, and even say it themselves in their law-review article (334), but then ignore it to attack Oxford in 'Other Car.'

They openly berate the quality of Oxford's verse, as if it were a finding of their study. They describe it as 'sour, plodding, woeful, pedantic, verbose and crudely alliterative' (2007, 145). They say that, 'Talented teenagers have been known to write and publish good ones' (146), implying that Oxford's are bad. They say that Shakespeare's verse is '100 times better' than Oxford's (147), as if it were based on precise measurement, not opinion. They challenge us to name 'any competent mature poet whose juvenilia were as 'clumsy' as Oxford's known poems' (146). Our answer is that every competent, mature poet writes clumsy juvenilia, and clumsy verses in maturity too, as Professor Simonton points out (*supra*).

Seeing how Elliott and Valenza berate the quality of Oxford's verse is enough to make one wonder why he was ever considered a viable candidate in the first place, much less emerging as by far the leading alternative. We may also wonder why a fine poet like Professor William Y. Elliott, Professor Ward E.Y. Elliott's father—by one of life's ironies a co-founder of the Shakespeare Oxford Society, sponsor of this journal—was so seemingly blind. The elder Elliott had presumably read Oxford's verses, and, unlike his son, did not think their quality eliminated him.

The contrast between Elliott's and Valenza's opinion and the views of literary critics before Looney is striking. Sir Sidney Lee said that Oxford, 'wrote verses of much lyric beauty' (1920, 124). W.J. Courthope, Professor of Poetry at Oxford, said his verses were 'distinguished for their wit...terse ingenuity,' and 'epigram' (122); echoing Falstaff in *1 Henry IV*, he said Oxford, 'was not only witty himself, but the cause of wit in others' (*ibid*). Professor Harold Child of Cambridge singled out Oxford for special praise for his 'charming lyric' (121). Dr. Grossart wrote that 'Our collection of Oxford's poems will prove a pleasant surprise...to many of

our readers. They are not without touches of the true Singer, and there is an atmosphere of graciousness and culture about them that is grateful' (124).

Among modern critics, Steven May, Elliott's and Valenza's own expert, grants Oxford the distinction of having been, '...the premier Elizabethan courtier poet' (52). Of his prefatory poem to *Cardanus Comforte* (1572), he writes:

The poem differs from earlier efforts of the kind not so much because it appeared in English [not Latin], but because his verses are so self-consciously poetic...Oxford flaunts a copious rhetoric in this poem in contrast with the more direct, unembellished commendatory verse of his predecessors. His greatest innovation, however, lies in his application of the same qualities of style to the eight poems assigned to him in the 1576 *Paradise of Dainty Devices*, pieces that Oxford must have composed before 1575 [sic]...De Vere's eight poems in *The Paradise* create a dramatic break with everything known to have been written at the Elizabethan Court up to that time. Seven of them are love lyrics, four of which are complaints set forth with variations in tone and approach that sharply differentiate them from one another' (ibid). One of them is based on a sonnet by Petrarch, although it could not be termed a translation, for Oxford goes far beyond his original.³²

Comparing Oxford to the innovative court poet Edward Dyer, May finds Oxford 'the chief innovator, due to the range of his subject matter and the variety of its execution...[his] experimentation provided a much broader foundation for the development of lyric poetry at court' (54). Again and again May notes how innovative and creative Oxford was relative to his predecessors. And he is writing here about poems Oxford composed by age 16! Nowhere in *Courtier Poets* does May say anything derogatory about the quality of Oxford's verse.

Oxford's early songs and poems are immature relative only to what came after. Viewed in context, experts in literary criticism, including their own Steven May, agree that Oxford's known verse was innovative and creative, even in his teens—'a dramatic break with everything known to have been written at the Elizabethan Court up to that time,' per May. That's an amazing accomplishment for a 'clumsy, sour, plodding, woeful, pedantic, verbose and crudely alliterative' adolescent, and precisely what we would expect from a young Shakespeare.

Juvenilia vs. Juvenile

Elliott and Valenza have a habit of attributing to others things that they never said. For example, when we demonstrated that Oxford's known songs and poems were written much earlier than they had assumed, we characterized them as 'juvenilia'—a well-known term meaning works created in youth, not a reference to quality. But Elliott and Valenza turned our noun, 'juvenilia,' into the adjective 'juvenile,' meaning immature, childish, infantile, to attack Oxford and then attrib-

ute it to us! They say, ‘We did not originate the Oxford-as-clumsy-juvenile argument.’ (146).

Nor did we. If Elliott and Valenza think they can prove that Oxford wrote lousy verse, they’re welcome to try it on their own, without putting words in our mouths. Half are song lyrics they attribute to Oxford at age 26, which he wrote by age 16. Any objective scholar, shown evidence that Oxford’s verses were written much earlier than assumed, would conclude that he was more *precocious* than had been thought. Instead, they twist it into an admission his verse is ‘juvenile’ in quality!

More Mischaracterizations

Mischaracterization is a pattern with Elliott and Valenza, as we have noted before (‘Apples,’ 119-20). They routinely distort our views and those of other Oxfordians. Note that we quote them extensively, while they rarely quote us directly. Instead they paraphrase, telling the reader what we say, or think, usually incorrectly. It’s easier to knock down straw-man arguments than to rebut what was actually said.

The following are distortions in ‘Other Car’, with our replies:

1. ‘[Shahan and Whalen] urge us to forget what we can see of Oxford’s poems directly, and consider what we cannot see but might infer from commentators...’ (142).

We’ve never said that they should not study Oxford’s poems directly. Yes, they should properly consider the implications of the contemporary praise for Oxford’s writing for the completeness and representativeness of their Oxford verse sample, but we’ve never said that anything conclusive can be inferred about the writing.

2. ‘[Shahan and Whalen] argue that Oxford’s visible verse is...oranges, and our Shakespeare baseline...apples, and that we shouldn’t be comparing them’ (142). We’ve never said that they should not compare Oxford’s verse to Shakespeare’s. They give no quote. What we said is the opposite of what they claim (see below).

3. ‘Wouldn’t it be wiser to put aside what Oxford did write and focus on what he might have written?’ (142)

We’ve never said that anyone should put aside what Oxford wrote, or that they should ‘focus on what he might have written.’

4. ‘... Shahan-Whalen’s ... inference that there must once have been... [Shakespeare-like verse] out there ...’

No, we've never said that either. On the other hand, Elliott and Valenza certainly cannot rule it out, because of the flaws that we've identified in their study design.

5. 'Shahan and Whalen reproach us for testing only the spoonful of Oxford's verse that we have ...' (148)

No, we said the opposite. Replying to their comment that, 'If looking where the light is amounts to a sin, we...are the greatest of sinners' (2004, 394), we wrote: 'We don't blame them for looking where they could see; but we do blame them for reaching a conclusion that is not warranted by what they could see. That was their sin' (2006, 122).

6. 'Would [the assumption that lost Oxford works were excellent] be enough to make him the True Shakespeare...but not the Queen, or dozens of others on the Most Excellent lists? It seems to us quite a leap of faith' (2007, 149).

We make no such 'leap of faith,' nor do we offer a positive argument for Oxford as Shakespeare in our critique. Our position is that, '[Elliott and Valenza] should have concluded that although they found little stylometric support for Oxford, he was not a fully testable claimant, and so he could not be eliminated' (2006, 124).

7. 'The idea that juvenile work must be sour and clumsy—or, more precisely, the idea that sour, clumsy work must therefore be juvenile—is an old Oxfordian standby, much urged in all the Ogburns' books (Ogburns, 1952, Ch. 6; Ogburn, 1984, 390-97), and in Joseph Sobran's book (1997, Appendix 2), no less than in Shahan-Whalen's article' (146).

We find no such statement in the works of the Ogburns, or Sobran, nor have we made any such statement ourselves. We have raised this issue before, and we hereby challenge Elliott and Valenza to back it up with the specific quotes.

8. 'Now [Oxford's] signed poems are properly recognized as a mismatch, a juvenile misadventure, and an embarrassment for his claim. Good researchers should put them aside as a distraction and make it plain that the best evidence for his claim is precisely the evidence we don't have, not the evidence we do have. The case for Oxford would be much enhanced if we could make his known poems go away' (151).

Not one of Oxford's poems is 'signed,' nor have we ever said anything like this. As noted, we agree with May that Oxford's verse was 'innovative and creative'

for its day. In the section on ‘mischaracterizing with statistics’ below, we reject the claim that his poems are a ‘mismatch.’

9. ‘Let us conclude by going back to John Shahan’s favorite metaphor [the importance of looking for keys where the light is] ...It’s a good way to illustrate the differences between our world view and his, ours that relies on the observed and supposes that what you see is what you get, and his that relies more on the (by us) unobservable, and supposes that a good rumor, or even a bad one, is four aces, while an inconvenient observation is worth nothing’ (151).

This is the third time that Elliott and Valenza refer to the praise for Oxford as ‘rumors,’ without offering a thing to back it up; but having used the word three times, they treat it as an established fact, and go on to say they are ‘bad’ rumors. Here they’ve mischaracterized both us and themselves. Rather than relying on the ‘unobservable,’ and ‘rumors,’ we have relied on solid documentary evidence. We haven’t claimed to have *definitive* evidence (‘four aces’), but there is nothing ‘unobservable’ about the praise

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for Oxford, or about printer Henry Disle’s preface to *The Paradise*. There’s nothing unobservable about what Steven May has to say about Oxford and the court. Elliott’s and Valenza’s view is that, ‘what you see is what you get’—until it’s more convenient to ignore it and assume something else.

We contend that Oxford’s known verse should be seen in context, while Elliott and Valenza want to focus just on the verse. They claim to rely on ‘the observed,’ but theirs is a most Procrustean approach to observation. Their concept is limited to what they want to see, and what fits their thesis, and the rest gets cut off. They rely on May’s views when they like what he says, then dismiss him at other times. They ignore clear genre, dating, and sampling issues, then want to don the mantle of empiricism. The difference between us isn’t that they are empiricists and we are not, it’s that we take study design issues seriously, and they don’t. We also take Shakespeare seriously. ‘What you see is what you get’ is hardly his viewpoint.

10. ‘My Other Car is a Shakespeare’ (142): ‘Didn’t several people of note say there was once one of those frames around the [clunker’s] license plate, saying ... ‘My other cars are The Most Excellent!’ We don’t have anything in hand like... this Most Excellent fleet... But it doesn’t matter because the evidence from this

license frame ... says it too clearly to admit of doubt: 'My other cars are The Most Excellent!' Everyone knows that [Shakespeares] are The Most Excellent! What could the other cars be but the lost fleet of [Shakespeares]? Bingo! Q.E.D.!' (152)

As we say, Elliott and Valenza mislead by putting words in peoples' mouths, and here's another example. The title of their article, 'My Other Car is a Shakespeare,' and the above explication of the analogy, imply that we say contemporary praise for Oxford amounts to claims by his contemporaries that he wrote other works, and that it can be inferred that the other works were the works of Shakespeare!

We have made no such claim. We've never characterized the works referred to, except in the terms in which they were originally described, or to argue for the validity of taking the descriptions at face value.

The 'Other Car' analogy is highly misleading. As stated, it implies that Oxford himself claimed that he wrote other 'Most Excellent' works. It is his license frame in their analogy, with all of his contemporaries parroting from the frame. Nothing suggests that the praise of Oxford's contemporaries is based on anything but their own best assessments, and it is clear that some if not all of them had actually read the works they praised. There's a consistency to the praise, over twenty years, and long after he died, that deserves some respect. Elliott and Valenza never bothered to mention it – not even in their summary of 'the case for Oxford' (2004, 325-7).

As we say in 'Apples,'

The issues that we are raising are fairly straightforward questions of research design and the logic of interpretation. The reader should ask why, if [Elliott's and Valenza's] position is valid, they find it necessary to ignore our criticisms and mischaracterize our views. (120)

Mischaracterizing with Statistics

When prominent professors seem defensive, perhaps they have good reason to be. The extent to which Elliott and Valenza mischaracterized our stated views led us to consider the extent to which they may also have mischaracterized their results. We think they've done so extensively. Let's look at one their typical statements: 'In terms of quantifiable stylistic attributes, Oxford's verse and Shakespeare's verse are light years apart. The odds that either could have written the other's work are much lower than the odds of getting hit by lightning' (2004, 323).

Most people reading this statement probably assume that, (1) it summarizes a broad-based comparison of their overall writing styles, (2) it accurately reflects the magnitude of the differences between Oxford's style and Shakespeare's, and (3) it gives an indication of the odds that Oxford's style changed to Shakespeare's. In fact, none of these three assumptions is correct. Let's take them one at a time.

1. Elliott and Valenza imply that their results represent overall styles; but, in fact, they represent relatively few traits. They focus on differences, said to disprove common authorship, and, unlike most stylometricians, ignore similarities. Having made the decision to focus on differences and ignore similarities, their results cannot apply to overall styles. Rather, they apply only to the tests they selected to detect differences, and not to tests that don't tend to differentiate. Their results apply only to the limited number of traits they measured, not to all they could have measured. By 1996, they had tried '300 tests which did not show a sharp enough distinction between Shakespeare and others' (1996, 20). They excluded all 300 tests, so their results cannot be generalized to those traits.

Elliott and Valenza did not choose their traits to represent overall writing styles. They are no random sample. So the odds that they say are, 'lower than the odds of getting hit by lightning,' refer only to the statistical significance of the differences they found between Oxford and Shakespeare on the traits they selected to detect differences. The odds suggest that the differences they detected are real, but they cannot be generalized beyond the traits measured. A broader, more representative set of measures would surely have revealed many more similarities.

Elliott and Valenza cannot exclude traits that tend to be similar, and then claim there are no similarities. Oxford's style is 'light years away,' from Shakespeare's style only if one first eliminates all of the many ways in which is not so far away. So when Elliott and Valenza say, 'His known poems do not look and sound like Shakespeare's poems at all' (2004, 328), it isn't true. Just because they can detect differences by culling hundreds of tests, it doesn't mean there are no similarities.

For example, Oxford wrote a sonnet in what we know as the 'Shakespearean' sonnet form. How can they say that such a sonnet, 'does not look and sound like Shakespeare's poems at all'? They ridicule Louis Benezet for his 'mixed verse' test in which experts couldn't distinguish between Oxford and Shakespeare (151). Were the similarities that confused the experts real? Of course they were. Again, the fact that one can search through tests to identify those that detect differences doesn't make the similarities go away. Elliott and Valenza are like magicians in that regard. One must keep an eye on them lest they make similarities disappear.

2. Measures of statistical significance are not measures of distance. When Elliott and Valenza claim that Oxford's verse and Shakespeare's are 'light years apart,' they mischaracterize their measures of statistical significance as measures of the magnitude of the difference between them. This isn't correct. Styles can be much the same, but statistically different. The size of a difference is related to the odds that it was due to chance: the larger the difference, the lower the odds. But one can still have low odds of even relatively small differences being due to chance. Elliott and Valenza run statistical tests combining multiple measures—all selected

to detect differences. So it is not surprising that they might find low odds that they are written in one style. In any case, even low odds apply only to the specific traits selected and measured, not to overall styles. Elliott and Valenza should not imply that odds of differences being due to chance describe distances between styles.

3. Neither the size of a difference, nor the odds that it was due to chance, says much about the chance of stylistic change. We are only talking about a limited

Elliott and Valenza should speak of odds that their sample tests in the range of the canon, not of odds that Oxford wrote the canon. Any competent statistician would know better than to say such a thing.

number of traits, and the entire period was one of rapid change and development. How hard could it have been to modify seven traits over fif-

teen years? Probably not hard at all for someone who read a lot, and liked to experiment with writing. Elliott's and Valenza's astronomical differences could easily have gone to zero.

Having selected relatively few traits, Elliott and Valenza cannot claim that many changes were needed. They may say that their tests measure stylistic markers, and represent more than just themselves. This is so, but they still aren't representative, even just of differences. As they themselves point out, 'Some have criticized our process of trial and error for 'multiple testing,' or 'cherry picking': bombarding texts with so many tests that some would be bound to show some kind of distinction simply by the law of averages' (1996, 20). We believe this criticism is valid. Their cherry-picked differences say little about the odds of stylistic development.

4. They claim that, 'Oxford's poems show no signs of testable stylistic change from his earliest poems at twenty-two to his latest at age forty-four' (2004, 394). Note the use of the qualifier 'testable'— no signs of 'testable' change. Oxford's known verse totals 3,042 words, or an average of less than 200 words per work. Of course they couldn't test their Oxford sample for stylistic change; their sample is too small to test for any consistent pattern over time. That does not mean that there are no stylistic changes. Recall that May remarked on his 'range of subject matter,' the 'variety of its execution,' his 'experimentation.' He rated Oxford as the 'greatest innovator' at court (1991, 54). Elliott and Valenza cannot use their tests to detect such changes, but that didn't stop them from saying there are none.

5. A related point is that Oxford's known verse doesn't have one style that can be compared to Shakespeare's style. Of course Elliott and Valenza found differences between 'Oxford's writing style' and Shakespeare's. He did not have one set style.

That didn't keep them from combining his known verse, including songs, into one 3000-word sample to compare it to like-sized 3000-word blocks of Shakespeare's verse, i.e., the standard block size in their study. That might have been appropriate for a writer whose verse was all of one genre, and showed little stylistic variation. We aren't saying that they shouldn't have compared them; but they shouldn't have reached unqualified conclusions, and then made statements such as, 'Oxford was a caterpillar from beginning to end... Shakespeare was a butterfly' (2004, 395).

6. They claim to have calculated, 'the odds that Oxford could have written' the Shakespeare canon (2004 title, 323). This is incorrect. They calculated the odds that an early sample of Oxford's verse is written in the same style as the works in the Shakespeare canon, using tests chosen for their ability to distinguish canonical works from others. The odds that two sets of works are in the same style are not the same as the odds that one person wrote them. Writing styles change over time, and Elliott and Valenza cannot quantify and include the odds of change in their estimate. We've shown there is good reason to think their Oxford sample is incomplete and unrepresentative. It isn't correct to speak of 'the odds that Oxford could have written,' when some factors have been omitted. They should speak of odds that their sample tests in the range of the canon, not of odds that Oxford wrote the canon. Any competent statistician would know better than to say such a thing. All they've shown is that he didn't write the canon in his teens and twenties. So what?

7. Suppose Elliott and Valenza split Shakespeare's plays into two groups — the latest three-fourths, and the earliest one-fourth — and computed expected ranges for stylistic measures from the later plays. Would the earlier plays fall within the expected ranges de-

derived from the later ones? It is unlikely that all of them would. Such a model would probably indicate that some

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plays in the earlier group do not belong in the canon. The fact that Elliott and Valenza had to eliminate seven plays to create their misleadingly-labeled 'clean' baseline makes the point. If they can't identify early canonical plays as Shakespeare's using a model based on later ones, why assume that they are any better at determining whether even earlier works—much earlier works—belong in the canon? It is one thing to apply their model to works written in the same time-frame, but quite another to project far beyond it.

8. Elliott and Valenza say that Oxford's prose letters show no signs of stylistic development over time, and so 'why should we suppose that his poems, which likewise show few, if any, signs of stylistic development, were different?' (147). As far as we know, they have conducted no objective study of Oxford's letters. Shahan asked them to study his letters using non-genre-specific methods (2001, 157), but we know of no such study. There is no basis to say his prose style did not develop. Nor have they explained why one would expect a writer's business prose style to change with his literary style. Does the prose style in Shakspere's will suggest that his prose style developed along with his alleged literary style?

Considering how strongly Oxfordians have objected that Elliott and Valenza are using a non-contemporaneous Oxford sample, it is strange that they have avoided analyzing the one set of works that does not have this problem. Many of Oxford's letters were written during timeframes when plays were being written under any scenario. Standard comparisons of vocabulary (e.g., rare word analysis) could be conducted. The order in which words common to both Oxford and Shakespeare appear over time could be correlated to see whether there is a relationship.

Oxfordian researcher Nina Green compared lexical words in Oxford's letters and poems to rare words in the plays, and found great overlap (1993). Fully 27% of lexical words in Oxford's letters are Shakespeare rare words, versus 32% in the canon itself. Overall, 94% of lexical words in Oxford's letters appear in the plays.

The extent to which Oxford's known lyrics 'failed' Elliott's and Valenza's tests should not be overstated. He passed eight of fifteen tests outright, and Elliott and Valenza say that three of the seven he failed are 'sensitive to time of composition' (2004, 376). They never explained why some are time-sensitive and others aren't. We think that all seven tests Oxford failed are time-sensitive. For example, they show 'grade level' as not time-sensitive (2004, 347, 370-71, 373). Why assume that a teenager's lyrics should test at the same grade level as his adult poems?

Yet they say, with no caveats at all, that 'Oxford's style is in a different galaxy from Shakespeare's' (2004, 190-1). They say this without qualification, as if their study design were flawless, with no comparability issues; but the odds are based on apples-to-oranges comparisons. It's futile to calculate the odds that an apple is an orange. Our response to their astronomical odds: Garbage in, garbage out.

The reason why Oxford's style differs from Shakespeare's could easily be that he had not yet become Shakespeare. Elliott and Valenza simply ignore the issues we've raised, as if they don't exist. But they do exist, so the reason why Oxford's known verse would differ from Shakespeare's in some respects isn't necessarily that he wasn't Shakespeare. We have one very credible alternative explanation.

The Bias Problem

Harold Love, in *Attributing Authorship: An Introduction* (2002), writes about bias in stylometric studies:

Once attribution becomes problem-driven [rejecting alternative claimants?], there is also likely to be bias involved. More is at stake, both personally and institutionally, than simply identifying an author ... The best way of dealing with bias is to declare it ... differences in cognitive styles and ideological bias are facts of scholarly work. Where it is not declared the reader should be alert for it ... Researchers have a duty [to declare their] interest. (217) 8).

Professor Elliott has referred to Oxford as the ‘family favorite’ at meetings of the LA-based Shakespeare Authorship Roundtable, which sponsored their study. This refers to the fact that his now-deceased father, Harvard Professor William Y. Elliott, was an active supporter of Oxford’s candidacy in the 1950s. By referring to him as the ‘family favorite,’ Ward Elliott implies that any bias he has must be in favor of Oxford. It is very clear to us, however, that any pro-Oxford bias he may once have had has been reversed. We have pointed this out before (2006, 123), and he has not denied it. We also see evidence of bias in the following:

... the Oxfordians loved our methods when they liked our conclusions, but they attacked us categorically when they did not like them. Fortunately for us, the attacks were ill-substantiated and did no damage to our evidence or to our conclusions... You do not know how strong your bunker is until someone bombs it. Ours was deluged with blockbusters, but the damage was negligible. Either our bunker was strong, or the bombs were duds, or both. The attacks amounted to a series of massive, highly adversarial audits that we passed with flying colors.’ (362-3)

This is not the statement of one who is sad to have discovered that the ‘family favorite’ isn’t Shakespeare after all. It is the self-congratulatory statement of one claiming to have triumphed over opponents who are held in slight regard. Rather than a neutral, objective scholar, Elliott comes off as a partisan in an adversarial relationship with ‘the Oxfordians.’ Having adopted that stance, it’s presumptuous to unilaterally declare victory, as if it were some unbiased assessment. Normally when one claims to have passed an ‘audit’ with ‘flying colors,’ it is the auditors who render the judgment. In this case Elliott and Valenza seem to have rendered the judgment, favoring themselves. If not, we would like to know who, precisely, audited their findings and conclusions, and said they ‘passed with flying colors?’

Elliott and Valenza have not addressed the question of bias as an issue in their study. We think it is time they did so. It would hardly be the first time that a son

held strong views at odds with his father's. There is always some bias when the 'family favorite' is involved. It could make it difficult to change one's position. The fact that they are defending a student-run clinic could also make it difficult. For the record, although we are supporters of Edward de Vere's candidacy, we have no such obstacle to changing our position if the evidence says otherwise.

Regarding the appropriate role of stylometricians, Harold Love writes:

Evidence gained from quantitative analysis has to submit itself to a broader, rhetorically conducted system of assessment. Its influence within this process . . . is not a substitute for the adjudicatory process but a contributor to it, and is ultimately bound by its rules. The stylometrist is an expert witness—not a learned judge. (210)

Elliott's and Valenza's self-congratulatory conclusion suggests the role not of 'expert witness,' but of 'learned judge.' It was premature for them to say, in 2004, that they had 'fortunately' succeeded in eliminating Oxford as a candidate. It was even more so to allow their students to announce to the world, in 1994, that all 37 alternative claimants had been eliminated. More responsible scholars would have allowed the 'adjudicatory process' to play itself out before such an announcement. We hereby put all who care about this issue on notice that it has still not been fully adjudicated as far as we are concerned. Elliott and Valenza have failed utterly in their attempt to pass the audit that we have conducted over the last many years.

We also want to call attention to a remarkable statement Professor Elliott made during a debate with the first author at the Beverly Hills Library on November 17, 2007. (See Sally Mosher's letter to the editor, 'The Shahan-Elliott debate at the SAR' (162-3, following 'Other Car') for an overall description.) He said that he has no background in statistics, yet he is the one who actually writes all of his and Valenza's articles. That might help to explain some of the mischaracterizations of their results, and other problems that we have identified; but it no excuse.

We note that Professor Valenza rarely appears as the first author of their articles. Since the issues we raise deal largely with research design and statistics, we would like to ask him to write a definitive article addressing these issues as first author. We want to know exactly where he stands on each of them. We also note that they never list third authors, and we challenge them to find a qualified expert who will join them, and endorse their methods and results. If they are unable to do so, one should ask why orthodox Shakespeare scholars have embraced their conclusions.

Summary

Elliott and Valenza present their opinions of the quality of Oxford's verse without telling readers that they are totally subjective and unscientific. As stylometricians, they know, or should know, that readers will assume their opinions are based on science. They fail to disclose that their opinions differ from those of certain well-

known authorities, including their own. They repeatedly mischaracterize Shahan's and Whalen's positions, to an extent that is hard to imagine is not deliberate.

The extent to which Elliott and Valenza mischaracterize their statistical results is shocking. It calls all of their work into question. Their study appears scientific, but they exploit this to reach unwarranted conclusions, and make invalid claims. We have not scrutinized their findings and conclusions for other candidates, but those for Oxford inspire no confidence. Rather than objective, unbiased analysts, they appear to have a strong bias against the 17th Earl of Oxford and Oxfordians.

The following is a summary of the many ways that Elliott and Valenza biased their results against Oxford:

1. They ignore the dating issue, and assume that Oxford's verses were all written in the year of publication.
2. They ignore sampling issue, and assume that all of the contemporary praise for Oxford's writing is false.
3. They select their measures solely to detect differences, and ignore the issue of false negatives.
4. They ignore similarities between Oxford's and Shakespeare's verse, and claim that there are none.
5. They generalize from non-representative measures to overall styles—a gross misrepresentation.
6. They mix Oxford's songs and poems in one sample even though this obviously confounds the results.
7. They claim Oxford's writing style did not change over time, even though their sample is too small to tell.
8. They ignore the varied styles of Oxford's verses, and compare them as if they were all in one style.
9. They imply that the statistical significance of differences is also a measure of their magnitude.
10. They imply that the statistical significance of differences is a measure of the odds against change.
11. They berate the quality of Oxford's verse, misleading readers into thinking it is based on stylometrics.
12. Without doing a valid study, they say Oxford's prose letters show no stylistic development over time.

For these reasons, Elliott's and Valenza's claim to have eliminated Oxford as a Shakespeare candidate is unwarranted. We hereby challenge them to prove their claim before a panel of neutral experts knowledgeable in quantitative methods and

critical analysis, without restrictions on evidence or arguments. The burden should be on them to prove their claim, the standard being ‘beyond a reasonable doubt.’

We do not normally view wagers as an appropriate way to resolve such disputes; but Elliott and Valenza use their phony bet to claim bragging rights, continuing to say that no one has accepted it, even though the editor of this journal says he did. We therefore offer to bet £1,000 on the outcome, if they agree to the above terms. Michael Egan adds that he is prepared to meet Elliott’s challenge any time, given fair terms such as those proposed above. One panel should suffice for both issues.

Acknowledgments

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Notes

¹ ‘Can the Oxford Candidacy be Saved?’ *The Oxfordian* (Vol. III, 2000, 89-92); also in ‘Oxford by the Numbers’, *Tennessee Law Review* (2004, 390-2)

² ‘Other Car’ (142)

³ Quoted in Rollins (1927, 3-4)

⁴ Rollins writes: ‘Indeed, if Edwards collected the poems—and Disle plainly says that he did—then all of them must have been written by 1566’ (1927, lix).

⁵ May tries to argue that they were written after 1566, but we have shown that this is not credible (2006, 115).

⁶ Steven May, *Courtier Poets* (1991, 2)

⁷ ‘Other Car’ (147)

⁸ Simonton, *Origins of Genius*, (1999, 155)

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ ‘Other Car’ (146, referring to TLR, 381, note 152)

¹¹ Shahan, *The Oxfordian* (2001, 160-1)

¹² Whalen, SO Newsletter (Fall 2004, 8)

¹³ Whalen (7)

¹⁴ ‘Other Car’ (147)

¹⁵ *Courtier Poets* (1991, 12)

¹⁶ ‘Other Car’ (149)

¹⁷ Webbe, ‘Discourse of English Poetry’ (1586). In *Ancient and Critical Essays*, Joseph Haselwood, ed. (1811, 243)

¹⁸ ‘Other Car’ (148).

¹⁹ Puttenham [?] (1589) *The Arte of English Poesie*. Gladys Doidge Will-cock and Alice Walker, eds. (1970, 13)

²⁰ Puttenham, [?] (61).

- ²¹ Peacham, *The Compleat Gentleman*. (1622, 95-6)
- ²² 'Oxford by the Numbers' (2004, 348)
- ²³ 'Apples to Oranges' (2006, 120-21)
- ²⁴ 'Oxford by the Numbers' (2004, 395; emphasis added)
- ²⁵ In an article in *The Tennessee Law Review* (2004, 221-254), May says that the parallels Looney found are commonplaces used by other writers; but few of them predate Oxford's first use. May also overlooks that while these 'commonplaces' are spread among many writers, they are concentrated in Oxford and Shakespeare.
- ²⁶ 'Other Car' (2007, 150)
- ²⁷ 'Other Car' (150) (Egan says that he is ready to meet Elliott's challenge at any time.)
- ²⁸ *Ibid.*
- ²⁹ Ramon Jiménez, 'Who Was the Author of Five Plays that Shakespeare Rewrote as His Own?' SO Newsletter (Winter 2008, 13-20)
- ³⁰ J.T. Looney, 'Shakespeare' Identified (1920, 75-6)
- ³¹ J.T. Looney (1920, 77)
- ³² *Courtier Poets* (1991, 52-3)

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Honour of Isabel Holden, 135-40. (Originally presented as a paper at The Edward de Vere Studies Conference, Concordia University, Portland, Oregon, April 21, 2006)

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