



# THE SHAKESPEARE OXFORD NEWSLETTER

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## Authorship Question Gets Major Media Coverage

by Alex McNeil

### Oxfordians Quoted in *New Yorker* Article



Following the recent death of former U.S. Supreme Court Justice and prominent authorship doubter John Paul Stevens, a staff writer for *The New Yorker* contacted several Oxfordians. The writer, Tyler Foggatt, had read Stevens's Wikipedia biography, where she saw (in a brief mention toward the end of the entry) that Stevens was an authorship doubter and

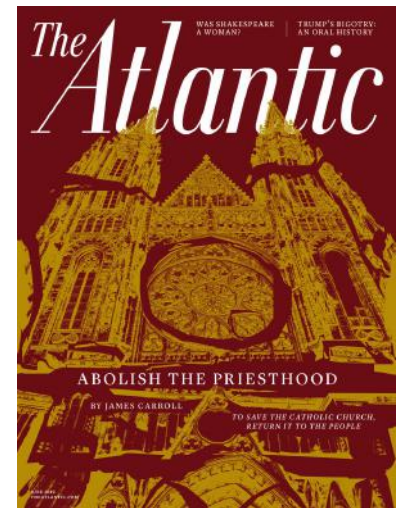
that he was the recipient of the Oxfordian of the Year award in 2009 (jointly presented to him by the Shakespeare Oxford Society and the Shakespeare Fellowship; see *Shakespeare Matters*, Fall 2009 issue, and the *Newsletter* 45:3, December 2009). That led her to the SOF website, where she saw Tom Regnier's eloquent tribute to Justice Stevens (see page 13), and contacted him. Regnier, who was one of the persons who had presented the award to Justice Stevens, in turn put Foggatt in touch with two of the other co-presenters, Alex McNeil and Michael Pisapia.

The result was a piece of some 900 words that appeared in the "Talk of the Town" section of the issue of August 5 & 12, 2019 (though it's primarily a weekly magazine, *The New Yorker* publishes five or six biweekly issues each year). Titled "Dept. of Dissent: Poetic Justice," it led off with a quote from Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg's eulogy on July 23: "Justice Stevens very much appreciated the writings of the literary genius known by the name William Shakespeare. . . ." Foggatt then explained that Justice Ginsburg had chosen her words carefully and deliberately—that Stevens

*(Continued on page 13)*

### *The Atlantic*: "Was Shakespeare a Woman?"

In its June 2019 issue, *The Atlantic* ran a 5,500-word article, "Was Shakespeare a Woman?" in which the author, Elizabeth Winkler, laid out a case for Emilia Bassano as the true Bard. The online version is here: <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2019/06/who-is-shakespeare-emilia-bassano/588076/>



#### I. The Article

Winkler, a reporter for the *Wall Street Journal*, correctly observed that doubts about whether William Shaksperre of Stratford "really wrote the works attributed to him are almost as old as the writing itself." However, this statement was later modified in the online version of the article to read that "Theories that others wrote the corpus of work attributed to William Shakespeare . . . emerged in the mid-19th century. Assorted comments by his contemporaries have been interpreted by some as suggesting that the London actor claimed credit for writing that wasn't his." She noted that alternative candidates such as Francis Bacon, Christopher Marlowe and Edward de Vere "continue to have champions, whose fervor can sometimes border on fanaticism." Winkler then took Stratfordians to task: "orthodox Shakespeare scholars have settled into dogmatism of their own. Even to dabble in authorship questions is considered a sign of bad faith, a blinkered failure to countenance genius in a glover's son."

Winkler has certainly researched the authorship question, and deftly knocks holes in the case for the Stratford man ("The profile is remarkably coherent,

*(Continued on page 15)*

## From the President:

Greetings, fellow Oxfordians! As our friend Edward said, "Some are born great, some achieve greatness, and some just got back from Ashland, Oregon!"

First, some good news: We are slowly starting to make a dent with the press. They are becoming aware of our existence!

I just came back from the very exciting Summer Seminar on Shakespeare Authorship that took place in Ashland from July 22 to 26 (see page 17). It was arranged by SOF Board member Earl Showerman and got the attention of the local press. Our Public Relations Director, Steven Sabel, contacted media outlets and on July 24, the *Ashland Daily Tidings* newspaper featured our seminar on page one, with a huge photo of Dr. Roger Stritmatter looking through 17th century Shakespeare Folios on display at the Hannon Library of Southern Oregon University campus. The very positive coverage of the Shakespeare Authorship polemic ran for three pages!

You can see the article in the following link: <https://ashlandtidings.com/news/top-stories/shakespeare-oxford-fellowship-questions-authorship-of-plays-at-ashland-oregon-events>

But more significantly, in terms of national coverage, the SOF was recently contacted by *The New Yorker* (see

page 1). The article, which appears in its August 5 & 12 issue, also briefly notes the origin of the Oxfordian theory in 1920 by J. Thomas Looney: "Shakespeare was the front man for de Vere, an aristocrat who could not publish under his own name." We also informed them of our upcoming conference in Hartford, Connecticut, in October at the Mark Twain House. As you know, Twain's last book, *Is Shakespeare Dead?* questions the traditional authorship.

We hope that the publication of *The New Yorker* and *Ashland Tidings* articles within a week is not just a coincidence, but rather signifies a possible change in the attitude of the press. In order to promote the Oxfordian cause we need more exposure in the media to start making a significant dent and initiate a true debate on the authorship issue.

We will be contacting all the major news outlets about our upcoming October conference in Hartford, and about the J. Thomas Looney "Shakespeare" Identified 100th (SI-100) anniversary event we are planning for March 4, 2020. We have not selected a location, but we will soon notify you of the program we are planning for that commemoration. I wrote to the Huntington Library in San Marino, California, to see if we could hold the event at their facility, but I was informed by Dr. W.M. Hindle, Director of Research, that "The Huntington is in fact celebrating its own centennial in 2019-2020 and our

### The Shakespeare Oxford Newsletter

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The Shakespeare Oxford Fellowship is a non-profit, educational organization dedicated to investigating the Shakespeare authorship question and disseminating the evidence that Edward de Vere, the 17th Earl of Oxford (1550-1604), is the true author of the poems and plays written under the pseudonym "William Shakespeare."

The Shakespeare Oxford Fellowship pursues its mission by supporting research, educational and scholarly initiatives, annual conferences, website and social media, and by publishing this Newsletter and an annual scholarly journal, *The Oxfordian*.

The Shakespeare Oxford Fellowship was formed in 2013 when the Shakespeare Oxford Society, founded in 1957, and the Shakespeare Fellowship, founded in 2001, united to form a single organization. Dues, grants and contributions are tax deductible to the extent provided by law.

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program for the whole academic year is full to overflowing. Most of our conferences, seminars and lectures for 2019-2020 were planned three or four years ago, and it will be impossible for us at this late stage to find space or time in our crowded schedule.” I guess we are not going to the Huntington next year, but they will sure miss our wild Oxfordian group!

We are hoping that at least one of the news outlets will have the courage to cover our activities and inform the public of the Shakespeare Authorship issue. The press and mainstream academia still treat us as an irrelevant fringe group and largely ignore our scholarly discoveries. We are basically untouchables. They won't acknowledge reading our articles, journals or books. We know that even if they report our activities, they might portray us in the worst possible light to discredit our “fake facts” and call in their “experts” from Cambridge, Oxford, Harvard, etc., to ridicule us. But we have the “real facts” on our side and we welcome a debate.

Several of our committees—Public Relations, Research Grant, Video Contest, Data Preservation, SI-100th Anniversary—are actively working on promoting Oxfordian events. Jim Warren, who received an SOF Research Grant to help him in his investigations, has found a trove of hitherto unknown Looney documents in an attic in Scotland. This is a significant find that will take time to research. Jim reports that he is now “inventorying and scanning the 1,600 pages I got from J. Thomas Looney’s grandson last month—papers that had belonged to his grandfather at the time of his death in 1944 and that until earlier this year hadn’t been seen by human eyes since 1952.” Kudos to Jim for his discovery!

We are also planning on initiating a new contest starting next year: the College Authorship Essay Contest. We need to get the attention of college students and go around mainstream academia roadblocks to discuss the Shakespeare authorship. We plan to advertise directly to students and offer a \$1,000 first prize to motivate them to participate. I will have more details on the contest in the next issue.

As I’ve said before, we at the SOF are actively working on getting the Oxfordian message out to the public. Most people have not heard that there is a Shakespeare authorship problem. Once it is resolved and Oxford is recognized as the author, the works of Shakespeare will become even more dramatic since many of the hidden allusions and themes that were topical at the time will be finally understood and resolved.

Help us get this message out! PLEASE DONATE so that we can pursue our many projects: PR, Research, Podcasts, Website, Video Contest, Data Preservation, the Looney 100th Anniversary event, and the College Authorship Essay Contest. We cannot do any of these activities without your participation and generosity.

Speaking of generosity, I want to end by thanking Ben August. On May 30, Oxford’s copy of Herodotus’s *Delle Guerre de Greci, et de Persi*, translated by Mattheo Maria Boiardo, published in Venice in 1565, was auctioned. Ben’s bid was the winning one! (See page 6). This is a major win for all Oxfordians. The book is now available for research by those who recognize its significance. We all have to thank Ben for stepping up and obtaining this unique piece of Oxford’s personal library. A book owned by Oxford! This is a piece of literary history.

Stratfordians would faint if they found ANY book owned by the man from Stratford. Thank you, Ben, for helping secure Oxford's legacy! Ben, in his usual humble self, said in response to Mark Anderson's thanks to him: “I hope SOF can get some positive PR from this. I never expected to have to pay this much, but I couldn’t accept an Institution or individual that secretly harbor doubts about the Stratfordian story owning it just because they’re well-funded. I’ll make sure those on our side of the argument get abundant opportunities to enjoy this historical book.”

We are here and we are clear—  
It had to be Edward de Vere!

John Hamill, President

## SOF PR & Marketing Update

by Steven Sabel, SOF Director of Public Relations and Marketing



### The Momentum Continues

The early successes of our initial PR and marketing efforts have continued to gain us momentum and garner us some attention across the country and beyond. We

have now added more than 7,500 media contacts to our growing list of publishers, editors, reporters, and columnists from all major daily, weekly, and monthly news publications. Our list currently covers forty-one states, Washington, DC, and a large area of Southern Ontario, Canada. By sending regular press releases in a timely fashion regarding our latest news items such as new books published, our video contest, our Ashland Summer Seminar, and other activities, we have succeeded in receiving mention in more than a dozen different news publications since January. We are building an online presence of news mentions that breed



further news when interested reporters do a search of us online and see that we are a legitimate newsworthy organization.

Thanks to our immediate past president, Tom Regnier, who moved quickly to get out his memorial article on Justice John Paul Stevens, we scored a great victory in the pages of the August 5 & 12 issue of *The New Yorker* on the heels of the passing of Justice Stevens (see page 13). That giant coup followed our scoring the front page of the Ashland (Oregon) *Tidings* during our Summer Seminar there in July (see page 17).

Public events and presentations conducted by SOF and/or its members are the best way to share our knowledge of this issue, while also gaining broader attention. It was the public forum portion of our Ashland Seminar that led to the attendance of a local reporter and front page coverage. We received similar attention in Santa Barbara, CA, last January from a public presentation Bryan Wildenthal delivered, and a recent presentation by Bonner Miller Cutting, organized by Linda Bullard, also landed on the front page of her hometown newspaper (see page 8).

The Conference Committee is committed to creating a public presentation aspect to our upcoming Conference in Hartford, Connecticut, in October, with the hope that we can continue this string of successes by following the model we have been using so well. I will be visiting Hartford a few weeks before the conference to connect with local media, business leaders, service organizations, and college campuses to share information about our organization and our conference schedule, including Keir Cutler's performance of "Is Shakespeare Dead?"

### **Speakers Bureau**

We can always use more members in our Speakers Bureau. We have several states completely open, and regions of larger states that can use some coverage. We are currently working on creating a PowerPoint presentation that can be easily shared with any member who wishes to use it as their presentation template for making presentations to local service clubs, libraries, schools, or other groups. Reach out to your local area and offer to share the SAQ with them. We will support your efforts with the materials you need.

### **Reach Out**

If you have an SAQ or Oxfordian event or presentation scheduled, reach out to SOF PR and Marketing Committee co-chairs Julie Sandys Bianchi and Joan Leon. They will make sure your event gets into the queue for proper support from the PR and Marketing department. All ideas, suggestions, and requests are fielded through them.

### **Your Help Is Needed**

Unfortunately, we do not have unlimited time and resources to support our PR and marketing efforts, but you can help. If you wish to help boost our efforts and ensure the continuation of these efforts, consider making a donation to SOF, and indicating that you wish to see the funds used toward PR and marketing. We will make sure to stretch every dollar as far as we can toward continuing to spread the word.

### **"Don't Quill The Messenger"**

Our podcast series is also gaining momentum. With new episodes released every two weeks, our podcast series has received thousands of downloads from listeners across the country and beyond. Positive response to the series continues to grow, and the mission of reaching people who are new to the SAQ and Oxford is working! You can help boost the popularity of the series by going to any podcast listening site, downloading episodes to your phone or tablet, and writing a review of the series. Ratings and reviews from listeners help drive the series to the top of the list of recommended series for new listeners. New listeners drive people to our website and to obtaining additional information about us and our mission.

### **Website Updates**

The website redesign team is hard at work making revisions to pages and content for a more streamlined and functional website that will better assist newcomers in finding the information they seek. The site will still contain all of the favorite aspects our members enjoy, but will also take into account that we have new traffic going there like never before as result of our PR and marketing efforts.

### **More to Come**

Our Annual Conference is just around the corner (see page 18). The PR and marketing campaign to publicize the conference is about to move ahead with full steam. Initial rounds of the campaign will be followed by direct contact and more details in subsequent press releases to lay the foundation for my visit to Hartford in late September to create an interpersonal connection with local leaders. I will be armed with brochures, flyers, media kits, and an exciting schedule of events to promote!

It is a great time to be an Oxfordian!



## Letters:

In the fifteen years I have been a member, I have seen amazing progress. Hiring Steven Sabel as the PR Director is one more step in making the Authorship Debate more available to the public. The more the public hears of the issue, the better. The question is how we reach people.

The Stratfordians constantly claim that Oxfordians are “amateurs.” If they would come to one conference, they would realize how inappropriate that label is. The presentations are very scholarly. That is necessary and good, but we also need to reach out to the less informed public. Too often academics preach to the choir.

To create a groundswell of public opinion, we must share our information with the average people. The facts, when clearly presented, are compelling. I know that when I give classes or talks, people are shocked. “But I saw his house and his bed,” they say. “Sorry,” I reply, “I hate to burst your bubble, but you saw *a* house and *a* bed.” Yes, there are “scholarly” Stratfordian biographies of Shakespeare, but when we look at them closely, we find little or nothing about the Stratford man. The biographies are filled with general history, information about other authors, and assumptions from the canon. When I point that out to my students and audiences, they respond positively. I am not sure how the SOF can accomplish this, but reaching out to the greater public definitely should be one of our PR goals.

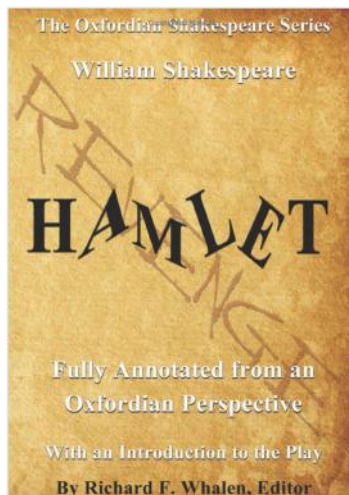
Susan Nenadic  
Ann Arbor, MI

In the Winter 2014 issue of the *Newsletter* Dr. Richard Waugaman offers a number of kind remarks about my book *Hamlet Made Simple*. Considering that almost no one actually read this volume, I owe much to someone who did and ventured to comment. Unfortunately, Dr. Waugaman seems to have misconstrued the book’s central hypothesis. He says the author “insists” that Hamlet is the son of Claudius, as if this notion rested on sheer iteration. No attempt was made by Dr. Waugaman to state the actual argument and evaluate it. By presenting the thesis of the text as a stubborn inclination of the writer, or symptom, the significance of the essay is so reduced as to remove any reason to pick it up and read it. Thus one of the most stimulating ideas of our time is blithely discarded and lost.

At the conclusion of the chapter I suggested that *Hamlet* supports *two* interpretations: (1) the exoteric one in which Hamlet is the son of Hamlet Sr., and (2) the more thorough and illuminating one, which entails his descent from Claudius. That argument is not going to be repeated here. All that need be said is that in his play the dramatist deliberately gives us a portrait of the prince that is ambiguous. What we choose to make of it tells us something about ourselves as readers and as human beings. From a diagnostic point of view, to ignore the evidence and reasoning that support the main idea is a regrettable parapraxis, unhelpful for those struggling to come to terms with Shakespeare and his most redoubtable creation.

Many thanks,  
David Gontar  
Tustin Ranch, CA

### Advertisement



## Ever wonder what an Oxfordian edition of a Shakespeare play would look like?

Try the Oxfordian edition of *Hamlet* (2018), a play that the Stratfordians call “enigmatic” and “problematic,” but which makes perfect sense and wonderful entertainment when read with the understanding that it was written by the Earl of Oxford.

Edited by Richard F. Whalen with Jack Shuttleworth, chairman emeritus of the English department at the U.S. Air Force Academy, *Hamlet* is the latest of four plays so far in the Oxfordian Shakespeare Series, following the second edition of *Macbeth*, also edited by Whalen, general editor and publisher of the series; *Othello*, edited by Ren Draya of Blackburn University and by Whalen; and *Anthony and Cleopatra*, edited by Michael Delahoyde of Washington State University.

All four plays are available at [Amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com).

## What's the News?

### Book Owned by Oxford Purchased—By an Oxfordian

In late May a London auction house, Forum Auctions, sold a book belonging to Edward de Vere. The book, an Italian translation of Herodotus's *Delle Guerre de Greci, et de Persi* (The Greek and Persian Wars), was listed in the catalog as follows:

Shakespeare,—Edward de Vere's copy.—Herodotus. *Delle Guerre de Greci, et de Persi*, translated by Matteo Maria Boiardo, woodcut device on title, some worming to upper margin, occasionally just touching headline or text, some staining at beginning, title with ink inscriptions and almost loose, contemporary Oxford binding of calf with gilt armorial device of the Earl of Oxford (a boar) to covers with gilt fleurons at corners, upper cover scratched, upper joint cracking, lacking ties, preserved in modern morocco-backed cloth drop-back box, 8vo, Venice, Appresso Lelio Bariletto, 1565.

✱ Important Shakespearean association. A copy of Herodotus from the library of the 17th Earl of Oxford, Edward de Vere (1550-1604), a poet and playwright who was considered by many to be the true author of Shakespeare's plays. Herodotus is thought to have been a source book for Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus*. Provenance: Edward de Vere, 17th Earl of Oxford (armorial binding); "Tho: Burkelei Ex dono illustriis Ed. Comitibus Oxon" (ink inscription on title) and Latin motto "Nec temere nec timide" ["neither rashly nor timidly"]; Sir John Berkeley (ink signature to second leaf); ? Chetwode 1719 (ink inscription to title); Robert S. Pirie (bookplate).

Forum Auctions estimated that the book would be sold for £6,000-8,000 (approximately \$8,000-10,000). To that end, shortly before the auction the SOF organized a grass-roots campaign to raise funds for the purchase in association with a major library, and quickly received \$15,000 in pledges. But no library announced an intention to bid. The SOF decided to bid on its own and asked member Ben August to bid. When the bidding exceeded the amount pledged, August gamely decided to stay in and committed his own money. He won. The final price (which included a substantial buyer's premium) turned out to be much higher than the estimate: £48,000 (about \$60,000).

"I believe this is one of many volumes owned by de Vere, the real Shakespeare," said August after the



auction. "The auction house also called it that: 'Shakespeare-Edward de Vere's copy' in the catalog. Obviously, I was not the only one bidding who believed it is a genuine Shakespeare volume. Yes, the price was high but who knows what it could be worth years from now when the world accepts de Vere as Shakespeare. "My plan is to make it available through SOF and those details will have to be worked out. I hope it can be kept in a public way so it is available to researchers. But SOF will have first call. I didn't want to have it go into the hands of people who would keep it away from the light as it has been over the last

number of years. In any event, if it ever has to go on sale again, SOF will have the first shot at it. In the meantime, SOF will be more than welcome to promote it and display it."

SOF member Michael Morse was able to examine the book in advance in London. Morse believes that the first inscription ("Tho. Burkelei . . .") indicates that the book was owned by Oxford and was later apparently given as a gift to his first cousin, once removed, Thomas Berkeley (1575-1611). Berkeley was the son of Katherine Howard, Oxford's first cousin, who was herself the daughter of Henry Howard, Earl of Surrey, and his wife, Frances de Vere, the sister of the 16th Earl of Oxford, Edward's father. "Who knows what occasioned the gift," said Morse, "but Thomas did matriculate from Oxford University in 1590 at the age of fourteen and shortly thereafter entered Gray's Inn to study law. Oxford's personal copy of Herodotus would probably have made a nice gift for this budding scholar." Thomas appears to have been later knighted by James I.

The pledge campaign was coordinated by SOF trustee Don Rubin, who said, "Over sixty SOF members pledged amounts ranging from \$10 to \$1,000. It was an extraordinary outpouring of real support for the organization and this opportunity to own a tiny bit of Edward de Vere—Shakespeare. Ben has said that purchasing the book is his personal way of supporting the cause and he is not asking for financial help."

Ben August plans to bring the book to the SOF Annual Conference in Hartford, Connecticut, in October (see page 18 for more Conference information).

[Editor's Note: This particular book seems to be the same item that was purchased by an anonymous bidder at a Sotheby's auction in December 2015 (see "Third Book of Oxford Disappears after Sotheby's Auction," *Newsletter*, Fall 2017). The sales price at that time was \$8,750, which means that the buyer—whoever it was—made a very tidy profit on the resale. It also suggests that the antique book-collecting world is ready to bet heavily that Edward de Vere will come to be recognized as the true Shakespeare.]



## Keanu Reeves Is an Oxfordian



As recently reported online at YahooSports.com, actor Keanu Reeves has admitted he's an Oxfordian (or "Edward de Verean," as he put it). In a video interview with BuzzFeed, Reeves was asked if he could time travel to any period in time when would it be and why. He answered, "I always wanted to know growing up who really wrote the plays of Shakespeare. So I want to be there for that moment when 'Shakespeare' [he makes air quotes]—because I don't believe that Shakespeare was really Shakespeare—wrote *Hamlet*." He elaborated, "I'm an Edward de Verean, Earl of Oxford. So I'd like to be there in the 1600s."

Reeves, now age 54, began his film and television career in 1984, and has starred in blockbusters such as *Bill and Ted's Excellent Adventure* and *The Matrix* film series.

He has also appeared in film adaptations of Shakespeare, including *My Own Private Idaho* (1991, loosely based on *Henry IV, Part I*) and *Much Ado About Nothing* (1993, as Don John).

Here is a link to the YahooSports story, which in turn has the video feed link: <https://sports.yahoo.com/keanu-reeves-doesnt-believe-in-shakespeare-133017029.html>

## WSJ Mentions de Vere, but "It's All a Joke"

In the March 7 issue of *The Wall Street Journal*, sports columnist Jason Gay wrote about the upcoming NFL draft. Looking back to the 2018 draft, Gay wrote that "a lot of us got fired up that UCLA quarterback Josh Rosen was too smart for football—that Rosen's brain was just so inquisitive, he couldn't possibly focus in the way we need him to focus. When a quarterback drops back in the pocket, you want him to focus on completions. You don't want him scanning the field, daydreaming over whether or not Edward de Vere actually wrote Shakespeare's plays."

What? Josh Rosen, who maintained a 4.3 average in high school, was a star quarterback at UCLA; he announced his availability for the pro football draft after his junior season. Drafted in the first round by the Arizona Cardinals, he signed a \$17.84 million multi-year deal with an \$11 million signing bonus. He started thirteen games. Unfortunately, the Cardinals were 3-10 in those games (3-13 overall). In April 2019 the Cardinals drafted a new quarterback and traded Rosen to the Miami Dolphins.

We don't know if Rosen took any Shakespeare courses at UCLA or whether he has an opinion about the authorship question. And neither does Jason Gay. Contacted by SOF member Patrick Sullivan about the

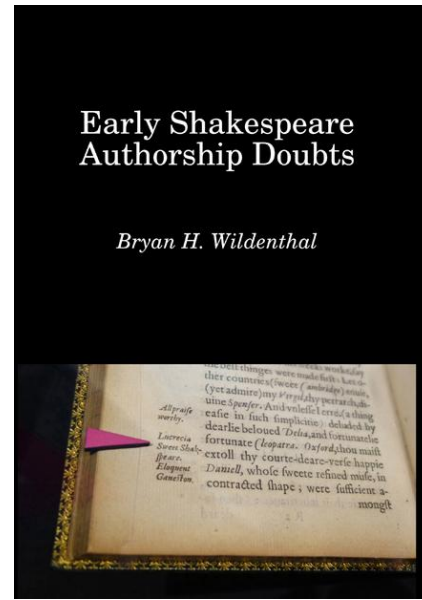
statement, the columnist replied: "To be clear: it's all a joke. Rosen's never discussed it. I wanted to make a joke about an interesting if not very well know academic debate. An earlier draft had him wondering if dark matter possessed electromagnetism."



## Bryan H. Wildenthal Publishes New Book

Bryan H. Wildenthal recently published *Early Shakespeare Authorship Doubts*, which examines dozens of instances of doubts that were expressed about the identity of the author known as William Shakespeare. The book focuses on doubts expressed before 1616 (the year that Will Shakspeare of Stratford-on-Avon died), including five indications that the true author had died well before 1616. Alexander Waugh praises it: “Professor Wildenthal’s witty and forensic tour de force examines the evidence of Shakespeare’s contemporaries and what they really thought of him. Seldom is the argument against conventional opinion so devastatingly articulated.” The 412-page book is available from [lulu.com](http://lulu.com) and [amazon.com](http://amazon.com).

Bryan H. Wildenthal is a professor of law emeritus at Thomas Jefferson School of Law in San Diego. He previously published a book on American Indian law. An Oxfordian for almost two decades, he has also published numerous articles in Oxfordian



publications. He is a trustee of the Shakespeare Oxford Fellowship.



## New German SAQ Website

SOF member Hanno Wember has informed us about a new German website, <http://wer-war-shakespeare.de/> (“Who Was Shakespeare?”). “For U.S. and U.K.

readers, it’s of little interest, since it is only in German,” Wember writes. “For German readers it is of some interest, since it has a discussion forum, which is new, as the ‘old’ internet site ([www.shakespeare-today.de](http://www.shakespeare-today.de)) does not offer this.”

## Shakespeare Authorship Question Comes to the Texas Hill Country

by Linda Bullard

On June 6, 2019, Bonner Miller Cutting gave an authorship talk to a packed theater at the Schreiner University campus in Kerrville, Texas. Support for the presentation by a Professor of English at Schreiner, Kathleen Hudson, Ph.D., made it possible to hold the event on campus.

Cutting opened her talk by going over the problems with the traditional attribution of

authorship. After showing the slide with the six scrawled signatures—the only evidence that we have of the Stratford man’s handwriting—she noted that for people new to the authorship question, “it’s hard to get your head around the lack of evidence to support what students are taught in schools.”

Cutting’s presentation preceded Kerrville’s “Shakespeare in the Park” presentation of *The Merry Wives of Windsor* on June 7 and 8, produced by the local community theater group Playhouse 2000, so she tailored most of her talk to that play.



Noting that *Merry Wives* is usually thought to be just “a farce of folly and fun,” it is really a “roman à clef” in that the characters are thinly veiled representations of important people in Queen Elizabeth’s court. “Everybody is somebody, and with a little historical information, we can easily recognize who’s who.” Cutting went on to say that Shakespeare’s plays, and *Merry Wives* in particular, contain much political satire, and she compared this play to *Saturday Night Live*, where contemporary figures are regularly subjected to unflattering caricatures.

In the Q & A after the talk, members of the audience showed that they understood that the key to the identity of the characters is found in the identity of the author. Questions included “How could someone not connected to the royal court know these things?” and “Who could insult important people and get away with it?” Cutting responded that portraying real people on the public stage was against the law and was not tolerated by the powers that be. “It’s one of the reasons why the author used a pen name.” As people left, many commented that they would enjoy the performance of *Merry Wives* much more armed with what they had learned about the true author and his relationship to the plot and characters.

Cutting’s talk made the front page top-of-the-fold in a local newspaper, with the headline “What’s in a Name Key in Shakespeare Dispute,” and it continued inside with a half-page unbiased report of the event. The lecture also became the basis for a flyer distributed at

Shakespeare in the Park, identifying the characters in *The Merry Wives of Windsor* from an Oxfordian perspective, using historical portraits. The following day Bonner Cutting appeared at a neighborhood event, talking about her mother Ruth Loyd Miller’s involvement in researching and promoting Edward de Vere as the pen behind the pseudonym Shakespeare.

“Shakespeare in the Park” productions are performed in communities large and small during the summer months throughout the country and offer a perfect hook for organizing a lecture by an SOF speaker, placing an article in local press, or creating an educational flyer to distribute to the audience. Bringing the Shakespeare Authorship Question to the Texas Hill Country, Bonner Cutting demonstrated to our playgoers how knowledge of who wrote the plays enriches our experience of them.



Bonner Miller Cutting and Linda Bullard

## In Memoriam: Ron Hess (1949-2019)

by William Boyle



Willard Ron Hess, Oxfordian researcher and author, and longtime member of the Shakespeare Oxford Fellowship

(and its predecessor, the Shakespeare Oxford Society), passed away during the weekend of May 18-20, 2019. He and his wife, Dorothy E. Hess, were found dead in their home in Winder, Georgia, by police on the morning of May 21, shortly after receiving a 911 call from Hess’s grandson, who had gone there after not hearing from them for several days. Both were found shot to death; the double homicide remains unsolved at this time. As far as can be determined from local police reports, there are no leads, no suspects, and no known or even suspected reasons. The house was reportedly not ransacked, so robbery is not suspected. A suspicious automobile, captured on a nearby surveillance camera in the days before the shootings, has not been found. The entire affair has been a shock to all who knew him. Ron Hess was 70 years old, Dorothy Hess 72.

A funeral service was held in Randallstown, Maryland, on May 30. Ron and Dorothy Hess were buried at Woodlawn Cemetery in Baltimore. They are survived by their two daughters, Wendy Adams of Winder and Laura Hess of Bowie, Maryland, four grandchildren, a large number of friends and colleagues from Ron’s years in government work in Washington,

DC, and, of course, Ron's friends and colleagues in the Oxfordian community.

Ron Hess grew up in Hawaii and graduated in 1966 from the Leilehua High School. He attended the University of Hawaii, graduating in 1970 with a degree in European and Russian History. Moving to the mainland in the 1970s, he wound up in Washington, DC, earning an MS in computer science from American University in 1978.

His professional career was closely involved with his expertise in computer systems. His most significant and longest lasting position was in Washington, working for the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) from September 1988 until October 2009. During those years he served as the Information Systems Security Officer for several agencies within HHS. He published several articles over the years in this field. Ron was also a member of the "Practitioner Faculty" in computer science at Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore. Following his retirement, he and his wife moved to Georgia.

Like many in the current Oxfordian community, Hess became involved in the authorship debate in the 1980s, but his path was a bit different. As he explained in a "How I Became an Oxfordian" essay in 2016, he first read about (and was intrigued with) the Earl of Derby, but then came upon Charlton Ogburn's *The Mysterious William Shakespeare*, and realized that biography was the key ("That's what hooked me, because the bio simply cried out, 'I'm your man'"). In that essay he also mentioned meeting Ogburn and getting him to sign his copy of *TMWS* in 1987, which almost certainly happened at the famous Moot Court debate in 1987 on the campus of his alma mater, American University.

By the 1990s he was active in researching and writing about authorship issues; his first article, "Certain European Researches into Shakespeare's French and Italian Connections," appeared in the Summer 1993 issue of the *Newsletter*. The inaugural issue of *The Oxfordian* in 1998 featured an article by Hess on computerized stylistic analysis ("Hotwiring the Bard into Cyberspace: Insights into Automated Forms of Stylistic Analysis which Attempt to Address Elizabethan Authorship Questions"), reflecting his expertise in computer science. Over the following years he was often involved in the debates over textual and stylistic analysis, a continuing hot topic in authorship studies.

In all, over a period of twenty-five years, Hess published three dozen articles and reviews in Oxfordian publications, focusing on historical analysis, textual analysis, and, more recently, the Sonnets. At the 2017 SOF Conference in Chicago he co-presented, with European Oxfordian Jan Scheffer, on the topic, "A Précis for a Proposed Book, 'Shakespeare's Sonnets, Platonism, and Desportes.'" At the same conference he made a separate presentation on "How to Approach a Growing Number of Shakespeare Dictionaries." He was

a regular at the Library of Congress, where he conducted much of his research, and also photocopied many rare and hard to find books, eventually amassing a collection of 575 titles, which he has left to the Shakespeare Oxford Fellowship.

In 2002 and 2003 he published the first two volumes of his proposed trilogy, *The Dark Side of Shakespeare* (Volume 1, "An Iron-fisted Romantic in England's Most Perilous Times," and Volume 2, "An Elizabethan Courtier, Diplomat, Spymaster, & Epic Hero"; Volume 3 was never published), which delved deeply into his theory that Oxford was a political operative of the state—a spy—whose travels and related experiences in the 1570s and 1580s formed the core of the Shakespeare works. Though his books are not too well known among current Oxfordians, they are, as with all things Hess did, well researched, thoughtfully argued, and controversial. The back cover includes blurbs from Joseph Sobran ("even those who reject his conclusions will find plenty to think about") and Richard Whalen ("plunging into the complexities of Elizabethan history Hess raises a host of provocative questions"). Author Hank Whittemore, writing on his Shakespeare blog in 2011, said of Hess and his work, "I feel strongly that Hess has pieced together an extraordinarily complex but convincing argument that Anthony Munday was the 'Publishing Shepherd' of what Hess calls the 'Shakespeare Enterprise.'"

An interesting, though little known, part of the Hess legacy is that in the mid-1990s he was the first person to use the phrase "Prince Tudor" to describe the controversial theory that Queen Elizabeth had had a child by Oxford. He did not invent the term, but freely adapted it from a 1973 Baconian book (I, Prince Tudor, wrote Shakespeare). Hess never wavered in his antipathy toward the "Prince Tudor" theory. But, perhaps ironically, that theory is now known by most Oxfordians—including those who believe in it—as the "Prince Tudor" or "PT" theory.

In addition to regularly presenting at society conferences and publishing papers in the society's newsletters and journals, Hess was also involved in several discussion forums and listservs, making an impact that was often controversial. After being banned by forum moderators following contentious debates, he created his own listserv, allowing him to get his views out into the world without impediment. In a way, the "Hess OxL" listserv (started in the late 1990s, shortly after the "evermore" listserv, in the midst of a "Hessian crisis," became Nina Green's Phaeton listserv) was his unique version of a blog, by which he emailed his "followers" with his latest. Over a twenty-year period Hess sent out hundreds of messages commenting on all things Shakespeare, Oxfordian, and sometimes just the world at large.

He also maintained a website (under his name) on which a number of his articles appeared (both reprints of published ones plus versions of his posts on his Hess

listserv, and material from *The Dark Side of Shakespeare* (the site can be viewed on the Internet Archive, using its original URL: <https://web.archive.org/web/20180611234141/http://home.earthlink.net/~beornshall/index.html/>).

In the 1990s and early 2000s in the Washington, DC, area, Hess was a member of an active group of local Oxfordians which constituted a local chapter of the SOS (calling themselves “WASOS”), which included Peter Dickson, Vincent Mooney (a Baconian), Prof. Howard Bloch, Winston Chow and Alan Tarica, several of whom he shared credit with on various projects.

In 2003 Hess, Dickson and WASOS were instrumental in putting together a debate at the Smithsonian Institution, which featured an impressive lineup of authorship scholars (Hess himself, Joseph Sobran, Katherine Chiljan, Prof. Alan Nelson, Prof. Steven May and author Irvin Matus). It was introduced by Diana Price, and moderated by William Causey, the well-known lawyer and political figure who was also an authorship enthusiast. The debate was reported on in *Shakespeare Matters* (Summer 2003) and the *Newsletter* (Spring 2003), and also received local press coverage. During preparations for the debate Hess related an interesting story on his listserv that illustrates his unique presence in the authorship debate. In 1994 he had invited the “homeless Shakespeare scholar” Irv Matus to live in his house for a period of time, even as Matus was completing his important book *Shakespeare, In Fact* (an authorship treatise that defended the Stratford man and dismissed all anti-Stratfordians, published by Continuum in 1994). Ron said of Matus (in response to some recent Matus criticisms of all Oxfordians):

He’s a tremendously good chef of Italian cuisine, and actually a very nice fellow in private, nearly flawless in answering all the *Jeopardy!* questions on

TV ... [and] once you’ve seen somebody in their underwear, or arguing with their teenaged daughters, it’s often hard to pay them respect thereafter .... [Still] I understand his need to be acidly sarcastic and disdainful of Oxfordians [in public] if he himself is to be accepted among the Stratfordian elite!

At the 2016 SOF conference in Boston Ron had fun with everyone by having his “How I Became an Oxfordian” essay published on the SOF website as being by “Mr. W. H.” and inviting conference attendees to guess just who this was (prizes were awarded). Only four people came up with the correct answer that this “Mr. W. H.” was, in fact, **W. Ron Hess**. As he had posted on his Facebook page, “I love a joke, and frequently live one.”

Ron was active in the Oxfordian movement right up to the end, continuing to send out his listserv observations (a little more infrequently of late) and attending any conference he could drive to (he hated flying). He was deeply involved in every aspect of the Shakespeare authorship debate for more than thirty years, having an undoubtable impact, while also becoming a bit of legend in his own right, with his long penetrating questions and comments at conferences, his listserv, and his frequently provocative commentaries. In cyberspace he could be blunt and acerbic, but in person he was a quiet, soft-spoken giant of a man, always interesting and fun to talk with. I can attest to that, having known him in cyberspace and in person over some thirty years.

Ron Hess was an important part of the intrigue, excitement, adventure and controversy that is part and parcel of the Oxfordian movement, and his presence will be missed.



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## Oxford's Spellings of "Halfpenny" Are as Diverse as Shake-Speare's

by Richard M. Waugaman, MD

In his deeply flawed 2003 book about Oxford, *Monstrous Adversary*, our friend and collaborator Alan H. Nelson uses various lines of specious attacks on Oxford in an unintentionally comical effort to discredit him. Among other slanders, he claims that Oxford's spelling was too flawed for him to have written the Shakespeare canon. For example, Nelson complains that "Oxford had no settled way of spelling many common words: thus he could spell 'halfpenny' at least eleven different ways" (63).

Nelson failed to compare Oxford's spellings with how Shake-speare spelled "halfpenny." A quick perusal of the First Folio (in the Norton facsimile) shows that Shake-speare uses the word eight times in the plays collected there (actually, seven times, but I'm adding an example from Quartos 1 and 2 of *Henry V*). And Shake-speare uses eight different spellings!

Here is a list:

Halfepeny	<i>Hamlet</i> II.2.282
Halfe pennie	<i>Love's Labours Lost</i> III.1.149
Halfpenny	<i>LLL</i> V.1.77
Halfe-penie	<i>LLL</i> V.2.563
Halfe-penny	<i>Merry Wives of Windsor</i> III.5.149
Hapence	<i>Henry V</i> III.2.47 [in QQ 1 and 2; not in FF]
Half pence	<i>As You Like It</i> III.2.372
Halfpence	<i>Much Ado About Nothing</i> II.3.147

I have long pondered Nelson's critique of Oxford's spellings. I thought of Nelson when I noticed that each of Oxford's marginal manicules (pointing hands) in his copy of the *Whole Book of Psalms* is distinctly different. In sharp contrast, William H. Sherman, in his 2009 *Used Books: Marking Readers in Renaissance England*, writes that it was characteristic of Elizabethan readers to use a regular manicule that was as distinctive as their signatures. Instead, Oxford celebrates creative diversity, in his spellings as in his manicules.

Thank you, Professor Nelson, for continuing to build the case for Oxford's authorship of Shakespeare's works!



## A Clear Declaration in 1606 That Prince Tudor Existed

by Robert Prechter

*Albions England* was a twenty-year project recounting English history in verse, published in stages from 1586 to 1606 under the name William Warner. Chapter 107 of Book 16, the final chapter in the series, was published three years after the death of Elizabeth. In it, the writer fires a salvo indicating that Elizabeth Tudor had secretly had a child, and that it was a son.

Warner recounts that King Edward I got the Welsh to agree to his appointing as their prince someone who was "Borne in their Countrie, and could not one word in English say." After they agreed, he displayed to them his infant son (later Edward II), newly born in Wales. The Welsh held to their agreement, after which all English princes thereafter were denoted Prince of Wales. Warner concludes his narrative with this stunning bombshell:

Hence Englands Heires-apparent have of Wales bin Princes, till Our Queene deceast conceald her Heire, I wot not for what skill.

Warner thus reports that Queen Elizabeth had a male child who survived until at least 1603 ("her Heire") and would have been known as Prince of Wales had she not concealed the fact of his birth. Reasons why she would have "conceald her Heire" are clear: Elizabeth was not married, so the boy was a bastard and would have been an embarrassment, and besides, she had tremendous political capital in her status as the Virgin Queen. Warner took a risk in publishing these lines, but the Queen was three years gone, and as a historian he probably felt obligated to state the truth.

Warner's statement indicates that he knew of one male heir. This is not to say that Elizabeth had only one child; an earlier child could have been female; it could have died before Elizabeth became Queen; or she could have had a child Warner did not know about. But with respect to his statement, it seems that one should look for a male who was alive in 1603.

To my knowledge, no one else has noticed these lines. The reason must be that few people have the stamina to suffer the tedium of reading Books 13-16 of *Albions England*, whose author is different from the talented composer of the first twelve books. He is, however, an educated chronicler in possession of detailed knowledge of the history of England and, apparently, its Queen.



New Yorker (continued from page 1)

“appreciated the writings of the individual *known* as Shakespeare,” who, in Stevens’s view, was not “the commoner from Stratford-upon-Avon, but [probably] Edward de Vere, the seventeenth Earl of Oxford.” Foggatt gave a brief but accurate outline of the Oxfordian thesis and noted that Stevens had begun to express his interest in authorship at the famous 1987 moot court at American University in Washington, DC. (where Stevens said, among other things, “You can’t help but have these gnawing doubts that this author may, perhaps, have been someone else”). The article included

quotes from Regnier, McNeil and Pisapia, and also mentioned the SOF’s upcoming annual conference at the Mark Twain House in Hartford, Connecticut (adding that Twain himself was an authorship skeptic).

Here is a link to Tyler’s Foggatt’s article: <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2019/08/05/justice-stevens-dissenting-shakespeare-theory>.



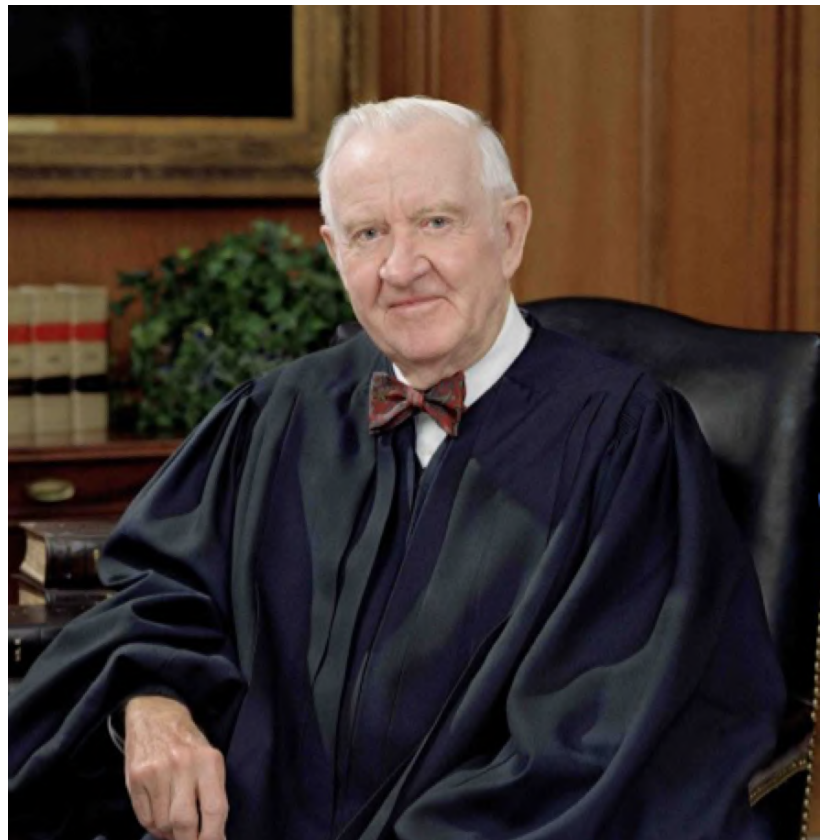
## In Memoriam: Justice John Paul Stevens

by Tom Regnier

[Editor’s Note: Tom Regnier’s tribute to Justice Stevens was posted on the SOF website on July 17, just a day after Stevens’s death. Its publication led to *The New Yorker*’s very positive article about Justice Stevens in its August 5 & 12, 2019, issue (see page 1). Regnier’s tribute is reproduced here in its entirety.]

We in the Shakespeare Oxford Fellowship note with great sadness and enormous respect the passing of retired Supreme Court Justice John Paul Stevens (1920-2019), who was our Oxfordian of the Year in 2009. Justice Stevens was also a “notable signatory” of the Declaration of Reasonable Doubt About the Identity of William Shakespeare.

Justice Stevens was appointed to the U.S. Supreme Court by President Gerald Ford in 1975. He became interested in the Shakespeare authorship question in 1987, when he participated in a moot court debate on the topic of Oxford vs. Shakespeare at American University in Washington, DC. There, he was part of a three-justice panel that also included Justices William Brennan and Harry Blackmun. Justice Brennan, the senior justice of the three, decided at the start that Oxfordians would have to prove their case by “clear and convincing” evidence—a higher standard than by a “preponderance of the evidence.” This virtually assured that the Stratfordians would win, but both Justices Stevens and Blackmun expressed strong doubts about the Stratfordian theory as they reluctantly cast their votes for the man from Stratford. Later, after studying the authorship question further, Stevens and Blackmun



came to believe that Edward de Vere, the 17th Earl of Oxford, was the true author of Shakespeare’s works.

In 2003, while I was still in law school, I wrote a law review article on the Shakespeare authorship question in which I quoted an article that Justice Stevens wrote on the same topic. When my article was published in the *University of Miami Law Review*, I sent a courtesy copy to Justice Stevens. To my surprise, I received a letter from him on U.S. Supreme Court letterhead about a week later:

Many thanks for sending me a reprint of your fine article. Your discussion of inheritance law in *Hamlet* contains insights that are new to me. If you can send me another reprint, I would like to forward it to a

friend in England who is becoming increasingly interested in the Oxfordian thesis. Incidentally, I think one reason why the scene involving Polonius and Reynaldo is so relevant to the authorship issue is its total irrelevance to the plot in the play itself.

Sincerely,  
J.P. Stevens

The comment about Polonius referred to the many recognized parallels between Polonius and Lord Burghley, who was the Earl of Oxford's father-in-law—one of the many, many clues linking Oxford to Shakespeare's works. Of course, I sent Justice Stevens three reprints of my article, in case he had any other friends who were becoming increasingly interested in the Oxfordian thesis.

Justice Stevens expounded on his belief in Oxford as the true Shakespeare in an interview with Jess Bravin published in *The Wall Street Journal* on April 18, 2009: "Justice Stevens Renders an Opinion on Who Wrote Shakespeare's Plays." The article also outed his fellow Justices Scalia and O'Connor as authorship skeptics. Additionally, Stevens expressed his view that "the evidence that [Shakespeare of Stratford] was not the author is beyond a reasonable doubt." For this eloquent public endorsement of the Oxfordian theory, he was named Oxfordian of the Year of 2009 by the Shakespeare Oxford Fellowship's two predecessor organizations. I was chosen to be in the delegation that would go to Washington, DC, and present the award to Justice Stevens, along with Alex McNeil, Michael Pisapia, and Melissa Dell'Orto. Justice Stevens greeted us warmly in his chambers. He complimented me again on the article I had sent him six years earlier. All of us chatted about the authorship question for some time. It was a sublime half hour or so. Alex McNeil later said of Justice Stevens, "Having been a court administrator for three dozen years, I know judges, and he was truly a class act."

In 1992, Justice Stevens had written an article in the *University of Pennsylvania Law Review*, "The Shakespeare Canon of Statutory Construction," 140 U. Pa. L. Rev. 1373. This was the article that I had quoted in my own article in 2003. In Stevens's article, he cited five canons of statutory construction, i.e., five basic rules (canons) to aid in the interpretation of difficult statutes, and applied them to the authorship question. When considering the fourth canon, "consult the legislative history," Justice Stevens found that a legislature's silence is often a profound indication of its intent:

For present purposes, I shall confine my analysis of the fourth canon to the Sherlock Holmes principle that sometimes the fact that a watchdog did not bark may provide a significant clue about the identity of a murderous intruder. The Court is sometimes skeptical about the meaning of a statute that appears to make a



Melissa Dell'Orto, Tom Regnier, Justice John Paul Stevens, Alex McNeil, and Michael Pisapia — November 12, 2009. Photo by Steve Petteway, Collection of the Supreme Court of the United States.

major change in the law when the legislative history reveals a deafening silence about any such intent. This concern directs our attention to three items of legislative history that arguably constitute significant silence. First, where is Shakespeare's library? He must have been a voracious reader and, at least after he achieved success, could certainly have afforded to have his own library. Of course, he may have had a large library that disappeared centuries ago, but it is nevertheless of interest that there is no mention of any library, or of any books at all, in his will, and no evidence that his house in Stratford ever contained a library. Second, his son-in-law's detailed medical journals describing his treatment of numerous patients can be examined today at one of the museums in Stratford-on-Avon. Those journals contain no mention of the doctor's illustrious father-in-law. Finally — and this is the fact that is most puzzling to me, although it is discounted by historians far more learned than I — there is the seven-year period of silence that followed Shakespeare's death in 1616. Until the First Folio was published in 1623, there seems to have been no public comment in any part of England on the passing of the greatest literary genius in the country's history. Perhaps he did not merit a crypt in Westminster Abbey, or a eulogy penned by King James, but it does seem odd that not even a cocker spaniel or a dachshund made any noise at all when he passed from the scene.

It will be more than a cocker spaniel or a dachshund who mourns today for Justice Stevens. It will be those who think that the truth always matters. Thank you, Justice Stevens, for all you did to bring the truth to light.





The Atlantic (*continued from page 1*)

adding up to a mercenary impresario of the Renaissance entertainment industry. What's missing is any sign that he wrote"). She even cites "meticulous scholar . . . Diana Price" for establishing that "[n]o such void exists for other major writers of the period." Winkler also carefully handles the numerous contemporary references to "Shakespeare" and his works, pointing out that they establish "attribution, not actual authorship." She also cites the Stratford man's apparent lack of education, the numerous deficiencies in his will, and the fact that he "appears to have neglected his daughters' education—an incongruity, given the erudition of so many of the playwright's female characters." She also brings up the point that much of what Ben Jonson wrote in praise of Shakespeare in the First Folio can be taken in more than one way.

Winkler was struck by several strong female characters in the works (Lady Macbeth, Rosalind in *As You Like It*, Isabella in *Measure for Measure*, Kate in *Taming of the Shrew*, Emilia in *Othello*). She cites "the remarkable female friendships" (Beatrice and Hero, Emilia and Desdemona, Paulina and Hermione), all of them "fresh inventions—they don't exist in the literary sources from which many of the plays are drawn." She then conjectures that "a simple reason would explain a playwright's need for a pseudonym in Elizabethan England: being female."

Though she mentions Mary Sidney, Winkler frankly admits that "the candidate who intrigued me more was a woman as exotic and peripheral as Sidney was pedigreed and prominent": Emilia Bassano (also known as Emilia Lanier), who was born in London in 1569 to a family of Italian musicians (who may have been Jewish conversos). In 1576, after the death of her father, she went to live with Susan Bertie, Countess of Kent, where she received an education and learned Latin. Some time after her mother's death in 1587, Emilia became the mistress of Henry Carey, Lord Hunsdon, who was forty-five years her senior. In 1592 she married her first cousin once removed, Alfonso Lanier. Shortly after the marriage she gave birth to a son, named Henry (presumably because Henry Carey was the child's father).

In 1611 she published *Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum*, thereby becoming the first English woman to publicly declare herself a poet, and one of the first Englishwomen to be published. The work, which was dedicated to nine women, is cited today for its feminist themes and point of view (for example, Bassano argues that Adam, who was stronger than Eve, deserves to share guilt for not resisting temptation). Bassano was widowed in 1613. Not much is known of her later years. She died in 1645 at the age of seventy-six.

Bassano, and her work, were largely ignored until 1973, when noted Stratfordian A.L. Rowse wrote of her, and speculated that she was the "dark lady" of *Shake-*

*speares Sonnets*. In 2014, John Hudson wrote a biography, *Shakespeare's Dark Lady: Amelia Bassano Lanier, the Woman Behind Shakespeare's Plays?* And in 2018, Morgan Lloyd Malcolm's play, *Emilia*, was presented at the Globe in London. Winkler saw the play, and interviewed Hudson for her article ("His zeal can sometimes get the better of him," Winkler wrote of Hudson).

In Winkler's eyes, "the discernible contours of [Bassano's] biography supply what the available material about Shakespeare's life doesn't: circumstantial evidence of opportunities to acquire an impressive expanse of knowledge." This would include knowledge about Italy, a possibly Jewish heritage, and erudition resulting from a good education. Winkler cites other clues: interestingly, that Emilia is the second most common female character name in the Shakespeare canon, yet it was not used by any other English playwright in an original work; that other characters are named Bassanio or Bassanius; and that a young Emilia may have run across the names Rosencrantz and Guildenstern from the accounts of diplomat Peregrine Bertie, the brother of Susan Bertie, in whose household Emilia lived for several years.

## II. The Reaction

As might be expected, Winkler's article generated much comment, most of it negative. Writing in [thefederalist.com](http://thefederalist.com), David Marcus grossly mischaracterized the "conspiracy theories alleging that William Shakespeare didn't write his own plays . . . [are] based in the notion that nobody of such base birth . . . could have been erudite enough to pen the most insightful English ever written." Marcus did manage to raise one cogent point, however: "Shakespeare wrote better women characters than his contemporaries because he wrote better characters of *every kind* than did his contemporaries. Women, kings, soldiers, Jews, Moors, fairies, and a fountain of other characters flowed from his pen, all revealing a new style and substance in English writing" (emphasis in original).

Interestingly, *The Atlantic* elected to post only three letters on its website, two of which were complimentary. "I thank you sincerely for shedding a light on the literary work published by William Shakespeare. I feel chills as I reread the texts and think of a woman holding the pen, creating, imagining, challenging, and improving the English language. . . ." wrote Pavel Uranga of Salem, Mass. "'Was Shakespeare a Woman?' was a delightful reminder of the richness of the authorship field and the tantalizing possibilities it surfaces for answers to one of history's great mysteries. Some are ready to heap vitriol on those who dare to entertain those possibilities. Specific points can always be debated, and unwarranted claims should be called out as such. But much compelling evidence and thoughtful analysis await those

who approach the subject with an open mind and humble curiosity. . . .” wrote Marc Lauritsen of Harvard, Mass. The third letter was from the English pontificator Oliver Kamm, who dismissed the entire authorship question, saying: “On the purported Shakespeare authorship question, there is no scholarly debate. . . . There are a mere handful of academics who give this stuff even the time of day, let alone credence, and Winkler has misrepresented the state of scholarship by insinuating that they are one side in a scholarly dispute.”

There can be no doubt that many negative comments were received, as revealed by Elizabeth Winkler herself in her posted response:

Following the traditions of *The Atlantic*, I questioned uncritically held assumptions instead of treating pronouncements by authorities as truth. Consistent with journalistic duty, I distinguished academic opinion and received wisdom from fact as I explored terrain on which evidence has proved open to varying interpretation. In their often vitriolic zeal to condemn me for nonadherence to their position, some critics have misconstrued my careful formulations and denounced my endeavor as “conspiracism.” More troubling still, they’ve missed my very point of departure—that a woman writing under another’s name isn’t conspiracism; it’s a literary practice that we know has gone on for much of history.

The discourse around the question of Shakespeare authorship is plagued by this sort of anti-intellectual suppression of inquiry. The idea of a female author is speculative, to be sure, but the animating impulse of my essay was neither doctrinaire denial nor adamant certainty. It was self-questioning, fueled by a recognition of how women’s voices have been hidden. Careful readers will note that I never claim Emilia Bassano was the author; indeed, I characterize the evidence as “circumstantial” and note that Bassano’s style differs from Shakespeare’s. I wonder, too, about the possibility of collaboration. (If Shakespeare had co-authors, as scholars now concede, can we be sure a woman wasn’t among them?) Implied in all of this is the question of what other women might merit consideration in connection with English literature’s greatest—and startlingly feminist—plays.

The personal attacks and rhetorical dismissal that greet such questioning may be intended to stigmatize the questions, yet instead they reinforce their legitimacy. As the author of the plays recognized, history is a fragile construct, “a scribbled form, drawn with a pen / Upon a parchment.” Scholarly opinion isn’t fact; assertions by authorities aren’t truth; and the journalistic imperative to question

orthodox thinking requires doubt. People are loyal to the first version of history they learn, Mantel notes: “If you challenge it, it’s as if you’re taking away their childhoods.” In this climate, accusations of denialism betray themselves as projections, and the impulse to skepticism emerges not as madness, but as the only rational and responsible approach.

### III. Analysis

First, kudos to *The Atlantic* for running another article about the authorship question. [The online version has links to the magazine’s two articles in its October 1991 issue, “The Case for Oxford” by Tom Bethell and “The Case for Shakespeare” by Irvin Matus.]

Second, the case for Emilia Bassano as the true author is a very weak one, especially to Oxfordians. The two most significant problems are the dates and the writing styles. Bassano was born in 1569, five years after Shakespeare of Stratford and nineteen years after Oxford. There is strong evidence that the real Shakespeare was working at his craft—producing plays—as early as the late 1570s (see e.g., Ramon Jiménez’s book, *Shakespeare’s Apprenticeship*), when Bassano was a young child. Also, Bassano lived until 1645, more than twenty years after the First Folio was printed, yet the prefatory materials to the First Folio tell us that Shakespeare had died before 1623. As to writing style, even Elizabeth Winkler concedes in her article that Bassano’s “writing style [in her 1611 *Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum*] bears no obvious resemblance to Shakespeare’s in his plays. . . .” Yet the book was published when Bassano was forty-two years old, presumably at the height of her creative powers. One would think that there would be at least some “obvious” resemblances. Oxford’s works, on the other hand, show deep parallels to Shakespeare’s, as most recently demonstrated by Roger Stritmatter in his two-volume series, *The Poems of Edward de Vere, 17th Earl of Oxford, and the Shakespeare Question*.

To briefly highlight some other problems with the case for Bassano, it should be noted that there is no evidence that Bassano wrote any dramatic works, nor is there evidence (as Winkler notes) that Bassano ever visited Italy. Presumably she could have learned about Italy from some of her relatives; however, though her father was Italian, he died when Emilia was seven, and her mother (who was English) then sent her to live with the Countess of Kent. Oxford, of course, spent several months in Italy in 1575-76, and, as Richard Roe convincingly showed in his book, *The Shakespeare Guide to Italy*, the real author had first-hand knowledge of many places and local customs in Italy.

But that is not to suggest that Emilia Bassano is not an important figure in the authorship question. The fact that Emilia is the second most frequent female character

name in the Shakespeare canon cannot be coincidence. Surely Oxford would have known her; indeed, he probably knew almost all of the creative people living in England at the time. Perhaps Oxford knew her very well; as Winkler noted in the article, A.L. Rowse speculated in 1973 that she is the “dark lady” of the Sonnets. Some Oxfordians agree: Stephanie Hopkins Hughes made that argument in “New Light on the Dark Lady” in the Fall 2000 issue of this *Newsletter*. In a recent email discussing the Winkler article, Hughes wrote: “Here we go again! Members of Oxford’s inner circle are continually being presented as the true author of Shakespeare, but although Emilia did NOT write the Shakespeare canon, she did write a very important book in which she published the first feminist manifesto in English as the introduction to her book of poetry, *Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum*, thus beating Mary Wolstonecraft in that honor by some 150

years. The feminist diatribe was possibly in response to the 1609 publication of *Shakespeare’s Sonnets*, following it as closely as it does, in which she was doubtless easily identified by her friends in Court circles as the lover we know as the Dark Lady.”

A final note: near the end of her *Atlantic* article, Elizabeth Winkler quoted Shakespeare scholar David Scott Kastan of Yale, who said, “What’s clear is that it’s important to know more about her. The more we know about her and the world she lived in, the more we’ll know about Shakespeare. . . .” One wonders if Kastan would dare to say the same thing about Edward de Vere.



## Shakespeare Authorship Summer Seminar a Success

by Earl Showerman

The SOF’s third Shakespeare Authorship Summer Seminar took place in Ashland, Oregon, from July 22 to 26. The program attracted almost fifty participants, who met over a five-day span of presentations and three evenings of plays. The focus of this year’s seminar was on the Shakespeare plays in production at the Oregon Shakespeare Festival (OSF), *As You Like It*, *All’s Well That Ends Well* and *Macbeth*. Instructors included Roger Stritmatter, Shelly Maycock, Bryan H. Wildenthal, Bonner Cutting, Steven Sabel and myself.

The seminar was preceded by a free-to-the-public series of presentations by seminar faculty on Monday in Carpenter Hall, immediately adjacent to the OSF theatres. The forum was well attended and was followed by an opening reception for seminar participants at the home of Carole Sue Lipman (the former longtime President of the Los Angeles Shakespeare Authorship Roundtable recently relocated to Ashland). Plenary sessions were held in the Meese Room at Hannon Library on the campus of Southern Oregon University. In 2016, Hannon Library was listed among the top twenty university libraries in the United States, and its Margery Bailey Collection has nearly 8,000 Shakespeare and Renaissance titles.

A special exhibit of 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> century books from the Bailey Collection, curated by reference librarian Mary Jane Cedar Face, was on display during the seminar. Among the items exhibited were copies of the Second and Fourth Shakespeare Folios, Jonson’s Folio, a Beaumont and Fletcher Folio, both Holinshed’s and

Hall’s *Chronicles*, William Camden’s *Britannia*, Plutarch’s *Parallel Lives* and Nicholas Rowe’s 1714 second edition of Shakespeare, which included the first attempt at a biography of the author.

All attendees received extensive background materials by emails and from the printed syllabus, which included chapters from Kevin Gilvary’s *Dating Shakespeare’s Plays* and William Farina’s *De Vere as Shakespeare*, abstracts, and extensive bibliographic citations to Oxfordian publications pertinent to the plays in production. Thanks to a special grant by Ashland resident and Seminar participant Toni Dockter, all participants will receive a complimentary copy of the latest volume of the Brief Chronicles book series, edited by Roger Stritmatter, *The Shakespeare Authorship Sourcebook: A Workbook for Teachers and Students*.

Morning sessions were conducted by Roger Stritmatter and Shelly Maycock, and included small group discussions and presentations, as well as debriefing sessions of the plays we had seen the previous evenings. Afternoon sessions were driven by a series of talks on a wide variety of topics. Bonner Cutting presented a preview of her upcoming Conference talk, “Connecting the Dots: How did a man who could scarcely write his name become revered as the greatest writer in the English language?” Later Cutting spoke on “Evermore in Subjection: Wardship and Its Impact on Edward de Vere,” and “Let the Punishment Fit the Crime: Censorship and Punishment in Early Modern England,” arguments addressed in her 2018 book, *Necessary Mischief*. Bryan H. Wildenthal also presented on three afternoons on a variety of topics taken from his 2019 book, *Early Shakespeare Authorship Doubts*. Both of these excellent books are available on Amazon.

Steven Sabel presented a “Shakespeare Authorship



101” talk at Carpenter Hall, and then previewed his highly dramatic discourse on “Shakespeare: Playwright and Stage Director” (also to be delivered at the upcoming Hartford Conference), which highlighted the author’s brilliant use of scansion and caesura. Shelly Maycock spoke on “The Developmental Curve between *All’s Well That Ends Well* and *As You Like It*,” and I gave two presentations: “Shakespeare’s Phisic: Hermetic and Alchemical Magic in *The Winter’s Tale*, *Pericles*, and *All’s Well That Ends Well*” and “*Macbeth* and the *Oresteia*.” Each afternoon session ended with a seminar faculty panel discussion.

SOF Public Relations Director Steven Sabel, host of the podcast series “Don’t Quill the Messenger,” managed to leverage the events to page one coverage in both the *Ashland Daily Tidings* and the *Medford Mail Tribune* on July 24. Prompted by her editor, reporter Caitlin Fowlkes interviewed Sabel, Roger Stritmatter and me, as well as other attendees, for the most expansive coverage of a Shakespeare authorship event ever published in southern Oregon. Charlotte Hughes, a longtime Oxfordian from Los Angeles, was quoted as noting that the fact that Shakespeare’s daughters could not write their own names raised suspicion about the validity of the traditional theory of authorship: “If you are a seeker of truth, you get fired up with outrage. What was the material in this artists life that led to, say, Hamlet? That is the compelling part.”

Fowlkes’s *Tribune* article, “To be, or not to be Shakespeare ... that is the question” began with a bold assertion: “Shakespeare didn’t write Shakespeare. At least that is what a large group of people all over the



Earl Showerman displays Summer Seminar media coverage

world believe, and many of them are meeting in Ashland this week to discuss their research.” Steven Sabel provided most of the commentary, and made the poignant observation, “That is de Vere’s life on stage. That’s what matters. When I see the play, I can better appreciate the pain of all the parts.”

It is my hope and expectation that the final lines of Fowlkes’s story prove to be prophetic: “Between 150 and 200 scholars are expected to attend the Shakespeare Oxford Fellowship annual conference in Ashland in the fall of 2020.”



## October at the Mark Twain House: Hartford Conference May Be a Big One

by Don Rubin, Conference Director

More than 100 people are expected to attend the SOF’s 2019 conference at the Mark Twain House in Hartford, Connecticut from October 17 to 20. That number should make this the best-attended conference in quite a few years.

Highlights—other than the more than two dozen specially prepared conference papers (see page 20)—will include a performance of Keir Cutler’s internationally acclaimed one-person show “Is Shakespeare Dead?” tours of the Mark Twain House (called America’s Downton Abbey), and the first public display of Edward de Vere’s personal copy of Herodotus’s *Delle Guerre de Greci et de Persi* originally published in Venice in 1565.

The volume was purchased by SOF member Ben August at a recent auction in London (see page 6).

For those arriving on the Wednesday prior to the conference, a registration desk will be set up at the Conference hotel—the Homewood Suites on Asylum Street—where conference materials and badges can be picked up. Early arrivals will also have an opportunity to tour both the Twain House (free) and the nearly adjoining Harriet Beecher Stowe House (discounted ticket) that afternoon.

Early arrivals will be also be able to attend a free reading and onstage interview at the Stowe House with SOF member Patricia Keeney about her highly praised

recent novel, *One Man Dancing*, which has now been turned into a Hollywood screenplay by another SOF member, Hank Whittemore. And yes, Hank will be at the reading as well. *One Man Dancing* is currently available for purchase through Amazon.

All times listed below are subject to change, but here is the current schedule.

### **Wednesday, October 16**

Mark Twain House tours are available at 2, 2:30 and 3 PM. Harriet Beecher Stowe House Tours are conducted at 4 and 4:30 PM. The Patricia Keeney-Hank Whittemore reading and interview, sponsored by the Stowe Center, is at 5:30 PM.

The day's events will end by 7 PM, leaving plenty of time to check out some of Hartford's fine downtown restaurants. A list of some of the most interesting will be included in the conference registration kit.

Homewood Suites will have its free private passenger van (6-8 people) available Wednesday from 4 to 8 PM for rides to and from the hotel. Just call the desk at (860) 524-0223. Before 4 PM it is probably easiest to take an Uber or a taxi (\$5-\$8 for 3-4 people) to the Twain House or Stowe Center. There is also a local bus in front of the hotel that runs every ten minutes.

### **Thursday, October 17**

The Conference Registration desk will move to the Mark Twain House and Museum (a mile or so down the road). A specially arranged conference bus will begin operating Thursday at noon, continuing until 8 PM, going back and forth every 15 to 20 minutes between the hotel and the Twain House. A full schedule will be available in the conference kit and at the hotel desk.

The first conference presentations will begin at 1 PM and go until about 5:30, followed by a wine and cheese reception from 5:30 to 7.

### **Friday, October 18**

The SOF Annual General Meeting begins at 8:30 AM at the Mark Twain Museum. It is open to all members of the SOF. Presentations of papers begin at 10:30 AM. Friday's presentations will run until 6 PM, with a sandwich lunch included.

The conference shuttle bus will run from 7:45 to 11:45 AM, and again from 2:30 to 6:30 PM, with service every 15-20 minutes. The hotel's private van service will be available from 7 to 11 AM and from 4 to 8 PM.

### **Saturday, October 19**

Paper presentations begin at 9 AM and continue to 5:45 PM, with two coffee breaks and a buffet lunch.

From 5:45 to 7:45 PM Saturday, those attendees who have not yet done so may take 45-minute tours of the Mark Twain House in groups of twelve to fifteen persons. During that period there is a special stuffed

potato and dessert mini-reception, along with a cash bar, to pass the time and assuage any feelings of hunger.

At 8 PM, Keir Cutler's one-man show, "Is Shakespeare Dead?" will be presented in the Twain Auditorium (it will also be open to the public), followed by a short question and answer period and an opportunity to sign the Declaration of Reasonable Doubt (for more information go to [doubtaboutwill.org](http://doubtaboutwill.org)).

Conference bus service will run to and from the hotel from 8 AM to noon and from 5 to 10 PM, and the hotel's private van service is available from 9 AM to 9 PM.

### **Sunday, October 20**

Paper presentations begin at 9 AM and continue to 1 PM. The Conference concludes with a banquet from 1 to 2:30 PM. Shuttle bus service starts at 8 AM and goes until just after 3 PM.

Those leaving on Sunday do not need to go through a lengthy checkout process at the hotel. They can opt to have their bill e-mailed to them and simply leave their luggage at the front desk Sunday morning on their way to the Mark Twain House.

For those flying out Sunday afternoon, we are trying to arrange a limo-bus to Bradley International Airport (leaving from both the Twain House and the Homewood Suites Hotel) starting at 2:45 PM. It will cost between \$15 and \$20 per person; we need a minimum of fourteen passengers to make it work. A sign-up list will be available at the conference on Thursday and Friday. If this works for you, try to arrange flights departing after 4:30 or 5 PM. If we can't arrange a group limo-bus, the taxi fare for up to three people is about \$45 plus gratuity. An Uber drops the price to about \$19, and Lyft is about \$28. [Shuttlefare.com](http://Shuttlefare.com) has additional information on airport prices.

Please note, the official conference hotel, Homewood Suites, is currently sold out (though cancellations are possible at any time, so do call). If you can't get into Homewood, we have arranged some additional rooms at the nearby Capitol Hotel (959-888-3000) at the same \$149 rate (including breakfast). Inform them you want to book under the Shakespeare Oxford Fellowship rate and the conference dates.

A few conference attendees are looking for people to share rooms with. Let me know ([drubin@yorku.ca](mailto:drubin@yorku.ca)) if you want to share and I will try to play matchmaker. No guarantees.

Final note: Please register before September 1. The Conference registration fee goes from \$250 to \$270 for SOF members after that date. If you have not yet registered, please do it now so that final numbers can be arranged.

See you in Hartford!



# SHAKESPEARE OXFORD FELLOWSHIP

## 2019 Conference Registration (Hartford, Connecticut)

**Full conference registration**, October 17-20 (includes all conference presentations, three lunches, one dinner, Keir Cutler performance, and tour of Mark Twain House).

**Register by Sept. 1 to save on registration fee!**

Qty.

**SOF members:**

(A member may buy up to two registrations at member price.):

If postmarked on or before Sept. 1, 2019:

\$250 x \_\_\_\_\_ = \_\_\_\_\_

If postmarked after Sept. 1, 2019:

\$270 x \_\_\_\_\_ = \_\_\_\_\_

**Non-members:**

If postmarked on or before Sept. 1, 2019:

\$265 x \_\_\_\_\_ = \_\_\_\_\_

If postmarked after Sept. 1, 2019:

\$285 x \_\_\_\_\_ = \_\_\_\_\_

**For those attending only specific conference days:**

Thursday (includes reception)

\$65 x \_\_\_\_\_ = \_\_\_\_\_

Friday (includes lunch and coffees)

\$75 x \_\_\_\_\_ = \_\_\_\_\_

Saturday (includes 2 meals, Cutler show ticket, and house tour)

\$100 x \_\_\_\_\_ = \_\_\_\_\_

Sunday (without closing banquet)

\$45 x \_\_\_\_\_ = \_\_\_\_\_

Sunday banquet luncheon only:

\$50 x \_\_\_\_\_ = \_\_\_\_\_

Extra tickets to Keir Cutler's performance:

\$20 x \_\_\_\_\_ = \_\_\_\_\_

**Total:** \$ \_\_\_\_\_

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_

Email address \_\_\_\_\_ Phone number (optional) \_\_\_\_\_

Method of Payment: Check \_\_\_ (enclose)

Credit Card \_\_\_ (give details below)

Name on Credit Card \_\_\_\_\_

Credit Card Number \_\_\_\_\_

Expiration (Mo./Year) \_\_\_\_\_ CVV (Security Code on back of card) \_\_\_\_\_

Cardholder's Signature \_\_\_\_\_

**Mail this form with your check or credit card information to:**

**Shakespeare Oxford Fellowship, P.O. Box 66083, Auburndale, MA 02466**

**To make reservations at the Homewood Suites by Hilton, call 860-524-0223 and mention the SOF Conference. Or go to the SOF website and click on "Conference," then click on "Registration" in the drop-down menu and look under "Lodging."**



## October Conference Program

More than two dozen speakers will present papers at the upcoming SOF Conference in Hartford on subjects ranging from new discoveries about J. Thomas Looney to arguments about group authorship, pen names, stagecraft, and the politics of poetry. Featured speakers include Dr. Richard M. Waugaman, who will pose the essential question, “Did Shakespeare Write Shake-Speare? Internal and External Meanings of Pen Names.” Waugaman will survey relevant recent studies of anonymous and pseudonymous literary works. Emeritus Professor Bryan H. Wildenthal will continue his case-by-case discourse on “Early Shakespeare Authorship Doubts,” and Don Rubin will speak on the “New ‘Field’ of Shakespeare Authorship Studies: A Critical Look at the work of Taylor, Leahy, John Florio and Edward de Vere.”

Emeritus Professor James Norwood is prepared to represent “Mark Twain and ‘Shake-Speare’: Soul Mates,” a revised and updated version of his brilliant 2014 paper, plus a bonus paper, “A New Way of Looking at Shakespeare’s Stagecraft.” Professor Alice Eaton of Springfield College will lead a panel on “Teaching the Shakespeare Authorship” with three graduate student double majors in English and Education presenting their research, and SOF Trustee Theresa Lauricella will speak on her experience teaching “Shakespeare in Community College.”

A number of prominent theatre professionals will also be present to discuss their creative endeavors inspired by Shakespeare. Keir Cutler will perform his acclaimed one-man show based on Mark Twain’s satire, “Is Shakespeare Dead?” and Ted Lange, the first American black actor to be featured in a film version of *Othello*, will discuss “*The Cause, My Soul*, The Prequel to *Othello*,” a verse drama by Lange that won the NAACP Theatre Award for Best Play of 2017. *The Cause, My Soul* “remains true to the characters crafted by Shakespeare and explores the flirtation, romance, comedy, and the drama of Othello’s journey into love and politics that preview Shakespeare’s play, *Othello*.” Professor Sky Gilbert will expose the dubious recent Stratfordian arguments about *Double Falsehood*, emphasizing the stylistic differences between *Double Falsehood* and Shakespeare’s work, and SOF Public Relations Director Steven Sabel will deliver his dramatic argument, “Shakespeare: Playwright and Stage Director —The Brilliance of the Bard’s Stage Directions to Actors.”

Perennial favorite Hank Whittemore, winner of the Dark Lady debate at the 2018 SOF Conference, will speak on “The Launch of the Pen Name: Who Knew What and When?” focusing on the roles played by John Whitgift, Archbishop of Canterbury, Richard Field, printer and publisher of *Venus and Adonis*, Henry

Wriothesley, 3<sup>rd</sup> Earl of Southampton and the dedicatee of *Venus and Adonis*, William Cecil, Lord Burghley, and Queen Elizabeth. Mark Anderson, author of “*Shakespeare by Another Name*,” will narrate “The Unlikely Bardographer,” the story of a science-educated freelance journalist who wrote the first popular literary biography ever of the man who, more and more evidence now suggests, was “Shakespeare.”

Former SOF President and attorney Tom Regnier and *Shakespeare Oxford Newsletter* editor and attorney Alex McNeil will conduct a remembrance for Supreme Court Justice John Paul Stevens. Psychiatrist and Oxfordian researcher Jan Scheffer will offer a remembrance of our late colleague Ron Hess (see page 9). Tom Regnier will also speak on Shakespeare’s intent when he wrote “Kill All the Lawyers.” Newcomer Marc Lauritsen, an attorney and educator who has taught at five law schools and is an expert in knowledge systems, will present “Mapping the Authorship Arguments,” addressing the conundrum of how we might get beyond “words, words, words.” Bonner Cutting, author of *Necessary Mischief*, will present her latest historical research on “Connecting the Dots: How a man who could scarcely write his name became revered as the greatest writer in the English language.”

Stephanie Hopkins Hughes, founder and General Editor of *The Oxfordian* for a decade, will address the question of “Why is it taking so long to get the truth out?” Hughes states: “Surely this is a question that must be answered if we’re to approach the Academy from anything but the impenetrable walls of their ivy-covered fortress. I have the answer to this, and if it isn’t pretty, it does have the virtue of making a very great deal of sense.” One of Hughes’s former contributors, Dr. Earl Showerman, will deliver the second part of his literature review of “Shakespeare and the Greeks” with a discourse on Professor Tania Pollard’s seminal study, *Greek Tragic Women on Shakespearean Stages*, winner of the Roland Bainton Book Prize. Dr. Marty Hyatt will discuss the mysterious origin of the heraldic star of the Earls of Oxford in “A Mullet is Born.”

James Warren will deliver the conference keynote address, “Reclaiming the Oxfordian Past,” highlighting his groundbreaking research over the past year on J. Thomas Looney and the first quarter century of the Oxfordian era. Warren has not only edited J. Thomas Looney’s “*Shakespeare Identified*” and “*Shakespeare Revealed: The Collected Articles and Published Letters of J. Thomas Looney*,” but has been diligently collecting and cataloging Oxfordian archives in English university special collections.

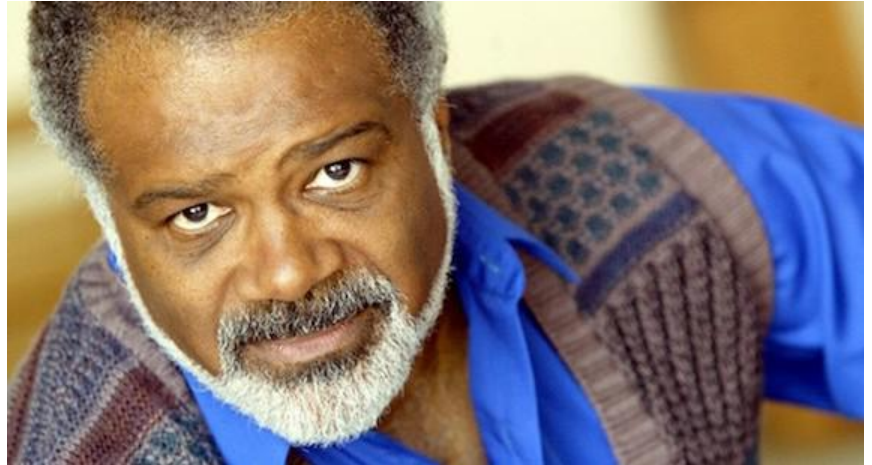
There will also be a panel of presenters discussing the plans for celebrating the 2020 centenary of the publication of “*Shakespeare Identified*.” Presenters will include Kathryn Sharpe, Chair of the SI-100 Committee, Linda Bullard, coordinator of the Centennial Launch on

March 4, 2020, Heward Wilkinson on the De Vere Society centennial plans, and Earl Showerman on activities in Ashland, Oregon, in the lead-up to next year's SOF conference, which will take place from September 30 through October 4, 2020. Robert Meyers will engage panelists and audience members in a discussion of strategies to leverage the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the publication of *"Shakespeare" Identified* to bring about a breakthrough in the Shakespeare authorship debate. Meyers will also present "Was It Really William?", a talk and slide show on how to use narrative and visuals to present the Oxfordian position to audiences unfamiliar with the issue.

Several presenters will focus on Shakespeare's poetry, including William Boyle on "Why One Word, in One Sonnet, Matters," a political interpretation of the word "misprision" in Sonnet 87. Cheryl Eagan-Donovan will speak on "The Lives of Poets in Late 16<sup>th</sup> and Early 17<sup>th</sup> Century London," John Hamill will propose a theory for the "Rival Poet" in "Southampton and the Devereux Family," and Peter Dickson will present on "The Politics of *Venus and Adonis*."

In "Oxfordians Need to Become Post-Modernists," Heward Wilkinson will explore how the peculiar relationship between character and author is an illustration of the "death of the author" and the "deconstruction of the subject." Shelly Maycock will speak on "Floating 'the Sweet Swan of Avon': An Oxfordian Reading of Jonson's First Folio Metaphor," examining the evidence that Jonson's use of "sweet swan," in the encomium to the 1623 Folio may also refer to Oxford. Finally, Coppin State University Professor Roger Stritmatter, editor of the Brief Chronicles editions, including the invaluable *Shakespeare Authorship Sourcebook*, will deliver an Oxfordian interpretation of *As You Like It*.

This will be an extraordinary, historical opportunity for SOF members to participate in a momentous conference and theatrical performance in the heart of an American treasure, Mark Twain's House!



Ted Lange



Keir Cutler



Sky Gilbert

## High Hopes, High Hoax: Cognitive Deception and the Shakespeare Authorship Question

by Harry Campbell

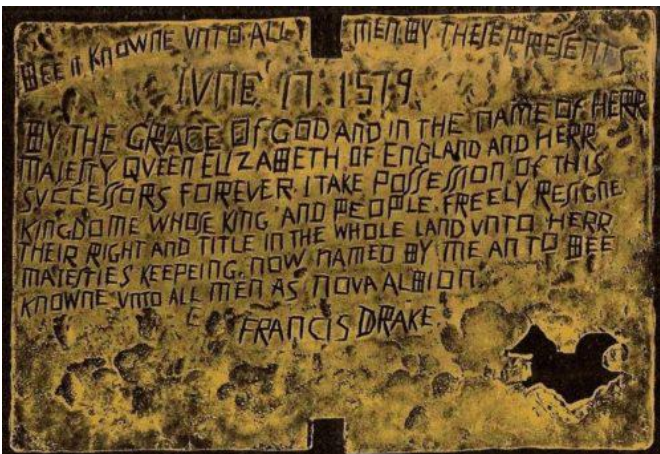
Most readers of this newsletter are in agreement that the traditional orthodox attribution of the authorship of the Shakespeare canon is incorrect, and needs to be investigated fully and professionally. Anti-Stratford skeptics have pursued many angles of research: Perhaps in addition we should reflect on the intentional or unintentional psychological forces at work in this controversy. Although many of us might conclude that these forces are obvious and that we need not spend time on psychological factors that require only an elementary understanding, there may be relevant dynamics involved that we don't seriously consider, and which may have a great influence on our ability to persuade others, whether they be causal observers or deeply invested believers.

In this article I will attempt to examine the Shakespeare authorship controversy through the lens or methodology of Peter Hancock's *Hoax Springs Eternal: The Psychology of Cognitive Deception* (2015). In his book Professor Hancock presents case studies of six historic objects that became famous first as important discoveries, but eventually came to be widely recognized as hoaxes: the Cross of King Arthur; Drake's Plate of Brass; the Kensington Runestone; the Vinland Map; Piltown Man; and the Shroud of Turin. These artifacts represent ideas about, as Hancock puts it, "the state of the world" that are most likely, and in some cases have been proved to be, untrue. Could it be true that the traditional and sentimentally appealing proposition that William Shaksper of Stratford-upon-Avon, an uneducated provincial commoner, authored the works of Shakespeare, as most of the world seems to believe—or are we looking at an extremely successful hoax?

In effect, these objects are the "media" through which potentially deceptive notions have been communicated to the intended audiences. So, if the

traditional authorship attribution was meant to be a ruse, the first among many questions is how was this hoax initially put forward? Is there a similar "medium" that transmitted the idea that the Stratford man was Shakespeare? The answer is yes: the First Folio. It must be acknowledged, however, that unlike the six objects mentioned above, which are suspected of being "fake" artifacts, the Folio itself is very real. It is the story it tells that skeptics believe is untrue. There is no question that Jaggard and Blount printed and published this sizable book in 1623. But, like Professor Hancock's six objects, it communicates (via its prefatory material) an idea that is now suspected to be false.

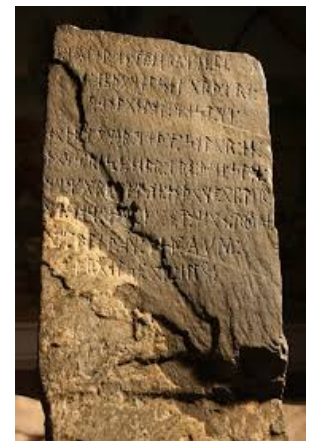
The first facet of Hancock's method is the recognition of "three essential elements of deception," which he labels the "trinity of deception." They are the deceiver (or source of the deception), the deception itself, and the deceived, all of which play an integral role in the birth and life of a hoax. The first element—the deceiver, whether an individual or a group—must have a motive or purpose for creating the deception. The second element—the deception and the method of transmitting it—must communicate to the intended audience through some conduit or medium a message that informs the recipients that a particular fact (though false) is being established. The final component is the deceived, an audience that, far from being a passive recipient of the message, is an active participant in the process, an audience that "is interested or passionate about" the subject of the deception. In other words, it is an audience that wishes to buy into a notion that somehow fulfills their desires. Here Hancock pertinently quotes Francis Bacon: "Human understanding ... is infused by desire and emotion, which give rise to 'wishful science.' For man prefers to believe what he wants to be true. He therefore



Drake's Plate of Brass



The Cross of King Arthur



The Kensington Runestone



rejects difficulties, being impatient of enquiry.”

Let’s stop here and consider the authorship question, and the function of the First Folio of 1623. It is a printed compilation of the plays of Shakespeare, assembled (we are told) by fellow theatre associates determined to erect this work as a monument to the memory of the great author. The traditional story—and the ostensible motive—is that Ben Jonson and his collaborators, even after seven years of inexplicable disinterested silence regarding the passing of so great a writer and colleague, took it upon themselves to honor their late friend from Stratford by publishing the plays in their most perfect form as the author intended them to be remembered, and, *essentially for the very first time*, to credit this body of work specifically to the flesh-and-blood itinerant entrepreneur from Stratford.

We are expected by these surrogates to understand that two particular terms appearing in the Folio’s introductory texts, “Sweet Swan of Avon” and the “Stratford Monument,” are signals that the Stratford man was the author. Oddly, there is no other mention of the actual identity, personal character or history of the author, or anything that would give readers some idea of who this man was. Furthermore, skeptics have shown that there is ambiguity associated with these phrases. No other contemporaneous direct evidence of authorship has been found in the surviving personal legal and family records of Shakspeare of Stratford, nor in all of the existing theatrical records of the period—not a single specific, personal record supporting the notion that he was a writer of plays.

The authorship controversy has been driven by those who, confronted with the orthodox authorship attribution and the mysterious nature of the purported author, are now skeptical of the traditional story. Hancock suggests that “many skeptics are romantics at heart . . . they often very much wish to believe what is being offered.” That’s true: Many anti-Stratfordians were, at one time, believers in the Stratfordian “myth” who now question its authenticity. Rather than accepting what now appears to be a tall story at face value, “they have to know.” And thus begins the methodical investigation of the evidence to “distinguish fact from fiction.” This investigation has led skeptics to go beyond the foundational idea that the Stratford man simply couldn’t have written the works, and dig deeper to discover who actually did.

As has been postulated since at least the mid-nineteenth century, beginning with Delia Bacon and continuing unabated by numerous writers up through the present, the true author was most likely a philosophical person (or persons) of superior and wide-ranging education, worldly experience including travel, language acquisition, detailed knowledge of Italian locations described in so many of the plays, and most evidently, courtly experience. Despite orthodox claims that this view reeks of snobbery, it does—based on the evidence

in the works—logically implicate a well-educated, well-connected aristocrat rather than someone of limited philosophical sensibilities, education, experience, travel and exposure to life at royal court.

However, it has been well documented by historians and biographers that persons of high rank involved in court politics and society would have been constrained in publishing literary works (other than poetry, mostly) under their own names, especially anything that might have been construed as politically or religiously sensitive, provocative or scandalous. Offering public theatrical entertainments—as opposed to those performed at court—was considered beneath the dignity of nobility. And, in fact, some aristocrats were known to be excellent writers whose works—if they ever saw the light of day outside the royal palaces or Inns of Court—may have been published anonymously or pseudonymously. Thus, their authors avoided “coming out” as playwrights. This state of affairs has been referred to as the “stigma of print.”

### **Motive, Means and Opportunity**

As we consider the likelihood that the authorship attribution could be a hoax, we next turn to three important elements that Hancock demonstrates must be in place for a successful cognitive deception or hoax: motive, means and opportunity.

What might have been the *motive* of Ben Jonson and his associates (John Heminge, Henry Condell, Hugh Holland, Leonard Digges, James Mabbe, and the sponsors to whom the work is dedicated, William Herbert, Earl of Pembroke and his brother Philip, Earl of Montgomery) if their intention was to misdirect readers’ attention toward the person of Shakspeare of Stratford as author of the works, if he was not the true author?

A great many names have been put forward over the last 150 years as possible alternatives, but since the 1920s the leading candidate has been Edward de Vere, the 17<sup>th</sup> Earl of Oxford, primarily because of the vast amount of circumstantial evidence connecting Oxford’s documented lifetime activities with events in the Shakespeare plays and poems. Therefore, he will be the focus as we examine motive, means and opportunity.

Assuming the author was actually Oxford (or possibly a group of contributing writers under Oxford’s supervision and sponsorship), we can begin to perceive the *motivation* to hide the true author. Just about every book that has been written about Oxford’s candidacy addresses various reasons why he would have wished to remain in the shadows, or why others with power, influence and the wherewithal to implement and support the deception would have wished it. Beyond the general “stigma of print” there were other reasons that likely *compelled* him to remain anonymous: As a youth he became a ward of, and later son-in-law, to the queen’s top advisor, William Cecil, the most powerful and

influential person in the government. He was close to and was supported by the queen, who granted him a substantial yearly allowance, second only in size to spymaster Walsingham's (these mysterious grants came at a time when England had serious financial difficulties), a payment for which she never gave an official explanation, and which continued into the reign of King James. He was likely involved in anti-Catholic espionage, pro-England propaganda (i.e., the history plays), and in writing distracting theatrical entertainments for the potentially rebellious masses. He was known to be a writer actively involved with the literary community and a sponsor of theatrical groups, which may have discomfited the queen and her top ministers even while these connections and talents may have served a useful political purpose—if he could be kept on a royal leash.

Oxford's relationship with the sponsors of the Folio, Pembroke and Montgomery, with whom he had remained on friendly terms and to whom he was related by marriage, along with the known literary inclinations of that family, begins the list of *means* required to set this hoax in motion with the publication of the Folio. After all, the sponsors were intimately involved with Oxford and the royal court, and likely would have been willing to assist with (if not initiate) the implementation of this hoax. It would have been a costly venture to produce this book, not only in terms of payments to the collaborators who compiled, edited and forwarded the texts, but also the production costs; these were no doubt covered by the sponsors. The collaborators themselves were seemingly genuine admirers of the plays and would have been eager to help create this monument to the great art of Shakespeare, and willing to associate their names with a worthy effort. Finally, this cohort possessed a convenient surrogate in their late comrade from Stratford, whose name was strikingly similar to "William Shakespeare" and who had been involved in the theatre community as an actor, shareholder and possibly a broker of plays, as well as someone who may have been recognized by some gullible associates as the actual author.

Several conditions existed that provided the *opportunity* to implement this hoax. Obviously, someone wrote the plays presented in the Folio. They were numerous and hugely popular during the lifetime of the purported author. If the real author was Oxford, as a writer under the protection and support of the royal court, the canon had the stamp of approval that may have assured that the book would sell and the deception would succeed, thus making the printed Folio a convenient and effective medium for introducing the idea that Shakspeare was Shakespeare. There happened to be a monument (that, as some have suggested, was probably originally created for Shakspeare's father) in Stratford that could be—and apparently was—altered around the time the Folio was published to depict a writer instead of a merchant.

The phrase "Swan of Avon" could reasonably describe someone from Stratford-upon-Avon, especially someone with a name similar to "Shakespeare" and who had been a relatively familiar character in the London theatre scene. Finally, as has been observed and lamented by many investigators, someone with influence and access to state records could have removed—and apparently did remove—nearly all of the court documents that would have encompassed any discussions or official actions related to London theatre and authorship during the years Oxford was active.

### Constituents of a Successful Hoax

Hancock lists the following as components necessary to create and sustain a hoax: A *target constituency with a "dream"*; a *medium* for the message; the *discovery*; a *champion(s)*; and *under-specification*. To some extent these must be planned or orchestrated by the deceiver, but there may be some element of accidental manifestation of these components as the hoax develops a life of its own. Assuming that someone with an understanding of psychology and cognitive deception (e.g., someone like Francis Bacon, friend and employer of Ben Jonson—himself a master of ambiguity) was involved in creation of the hoax, all of these constituent parts could have been laid in place or anticipated by the deceivers with a very good chance of success.

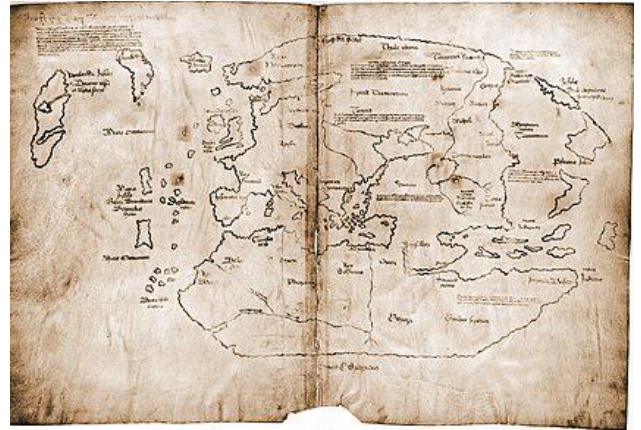
If we look for a target *constituency* with an identifiable *dream*, the first and foremost would be Shakespeare's contemporary "fan base." This would have consisted of the early 17<sup>th</sup> century literati and the general theatregoing public. The plays had been popular for over a quarter century as performed on stage and in printed versions. The earlier quarto editions of many of the individual plays had sold well, and we know the staged versions were in constant demand, both as court entertainment for special events and in the public playhouses. We have a pretty good idea of how effective the pseudonym "Shakespeare" had been in masking the identity of the true author, as no one at the time openly identified Oxford as the writer, and there is virtually no hard evidence that anyone ever identified the Stratford man as a playwright. Doubtless there were individuals who either suspected a cover-up or knew the closely guarded truth; indeed, there are numerous tantalizing contemporary allusions suggesting that "Shake-speare" was a pen name. There may have also been some confusion in the theatre community as the occasional recording of the name "Shakespeare" (as opposed to "Shakspeare") appears in some playhouse financial records—*although never once as the playwright*.

It is possible the originators of the hoax sensed some curiosity in this constituency regarding who actually wrote the plays (as well as the very popular Shakespeare poems). It would be reasonable to suggest that Jonson et al. would have been confident that the existing fan base

could be manipulated to buy into the romantic notion (the “dream”) that this theatrical associate from Stratford was actually the author. It also seems reasonable to speculate that the deceivers would also hope (but only hope) that the Shakespeare works would remain popular, and that the romantic notion of their authorship would gain traction with future generations of playgoers and literary scholars. After all, the hoaxers were planting their seed in the fertile ground of wishful thinking and hero worship of scholars who would surely recognize the greatness of these works, as well as theatre lovers who treasured the idea that a fellow commoner was capable of writing these astonishing works. As it turned out, that’s exactly what happened. As Hancock suggests, “An additional characteristic of a good hoax is longevity,” and one of the keys of longevity “resides in the continuing need for people to believe.”

We need look no further than the 1623 Folio for a convenient *medium* for planting the seed of the deception by introducing the notion that Shakspeare was the author, here in the arguably ambiguous forwarding texts accompanying the Shakespeare plays. The book would very likely be highly desirable to the burgeoning reading populace, and become a bestseller. That a specific individual, with a reputation as having been involved to some degree in the theatre community, was *at last* being identified as the author would have been an intriguing and appealing conceit. Yet, as carefully as the deceivers may have planned, they couldn’t have known just how successful the Folio would be. Four hundred years later copies of the Folio are among the most valuable books in existence, and not just because of its literary importance: The Stratford man has long been considered a national hero worthy of enshrinement at the centers of an international tourist industry, national pride, and English Literature academia—a unique Englishman who changed the course of the English language, theatre and literature, and who continues to stir our deepest emotions and desires.

Hancock goes on to describe the process of *discovery*, whether the deceiver needs to manufacture an accidental discovery or find a way to obscure the initial discovery to the extent that leaps of faith are required by the audience to marry the message, which they want to believe, to the lack of verifiable evidence that the story being promoted is true. This “is very much subject to a phenomenon termed confirmation bias,” which Hancock describes as the “propensity to search out information and cues that support a previously adopted position,” and which, in turn, he explains is a concept originated by Bacon: “Human understanding, once it has adopted opinions, either because they were already accepted and believed, or because it likes them, draws everything to support and agree with them. And though it may meet a greater number and weight of contrary instances, it will, with great and harmful prejudice, ignore or condemn or exclude them.”



The Vinland Map

In the case of the Folio, however, the discovery itself was not so much about the book that was published and offered for sale to the public, but more to do with the idea that the Stratford man was a writer. This must have been, to most, a revelation.

Four hundred years after Shakespeare’s time it’s easy to spot the *champions*, those who have promoted the deception. Hancock observes that the hoaxer is usually the first champion by virtue of inventing the whole scheme and setting the wheels in motion, but this runs the risk that the target audience may eventually suspect a dishonest, self-serving motive. He goes on to demonstrate that what is needed is an “*unsuspecting champion*,” often, the target of the hoaxer “for whom the hoax represents . . . *the dream*. These are the people who carry the torch. *If they have the imprimatur of authority, so much the better, for their opinions will carry all the more weight. Ardent amateurs are fine, but deluded professionals are even better, since they bring their credentials to the subject*” (my emphasis).

So, looking beyond Jonson, Pembroke, Montgomery, et al., there was, next in line, the publisher who would have had the incentive to promote and sell as many copies of the Folio as possible. The next, and perhaps the most effective, was actor-manager David Garrick, who staged the first Shakespeare Jubilee in Stratford in 1769, a pivotal event in the establishment of Shakespeare’s enduring reputation and his coronation as a national hero. Garrick was also responsible for birth of the Stratford-upon-Avon tourist industry, having (apparently after communing with the spirit of the late Bard) designated exactly which room in which house was the Shakespeare Birthplace! Now, of course, the torchbearers march on: The Shakespeare Birthplace Trust (SBT); self-righteous professors of Shakespeare studies and the tenure-oriented institutions that harbor them; Shakespeare festivals across the globe; and Shakespeare lovers everywhere who, like most of us, were indoctrinated in the orthodoxy from youth.

Finally, the need for *under-specification*: Hancock stipulates that “the hoax must not be *too* perfect.” He is



saying that minimum elaboration works in favor of the deceiver in that it allows room for the hoax to sustain its own life by creating “greater interest, discussion and debate.” These activities have the potential to “foster incorrect decision making” (based on our biases). Therefore some ambiguity generates contributions by those who wish to “actively participate in the discovery, elaboration, and elucidation” of the story. Of course, this allows orthodox Shakespeare scholars, critics and biographers to “discover” (or speculate about, or even invent) evidence that was not provided by the hoaxer, evidence which Hancock feels can be “particularly persuasive.”

It would be hard to imagine a better illustration of the effect of under-specification than the Shakespeare case. The huge gap between the few documented details of Shakspeare’s mundane life and the extreme erudition so clearly demonstrated in the works of Shakespeare begs to be filled with “discovery, elaboration, and elucidation.” Thus, there has been an unending proliferation of speculative biographies and innumerable critical theories over the last four centuries. Luckily for skeptics, under-specification has also resulted in what we call the “Authorship Question.”

### The Role of the Skeptic

As Hancock says, “Skeptics are skeptical.” When presented with the potentially false claim that Shakspeare was Shakespeare, the skeptic must engage in the battle to excise a deeply ingrained and passionately believed concept that has been cemented in the global psyche by the powerful forces of tradition, academia and the SBT. Skeptical scholars are obliged to understand these forces, the claims that have been made in support of the deception, and to recognize what forms of proof are required to prove the claims wrong. As Hancock says, regarding this process, “Concrete evidence is often claimed [by the promoters] . . . but unfortunately such evidence is virtually never forthcoming when critical public evaluation is invoked.”

There are clear examples of this evidential sleight of hand. For instance, orthodox writers have claimed, in rebuttal to the skeptics, that the “stigma of print” was *not* a factor that would have kept aristocrats from publishing literary works under their own names. However, in “*Shakespeare by Another Name*” Mark Anderson cites Castiglione’s *The Courtier*—a book that was practically required reading for Elizabethan English gentlemen—which advises that any aristocrat who was also a writer must “take care to keep them [his literary works] under cover . . . and let him show them only to a friend who can be trusted.” Another example, in reaction to skeptical questions about the omission of books in Shakspeare’s will, is the orthodox claim that the convention of the time was to list them only in the post-mortem inventory of an estate (which, in the case of Shakspeare, is conveniently

missing). But, as convincingly demonstrated by editor/compiler Jeanne Jones in *Stratford-Upon-Avon Inventories 1538-1699*, the more conventional practice was to specifically bequeath any books—often among a testator’s most valuable possessions—in the will (as well as listing their values in the inventory).

While orthodox biographers continue to conjecture about the life of the author, and scholars attempt to analyze the plays to find connections between the purported author’s life and the written works, or to find relevant passages in the works indicative of the author’s philosophical, religious or political sensibilities, some have openly admitted the frustrating futility of this effort. For example:

- Stanley Wells, Shakespearean scholar, defender of the orthodoxy as honorary president of the SBT, and author of *Shakespeare Beyond Doubt*, when asked by *Newsweek* “What would settle this [authorship] question for good?” replied, “I would love to find a contemporary document that said William Shakespeare was the dramatist of Stratford-upon-Avon written during his lifetime. . . . it is just possible something will one day turn up. That would shut the buggers up!”

- Stephen Greenblatt of Harvard, another giant in the orthodox camp, admitted there are “huge gaps in knowledge that make any biographical study of Shakespeare an exercise in speculation” (*Will in the World: How Shakespeare Became Shakespeare*).

- Samuel Schoenbaum said, “Perhaps we should despair of ever bridging the vertiginous expanse between the sublimity of the subject and mundane inconsequence of the documentary record” (*Shakespeare’s Lives* 2<sup>nd</sup> ed.).

- Hugh Trevor-Roper (Regius Professor of History at Oxford University) said he found Shakespeare’s elusiveness “exasperating and almost incredible. . . . [Shakespeare] has been subjected to the greatest battery of organized research that has ever been directed upon a single person. And yet the greatest of all Englishmen, after this tremendous inquisition, still remains so close to a mystery that even his identity can still be doubted” (“What’s in a Name?” *Réalités*, November 1962).

- And finally, perhaps the loudest and most disingenuous of the orthodox defenders, James Shapiro, while occasionally mouthing lukewarm praise for anti-Stratfordian scholarship and careful research, and yet grandly confirming the prescience of Bacon’s expression “*being impatient of enquiry*” openly acknowledges the authorship question “remains virtually taboo in academic circles . . . and walled off from serious study by Shakespeare scholars” (*Contested Will: Who Wrote Shakespeare*).

Hancock observes that the burden of proof usually rests on the shoulders of those making exceptional claims. But in the case of the traditional Shakespeare authorship attribution it seems to be the opposite: Against the strong beliefs of the unquestioning orthodox, skeptics find themselves having to prove that the conventional story is false. The reality is that, until fairly recently, the committed believers have not had to prove anything. The traditional story had long been accepted as truth told by trusted sources—Jonson, the sponsoring earls, academic institutions, and of course the SBT. The expression of doubts about the authorship is still a relatively new phenomenon. But it has definitely taken root and now the pressure is rising on the champions to defend their position—to “find a contemporary document that said William Shakespeare was the dramatist of Stratford-upon-Avon written during his lifetime,” as Wells laments.

In other words, people have doubts, and are actively questioning the heretofore “trusted sources.” Additionally, serious research has already produced a preponderance of evidence—however circumstantial—that is beginning to sway public opinion in the direction of alternative authors, especially Oxford. *Even the orthodox champions quoted above are essentially admitting that there is room for doubt.* And the SBT, I am told, is changing its dogmatic promotional rhetoric, now admitting that it isn’t absolutely sure about the authenticity of its properties.

While the burden of proof seems to gradually be shifting to the rightful owner, there is still strong resistance among the true believers. The SBT recently turned down a substantial monetary reward in the face of a challenge to simply prove its claims in a neutral court, saying they have “nothing to prove.” The fact is that they know they can’t prove their

case, and neither can the academics who admittedly thirst for actual hard evidence that has hasn’t yet emerged after 400 years, and is not likely to do so. Until recently, the absence of evidence has worked in favor of the deceivers, as it has kept the hoax alive and growing (which, Hancock explains, is characteristic of hoaxes) in the form of what has been called the “Shakespeare Industry.” It is incumbent on the skeptics to heed Hancock’s advice “to unravel their story through precise measurement and quiet contemplation,” to which he adds, in acknowledgement of the kind of divisive expression of opinions generated by successful, engaging hoaxes, “rather than through affective response or strident, polemic partisanship.”

Whatever it takes. There is, and will continue to be, “strident, polemic partisanship” but, perhaps for the skeptics, tempered by an awareness that the Authorship Question, like the classic hoaxes, is governed by the psychology of cognitive deception.

I gratefully acknowledge my debt to Peter Hancock for providing the inspiration for this article. I hope I have not misinterpreted his theories or misapplied his methods in seeking an alternate path in legitimizing the search for the truth about the Shakespeare authorship. I ask the reader to be the judge by obtaining a copy of Hancock’s entertaining, accessible and insightful work, and explore in greater depth the relevance of his theories, especially how they may relate to what may be one of the most successful and potentially explosive hoaxes that ever lived.

[Harry Campbell, now retired, was a Book and Paper Conservator at Ohio State University.]



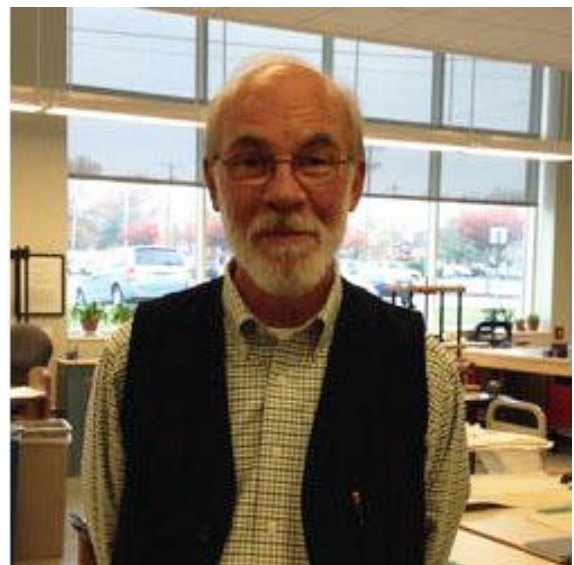
Piltdown Man



Author Will Shakspeare



The Shroud of Turin



NOT A HOAX: Harry Campbell

## Book Reviews

*Shakespeare and Ecocritical Theory* by Gabriel Egan (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2015); *Shakespeare and Ecofeminist Theory* by Rebecca Laroche and Jennifer Munroe (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2017)

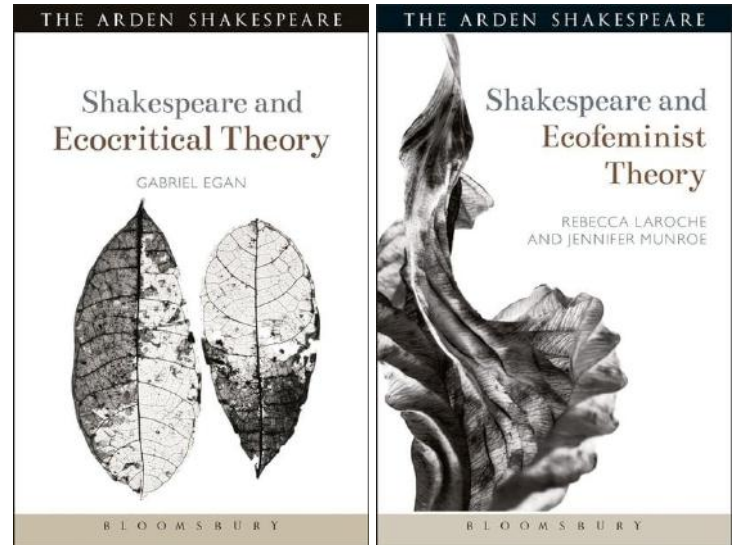
Reviewed by David Rains Wallace

Ecology has been called “the subversive science” because it questions assumptions basic to civilization since the Enlightenment—that, as uniquely rational beings, humans are entitled to control and change the natural world as we wish, and that science and technology justly have given us the power to further this ambitious agenda through technological progress. Ethical and aesthetic challenges to these assumptions have long existed, but lacked political clout. Ecology and related evolutionary sciences have empowered the challenges by questioning whether humans are uniquely rational and by pointing out that technological progress has led to pollution, resource depletion, social conflict, and impending disasters like climate change as well as improvements in human life.

The fact that the prestigious Bloomsbury Arden Shakespeare series has published not one, but two, “ecocritical” studies of Shakespeare suggests that academe is taking the challenges seriously. Stephen Greenblatt writes: “The series promises to be wonderfully useful not only as a glimpse back into what has been done but also as an inspiration for new work.” Might such “new work” include ecocriticism of the traditional Stratfordian narrative? That narrative, after all, largely has emerged from the Enlightenment’s materialist, utilitarian agenda—Shakespeare as an upwardly mobile professional actor-writer who made a fortune from the new technology of the public stage and shrewdly invested his literary profits in loans, commodities, farmland, and real estate—what Greenblatt calls “an amazing success story.”

Unsurprisingly, such is not the case with this establishment mainstream series. Neither book mentions the authorship question. Yet the ways they skirt around the question bring up some interesting aspects of it.

Gabriel Egan’s book, *Shakespeare and Ecocritical Theory*, moves in stimulatingly subversive directions at first. It takes swipes at other literary theories that uphold the “anthropocentrism” of the Enlightenment-based assumptions: Marxist theory with its absolute faith in progress; French theories like structuralism with their neo-Cartesian dualism that regards the non-human world as a mental construction: “nature” in quotes. Egan observes, interestingly, that “early modern” attitudes



toward life may have had more in common with twenty-first century ecological ones than with those underlying Marxism and structuralism.

He speculates that when asked three questions—“if human activity can affect the weather,” “if the Earth is alive,” and “if humans are essentially like other animals”—Elizabethans and “ecologists” both might answer “yes,” whereas most people who lived from the seventeenth century through the twentieth would answer “no” and would doubt the intelligence or sanity of those answering “yes.” He acknowledges that the two “yes” groups would base their answers on different concepts of reality, with Elizabethans drawing on old religious and magical ideas and ecologists on new evolutionary ones like James Lovelock’s “Gaia Hypothesis.” Early modern people would have engaged more with non-human life than Enlightenment ones because they lived before mass urbanization and industrialism, whereas postmodern ones can do so because reaction to urbanization and industrialism has generated protected wild lands and public access to them. Despite the disparities, Egan, a Professor of Shakespeare Studies at a British university, sees hope for solutions to environmental dilemmas in such historical commonalities.

Egan’s ecocriticism stops being stimulatingly subversive, however, when it comes to Shakespeare’s orthodox identity. That identity largely began with the “first” biography, in John Aubrey’s 1680s *Brief Lives*, which arose (as one twenty-first century editor puts it) from Aubrey’s “excitement” about the Enlightenment’s emerging “culture of invention, profit, and control.” Aubrey’s portrait of William as a self-made, smooth-operating theatrical entrepreneur has remained basic to the orthodox narrative, although history has dispelled most of its hearsay-based “inventions.” Egan holds tight, anyway, to the resultant conventions of a Stratford-schooled William coming to London sometime before 1592, establishing his reputation with derivative



narrative poems and mediocre collaborative plays, then rising to become “house dramatist” at the Burbage theaters and, along with the sonnets, regularly pumping out two masterpieces a year through the next decade: comedies and histories, then tragedies, then tragicomedies, until finally reverting to mediocrity with collaborative late plays.

Egan might have observed that along with acting, theater management, and property and loan investments, this busy agenda would have left little time for engagement with non-human nature, except perhaps during trips back to Stratford. But he doesn't mention any such trips. He doesn't even mention the love and knowledge of countryside that William supposedly acquired during his Stratford boyhood—perhaps not surprisingly, since there is no contemporary documentation of him acquiring it.

Egan's “eco-critique” of the canon thus has little to say about engagement with non-human nature. A chapter on “Shakespeare and the Meaning of Life” concentrates on human familial relationships in the “late tragicomedies,” discussing early modern concerns about things like illegitimacy in the context of evolutionary concepts such as gene selection. This is interesting, if anachronistic, but hardly seems a challenge to anthropocentrism. (Egan calls the plays “experiments,” bringing Francis Bacon to my mind, if not, evidently, to his.) A chapter on “Animals and Ecocriticism” concentrates on domestic animals, mainly horses and dogs, and on the implications for humans of their subservient roles in early modern society. One would not suspect from this the role that wild and/or non-subservient animals play in the canon, from the defiant stallion, hounded hare, and hunter-killing boar in *Venus and Adonis*, to the wounded stag and “lioness with udders all drawn dry” in *As You Like It*, to the courtier-devouring bear in *The Winter's Tale*. One would not suspect, either, that much of the canon is set wholly or partly in wild places, often described with geographical accuracy.

A lengthy final chapter, “Crowds and Social Networks in Shakespeare,” draws parallels between the internet and the Elizabethan public theater, which, again, are interesting if anachronistic, and hardly a challenge to anthropocentrism. Egan maintains that non-human social networks like ant colonies are inferior to human ones like theaters and computers because the ants took millions of years to evolve them whereas humans needed only a few centuries to invent them. Descartes and Aubrey would have agreed with that. Evolutionary biologists like ant expert E.O. Wilson might object that the comparison is apples and oranges, and that, anyway, insects' ancient social networks may have a better chance of outlasting civilization's wars and disasters than our resource-devouring new ones (bringing to mind the 1950s sci-fi film thriller *Them*, with its atomic-mutant ants in Los Angeles sewers).

Egan does allude to one chink in the orthodox armor: that the frequent Shakespeare publications of the late Elizabethan era stopped after 1603, to resume only intermittently during the two decades before the First Folio. He might have inferred doubts about the Stratfordian narrative from this. Why would a writer supposedly at the top of his game, having had no known run-ins with censors or other literary authorities, suddenly stop publishing? But Egan just masks the chink with the usual wire mesh of conjecture:

It is not clear why the first editions dried up, but unless Shakespeare himself was planning what became the First Folio—which is not impossible—then in the second half of the 1610s he would have been quite rightly anxious about his print legacy. From the late 1590s, his play editions begin to blazon their paternity on their title pages, but shortly thereafter came the drought of first editions that imperiled his intellectual legacy. It was at this point that Shakespeare began a series of plays about what and how the next generation inherits from the present one. It is not unreasonable to suppose that, as Shakespeare approached his half century on Earth, he began to give considerable thought to legacy and inheritance in their biological, creative, and intellectual forms.

So William wrote *Cymbeline*, *The Winter's Tale*, and *The Tempest* because he was worried about staying in print? It's a worry most writers have: there's nothing very ecological about it. Was this the man who wrote the following about a stag “that from the hunter's aim had ta'en hurt,” and set it in northern France's Forest of Ardennes?

Thus most invectively he pierceth through  
The body of the country, city, court,  
Yes, and of this our life, swearing that we  
Are mere usurpers, tyrants, and what's worse,  
To fright the animals and to kill them up  
In their assigned and native dwelling place.  
(*As You Like It* 2.1)

When I saw that the Arden series also includes a book entitled *Shakespeare and Ecofeminist Criticism*, I thought that approach might reflect more of the empathy I perceive in the canon than a male ecocritic's. It was perhaps sexist of me—seeing female as the “feeling” gender as opposed to “thinking” males. Anyway, co-authors Rebecca Laroche and Jennifer Munroe, English professors at American universities, show no bias for feeling over thinking. Their interpretation is replete with philosophical concepts and language: “Ecofeminist theory provides a framework to interrogate the ontological co-evolution of things, human and non-human alike, such that we can embrace ... ecological

embeddedness.... [I]t simultaneously explicates how the multiplicity of the 'we,' of the human, is experienced in diverse ways.... In so doing, ecofeminists may simultaneously intervene in networks that privilege reason and objectivity over embodiment and experiential knowledge and those that subjugate racial Others, the poor, women, and nonhuman beings—in particular networks of scientific knowledge that became formally established in early modern England and that still dominate today.”

As with most postmodern literary theory, the “death of the author” has gone pretty far in this book. Laroche and Munroe refer to Shakespeare as a “he” a few times, and that’s about it as far as identity goes. Yet, intriguingly, the dead white man who hovers spectrally behind their theorizing bears little resemblance to academic orthodoxy’s theatrical businessman, although the disparity is not all that clear in an initial section, “Of Mouseholes and Housefires,” which examines Shakespeare’s take on Elizabethan “housekeeping concerns,” i.e., food and medicine preparation, pest control, fire safety. The authors find a surprising number of speeches that address these, mostly voiced by woman characters. The utilitarian nature of such concerns might seem to fit with businesslike orthodox William, although the authors contend that they differ from Enlightenment-related utilitarianism in that female housekeepers were subjectively “embedded” in the environments they tried to control, whereas male “householders” had a more objective, reasoned relation to the domestic arena—an owner’s viewpoint.

The section did make me wonder how a busy, upwardly mobile householder like William could have become so familiar with housekeeper concerns. Germaine Greer might propose that he collaborated with Anne Hathaway on the women’s speeches, a logical extension of the business collaboration Greer conjectures for the couple in *Shakespeare’s Wife*. If Anne could read William’s sonnets, as Greer also conjectures, maybe she could contribute to the plays? Laroche and Munroe venture no conjectures about women having a hand in the canon, however.

Their next section, “How We Know Any Thing,” takes this subjective-objective theme a step further by analyzing three plays wherein the self-centered assumptions of aristocratic householders—King Lear, Bertram (in *All’s Well That Ends Well*), and Macbeth—fall victim to housekeeper networks which they mistakenly assume they control: Lear’s daughters, Bertram’s mother and foster sister, Helena, and Lady Macbeth with her occult link to the Weird Sisters. The authors observe that a major way whereby the “keepers” resist and manipulate the “holders” is through magical applications of the “woman’s work” of food and medicine preparation. Lear’s daughters all seem knowledgeable about such magic; Helena uses it to cure the king and make Bertram marry her; and the Weird

Sisters’ recipes are, of course, notorious. Again, the author of these dramas doesn’t seem like a man who spent his life climbing to the top of a professional ladder, shrewdly amassing wealth and property. He seems more like one who spent much of it stumbling among networks of “subjects”—mothers, sisters, wives, daughters, servants—that controlled him as much as vice-versa, losing wealth and property in the process.

A final section, “The Dynamic Object,” draws telling contrasts between Shakespeare’s attitude to plants—the basic materials of early modern food, medicine and magic—and those of more conventional Elizabethan male writers. The authors take Spenser’s *Amoretti* sonnet 64 as an example of the latter, observing that, while erotically idealizing his mistress’s body, likening her lips to gillyflowers, her cheeks to roses, and so forth, “Spenser assembles a garden that grows nowhere and at no time,” an artificial, allegorical assemblage that shows no awareness of how various flowers blossom at different times and under different conditions. They contrast this with Perdita’s rapt description of Bohemian spring wildflowers in *The Winter’s Tale*:

Perdita employs her botanical knowledge learned as a shepherd’s daughter and emphasizes the human-plant connections. In this active and immediate relationship, her plants are not only beautiful, but also susceptible to the fluctuations inherent in changing seasons. Most telling is her depiction of the daffodil. In Perdita’s poetry, the daffodil’s ability to withstand seasonal adversity is central, the beauty an extension of its hardiness: “daffodils/ that come before the swallow dares, and take/ the winds of March with beauty....” Perdita and her daffodils demonstrate an alternative to reducing women and nonhumans to simple “love objects” derived from the discursive Petrarchan tradition, “things of pleasure” that stem from misogynist and consumerist denigration....

Other Elizabethan writers probably knew that daffodils are hardy spring wildflowers, but few seemed to find it worth mentioning. Spenser’s “Petrarchan” sonnet 64 ignores the species, and he was one of the more botanically-informed writers. In her classic study, *Shakespeare’s Imagery*, Carolyn Spurgeon observes that Shakespeare has “a great deal more” images of plants than his contemporaries and that he shows a “much greater knowledge” of them. She also writes, relevant to Perdita’s “winds of March” speech: “I do not find, in all my search of the other dramatists, any single image of frosts and sharp winds nipping buds, which is so common with Shakespeare.”

William is supposed to have derived *The Winter’s Tale* from Robert Greene’s novel *Pandosto*, which features a Perdita counterpart named Fawnia. She says nothing about daffodils, although she plaits a garland of

“such homely flowers as the fields did afford” while expounding on the social advantages of sheep herding in Sicily (“Envy looks not so low on shepherds. Shepherds gaze not so high as ambition. We are rich in that we are poor with content, and proud only in this: that we have no reason to be proud...”) In contrast, Perdita’s “winds of March” rhapsody includes not only daffodils but a

March-to-May progression from daffodils and violets, to primroses and oxlips, to irises and lilies, implying an author who spent time observing wild flowers in their habitats as well as sniffing garden ones. The documents show that William had a garden at his Stratford mansion, but accounts of him wandering “lonely as a cloud” are conjectural.

## Film Review

### *All Is True*

Directed by Kenneth Branagh (2018), 111 min.

Reviewed by Howard Schumann

John Madden’s 1998 film *Shakespeare in Love* proposed a secret love affair as being the inspiration behind Shakespeare’s most popular play, *Romeo and Juliet*. The film’s widespread success revealed the public’s longing to find a real human being behind the name of the iconic poet and playwright who composed at least thirty-seven plays, 154 sonnets, and five long narrative poems, but whose life story we know little about. Written by Ben Elton, the latest attempt to shed some light on the subject is Kenneth Branagh’s *All is True*, a film that focuses on the poet’s last years in Stratford-upon-Avon after his premature retirement in 1613. While it is a work of speculative fiction, by borrowing the mysterious alternative title of Shakespeare’s *Henry VIII*, Branagh implies (perhaps tongue-in-cheek) that the film reflects true events.

*All Is True* opens as Shakespeare (Branagh), vowing to never write again after the Globe Theater burned to the ground in 1613, returns to his Stratford home after an absence of twenty-one years. From the outset, the feeling tone is one of wistful sadness enhanced by shots by cinematographer Zac Nicholson of autumn leaves drifting slowly to the ground. One almost expects to hear Frank Sinatra in the background singing “September Song.” Taking a page from his most famous play, *Hamlet*, William is visited on his arrival by the ghost of his son Hamnet (Sam Ellis), who died at the age of eleven and who offers his father some of his poems to read. Saddled with a prosthetic nose and hairline, Branagh resembles a figure being geared for display at Madame Tussauds.

Though there is no historical evidence for it, Shakespeare is shown being welcomed by the townsfolk with a reverence usually reserved for the Archbishop of Canterbury. He is greeted coldly, however, by his wife Anne, played by the great Judi Dench (*Victoria and*



*Abdul*) and his daughter Judith (Kathryn Wilder), but with slightly less chill by daughter Susannah (Lydia Wilson). Accused by his wife of not mourning Hamnet at the time of his death, William insists that he did mourn Hamnet, but Anne retorts, twisting the knife, “You mourn him now. At the time you wrote *Merry Wives of Windsor*” (a farcical comedy). Judith’s resentment is said to stem from her belief that her father thinks that “the wrong twin died,” while Susanna cannot help but notice William’s disdain for her marriage to local physician John Hall (Hadley Fraser), a man of strict Puritan leanings.



The film proceeds episodically, showing William planting a garden in Hamnet's memory; William is tormented by the death of his son, whom he believed was a promising poet whose writing showed "wit and mischief." It depicts his strained relationship with his wife, and his conflicts with his two daughters. Shakespeare emphatically tells his younger daughter, Judith, that she should marry and provide him with a male heir. Though he rages that his talent made the family very wealthy and was not appreciated, he later begins to understand the price they paid for his genius. One of the film's high points is the exchange during an unlikely visit to Stratford by the prettified 3rd Earl of Southampton, played by the forty-years-too-old Ian McKellen (*Mr. Holmes*).

The Earl brings up his identity as the "fair youth" of Shakespeare's Sonnets, pointing out that "it was only flattery, of course," to which the Bard responds, "Except, I spoke from deep within my heart." "But I was so young and pretty, then," Southampton responds. When they take turns in reciting Shakespeare's immortal Sonnet 29, asserting the great author's tender feeling towards the Earl, we at last get a glimpse of Shakespeare's true greatness. While the film has considerable pleasures including striking performances by Dench and Branagh, basically, *All is True* exists primarily as a vehicle to promote the traditional view of Shakespeare's authorship, now coming under attack from various quarters, most prominently from the growing interest in other candidates.

Contrary to its perceived intention, however, the film is neither edifying nor convincing in its attempt to put a human face on a cipher who lacks history, personality, or

indeed any semblance of a biography, and whose life story, as it has come down to us, has no connection to the many-faceted genius revealed in the plays and poems. Ignoring the fact that Shakespeare was a tax evader, moneylender, profiteer, and grain hoarder, Branagh and Elton envision Shakespeare as a genius capable of any literary feat imaginable. In one scene, an aspiring writer asks the Bard how he accomplished what he did without any schooling past the age of fourteen, without traveling outside of England, or having ready access to the immense learning evident in the plays.

The answer is right out of the Stratfordian playbook of miracles, "What I know . . . I have imagined," he says, asking us to accept that Shakespeare's knowledge of philosophy and astronomy, theology and the law, foreign languages, music, medicine, and court intrigue all came from his vivid imagination. In his attempt to make the implausible plausible, however, Branagh dumbs Shakespeare down enough to persuade us that he is just a "storyteller," an ordinary fellow after all, with domestic problems just like the rest of us. At one point, William proclaims with un-Shakespeare-like banality, "I've lived so long in imaginary worlds, I think I've lost sight of what is real." We might also say that is true of the traditional Shakespeare biography.

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