

From the Editor: Interdisciplinary Scholarship and the Authorship

Twenty-five years ago I proposed an interdisciplinary approach for solving the Shakespeare authorship question, and my intellectual commitment to that methodology remains strong given the achievements of Oxfordian scholars in the past generation. I believe that marshaling the vast body of knowledge required to persuade scholars in the Humanities that Edward de Vere, 17th Earl of Oxford, wrote the Shakespeare canon can only be executed successfully through such an approach.

This 24th volume of *The Oxfordian* demonstrates the validity of that approach, with papers encompassing a wide spectrum of disciplines in the Humanities and Sciences. Many papers integrate multiple fields in their scholarly research, such as literature, philology, Elizabethan culture and history (see Hutchinson and Stritmatter). One paper (Chambers) uses a combination of literary publication and Bayesian probability mathematics. Another (Dudley) employs epistemology and ethics. Yet another (Waugaman) incorporates dramatic literature with psychology and philology.

I believe the insight generated by combining standalone scholarly disciplines has been overlooked by mainstream academics because they prefer to remain isolated in their particular fields of expertise. For example, literature professors rarely raise their heads above the parapet of the text and thus remain ignorant of the social and political contexts that envelop the play, poem or novel.

When traditional Shakespeare advocates do venture to embrace other disciplines, such as computer science, they mostly misuse the methodology. This was recently demonstrated by the general editors of Oxford University Press's latest edition of the Shakespeare canon in 2016. Taking the texts of Elizabethan and Jacobean dramatists, they simply applied an algorithm that measured the extent of conjunctions and prepositions used in the author's play-text compared to other contemporary dramatists. The editors contend that this was a definitive method of identifying authorship of particular plays, yet a considerable contingent of experts in theater and literature refuse to accept their conclusions.

More depressing is the continuing refusal of Shakespeare professors to accept the rigor of the Oxfordian hypothesis simply because the evidence in its support is largely circumstantial. In contrast, their demand for direct evidence is never applied to other intellectual questions. Indeed, modern academics are willing to accept a paucity of evidence before declaring a consensus on a variety of issues, from the science of climatology to the legal validity of free speech on campus. Often, it is political ideology alone that drives modern academia. In the face of such intellectual corruption, Oxfordians may be allowed to vent their frustration, but should not despair given that researchers continue to generate discoveries that, under a different intellectual environment, will triumph.

Until academia recovers its institutional integrity, we will have to endure the Shakespeare tautology that "Shakespeare wrote Shakespeare because his name is printed on the title pages of the Shakespeare quartos published during his lifetime." On this score, there is the hope that the zeitgeist will be transformed.

We also need to remind ourselves and others of the logical coherence of the Oxfordian case—a key indicator of the truth of a theory.

Finally, we should be encouraged by the insight of Australian journalist Richard Fernandez, quoted by Michael Dudley in this issue.

If the costs of the lie exceed the energy necessary to sustain the illusion it inevitably collapses.... Normally the narrative will continue as before until the apologists suffer what amounts to a loss of faith. This happens to individuals but sometimes it occurs among entire populations. A loss of faith destabilizes the entire edifice of self-deception and can push it over the tipping point.

— Gary B. Goldstein