



Shakespeare Matters

“The Voice
of the
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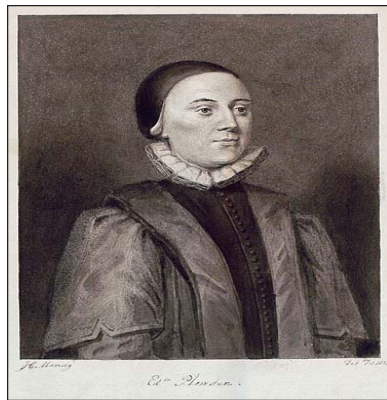
Special Issue: Teaching Shakespeare

Teaching Shakespeare and the Law

by Thomas Regnier

In the spring of 2006 I taught, for the first time, a one-semester course on Shakespeare and the Law at the University of Miami School of Law. I highly recommend the experience. In the course, we studied seven Shakespeare plays—*Merchant of Venice*, *Measure for Measure*, *Hamlet*, *Merry Wives of Windsor*, *2 Henry VI*, *Richard III*, and *Othello*. In addition, the course included over forty articles about legal issues in Shakespeare by such writers as Edith Friedler, Daniel Kornstein, Anthony Burton, Thomas Glyn Watkin, B.J. and Mary Sokol, George W. Keeton, Charles Ross, C.M.A. McCauliff, Lord Campbell, Mark Alexander, myself, and many others. Students also had to read portions of the Magna Carta and certain English statutes and cases. I used J.H. Baker’s excellent book, *An Introduction to English Legal History*¹, as a basic text on the common law of England. Although the course involved a tremendous amount of reading, the students never complained, and some even said they wanted more.

The class was taught as a seminar and had ten students. The class sessions emphasized discussion more than lecture, and we



Edmund Plowden (1518-1585), the famed Catholic jurist whose record of *Hales v. Petit*, a famous law case involving suicide and the state, is parodied in the *Hamlet* gravedigger’s scene.

Shakespeare, Meet Robert Frost....

by Robert M. Barrett, Jr.

Something there is that doesn’t love a wall,” Robert Frost wrote in 1914, using iambic pentameter and inverted syntax that are nearly Shakespearean in his blunt but memorable line. The line speaks for me personally in a very particular way: When I finished reading *The Mysterious William Shakespeare*, by Charlton Ogburn, Jr., something there was within me that didn’t love the wall that hid the true Shakespeare.

As a layman, newly introduced to a difficult subject, I responded to my reading in a way that was undoubtedly visceral—just in part, though, a small part. The larger part, I submit, was intellectual. I looked for reason, plausibility, evidence, coherence, and conviction in Ogburn’s words, and I found those qualities much more often present in the book than absent. I finished reading not indoctrinated, but excited by a new interest, one that has been increasingly rich and rewarding for me.

If you will indulge me, I would like to explain how I brought this exciting, new interest into a junior high school classroom. The general outline of what I experienced will be familiar and even predictable to some of you; to others, what I have to say might be instructive. I see it primarily as a cautionary tale.

Before reading Ogburn, I had had a lifelong but superficial appreciation of Shakespeare. In high school, I read *Julius Caesar* and memorized many of the shorter passages and lines. That fueled a temporary hunger that led me to buy the Folger paperback editions of *Romeo and Juliet*, *Macbeth*, *Hamlet*, *Othello*, and *King Lear*—tragedies all, befitting my dark, teenage personality at the time. I was fascinated by the language, which for me was analogous to geometry, my favorite school subject, in that it was problematical, but rational and solvable by concentrated thought and flashes of insight.

In college, I was introduced to authorship purely by accident.

Letters....

To the Editor:

Mr. David Moffat in his article (*Shakespeare Matters, Summer 2006*) uses a six-step approach to solving the Sonnet dedication puzzle and, by applying those principles, agrees with Dr. John Rollett in arriving at the solution of the puzzle: THESE SONNETS ALL BY EVER THE FORTH.

This solution, says Mr. Moffat, is both "very appealing, but ultimately disappointing" and continues ". . . we cannot ignore these last two words - nor can we explain them."

By applying the rules laid out by Mr. Moffat, it is true we cannot ignore the words **the** and **forth**, but what better way to explain them than to consult a dictionary and define them?

A dictionary search quickly yields one definition of the word **the** as "beyond any other."

Similarly a definition of the word **forth** is "out into view."

By using these definitions, the meaning of the dedication becomes: THESE SONNETS ALL BY E. VER, BEYOND ANY OTHER, OUT INTO VIEW.

One interpretation of **beyond any other** might be that this collection of sonnets is beyond the excellence of anything like it published before.

An interpretation of **out into view** might be saying that the sonnets are now published and available for all to see for the very first time--as opposed to being privately circulated amongst friends.

Whether or not this was the intention of T.T. I cannot say.

Sincerely,

Ian Haste
Mission, British Columbia

To the Editor:

Further to your interesting story "The Famous Poet 'Shakes His Spear'" (*Shakespeare Matters, Summer 2006, p. 4*), on the discovery of an apparent reference to Shakespeare as a pseudonym in the third (1628) edition of a Greek work by Thomas Vicars, I would like to point out that Vicars was the son-in-law of Sir Henry Neville. Vicars married Neville's daughter Anne in 1622, seven years after his death. Before that, Neville's widow Ann had remarried Bishop George Carleton (c1557-1628), an old friend of Neville's who was a fellow-alumnus of Merton College, Oxford, and whose first appointment was as vicar of Mayfield, Sussex, one of Neville's estates. As the stepfather of Ann Neville Vicars, Carleton did much to advance Vicars' career. In *The Truth Will Out*, which I co-authored with Brenda James, we advance the view that Sir Henry Neville (c. 1562-1615) was the real author of Shakespeare's works, and this

discovery about Vicars' reference, which was unknown to us when we wrote the book, plainly adds weight to our case. In contrast, I can see no links of any kind between Vicars and the Earl of Oxford, let alone between Vicars and William Shakespeare.

Professor William D. Rubinstein
Dept. of History, University of Wales

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The purpose of the Shakespeare Fellowship is to promote public awareness and acceptance of the authorship of the Shakespeare Canon by Edward de Vere, 17th Earl of Oxford (1550-1604), and further to encourage a high level of scholarly research and publication into all aspects of Shakespeare studies, and also into the history and culture of the Elizabethan era.

The Society was founded and incorporated in 2001 in the State of Massachusetts and is chartered under the membership corporation laws of that state. It is a recognized 501(c)(3) nonprofit (Fed ID 04-3578550).

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Shakespeare Matters welcomes articles, essays, commentary, book reviews, letters and news items. Contributions should be reasonably concise and, when appropriate, validated by peer review. The views expressed by contributors do not necessarily reflect those of the Fellowship as a literary and educational organization.

From the Editors

Shakespeare's Language--and *Our* Education

The books, the academes, from whence doth spring the true Promethean Fire — *LLL*

In graduate school, one can overhear many curious and often paradoxical theories about Shakespeare. A tenured English professor of my acquaintance was certain that Shakespeare couldn't possibly have had a serious education because it would have ruined him as a writer. The opinion was expressed to a newspaper reporter who had called to elicit his view on the authorship question. He explained that there was no such question among educated persons at universities, and that Shakespeare was, like Caliban, "a natural" (3.2.33) who acquired a talent for courtly diction as a hanger-on at court—an auditor, if you will, at the trough of higher education.

The Professor may have been over-acclimatized to orthodox groupthink on Shakespeare, but he was not dumb. Like most English professors, he was reluctant to debate the authorship question in public, but was caught off guard by the need to voice an opinion for which he knew his colleagues would hold him accountable. It was his fate to land in the middle of an argument he didn't ask for and of which he didn't want to be a part: his colleagues, who had much more at stake than he, were counting on him to defend the castle from the infidels. And some of them were much more sophisticated in their knowledge of the Elizabethan renaissance than he, a specialist in Anglo-Saxon, could possibly have been.

Voila: The perfect "front man." *Credit quia absurdum*. Moreover, he was popular. The reporter called because she remembered his polite, student-centered pedagogy from her years as an English Department undergraduate. She felt she could trust him. Your editor was brash

enough to phone the reporter and tell her that the Professor, whose course on another subject he had taken, didn't know what he

The reporter thought your editor was attacking the Professor, whom she had "liked," and not his misguided notions.

"I like him too," said your editor, "but that doesn't change the fact that he doesn't know what he's talking about."...

"Do you know something," the Professor told your editor a few days later, "Shakespeare knew Anglo-Saxon! In *Troilus and Cressida*, he conjugates the anglo-saxon verb, *to seethe*: "My business seethes.—sodden business...."

was talking about when it came to Shakespeare.

The reporter thought your editor was attacking the Professor, whom she had "liked," and not his misguided notions.

"I like him too," said your editor, "but that doesn't change the fact that he doesn't know what he's talking about."

News has a funny way of traveling in unexpected circuits. As I said, the Professor was not dumb. Moreover, when he had time to reconsider his words, he realized that he really didn't give a damn who Shakespeare was. It was not as if [he] it was any skin off his nose.

"Do you know something?" the Professor told your editor a few days later, "Shakespeare knew Anglo-Saxon! In *Troilus and Cressida*, he conjugates the anglo-saxon verb, to seethe: "My business seethes.—sodden business...."(3.1.43).

Funny how a change in perspective matters. We're used to the mantra, based on quoting Ben Jonson out of context, that Shakespeare had "little Latin and less Greek," but Anglo-Saxon? How many Elizabethans could read—let alone use—their own ancient tongue? How many could conjugate *sodden*—a word so perversely rare that the earliest OED occurrence is listed as 1812!—as the past participle of *seethe*? Perhaps such a form could be generated by analogy from more common Renaissance English exemplars. A fair number of Anglo-Saxon survivals might have furnished analogy for a past participle ending -en with vowel vowel umlaut -- *took- taken, gave-given*, etc. Still, the Professor seemed quite sure, based on this one striking example, that Shakespeare had a working knowledge of Anglo-Saxon.

Beowulf, the primary surviving scrap of that language then as now, existed in a sole copy owned by Lawrence Nowell. True, as early as 1565, one year after the traditional hero of our story was born (and two years after Nowell wrote to William Cecil that he could be of little further use as a tutor to the young Earl of Oxford),

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(Shakespeare's Language cont. from p. 4)

Nowell had published his *Vocabularium Saxonicum*. True, a few scholars in the country were starting to take an interest in the ancient history of their own tongue. But we can be confident that Shakspeare did not learn Anglo-Saxon at the Stratford grammar school, however sophisticated the school may have been in its Latin instruction, and the number of proficient readers of *Beowulf* in England must still have been minuscule even by the very end of Elizabeth's reign in 1603. Compared to Latin, it was an obscure and esoteric study, most likely to be absorbed at the foot of a highly specialized tutor like Nowell.

When it comes to *Troilus and Cressida*, Anglo-Saxon isn't the half of it. The most disturbingly intellectual of any play in the Shakespearean canon, *Troilus and Cressida* wears its scholastic rhetoric on its sleeve. As G. Wilson Knight emphasizes, the play is "more peculiarly analytic in language and dramatic meaning than any other"; it poses perplexing interpretative difficulties of an "essentially... intellectual complexity" and is "freighted [with] extraordinary Latinisms" that are "unique among his plays."

Anglo-Saxon roots *and* analytical Latinisms? In the same play? No wonder that Coleridge declared that in it "the old heroes [of *The Iliad*] seem all to have been at school ever since" and admitted that, not knowing what to say about it, he "by a cunning instinct ran off to subjects on which I should find it difficult not to say too much..." since "there is none of Shakespeare's plays so difficult to characterize."

Troilus and Cressida is an example of the stratospheric level of intellectual comedy Shakespeare could achieve. The jokes are cosmic, and often leave us feeling left out because we "weren't there." But the play is only the most obvious and troubling of many hints of Shakespeare's erudition. Anti-Stratfordians are fond of noting the extensive testimony for Shakespeare's skilled knowledge of many fields: Italian geography and literature, European history, both common law and equity, philosophy, statecraft, medicine, and psychology, etc. Experts in those fields have declared that the bard's command of the subject rivaled or transcended that of the most sophisticated experts of his day. But of all these areas of expertise the most comprehensive is Shakespeare's mastery of language. For example, your editor owns a curious annotated bibliography, *The Foreign Sources of Shakespeare's Works*, by Selma Guttman, which includes scholarly commentary from 1904 to 1940. The 571 items in Guttman's study are divided into six major categories: Latin, Greek, French, Italian, Spanish, and Other, the latter including a number of items exploring theories of Shakespeare's familiarity with Dutch and German.

The Stratfordian answer to all of this, to the extent that one can generalize about it, is at best paradoxical, and at worst is a contradiction of magnificent proportions. On the one hand we are witnesses to a longstanding tradition of predictably strained attempts to deprecate Shakespeare's actual knowledge of numerous subjects, from classical literature to law to the topography of Northern Italy. When these fail, as on closer inspection they usually do, it is answered that Shakespeare was simply a "genius." He did

(Shakespeare's Language, cont. p. 7)



Midwest Oxfordians (from left to right), Allegra Wakest, Ron Halstead, Barbara Burris, and Eddy Nix, enjoying the awards banquet at the 2nd Annual Joint SF-SOS Conference, November 9-12. Conference Details forthcoming in the Winter 2007 newsletter.

In Loving Memory: Ruth Loyd Miller and Minos D. Miller

by K.C. Ligon

On September 15, 2005, the world of Oxfordian studies lost the inestimable Ruth Loyd Miller, whose life and work has lighted the way for generations of Oxfordians to come. This past July, our beloved friend and Oxfordian champion, her husband Judge Minos D. Miller, made his transition. It has been said that all life is learning, and that all those we encounter in our lives have come forward to teach us the lessons of our lives. If we are fortunate, we meet and study with outstanding teachers, those who see our potential and delight in our development, even as they impart to us their wisdom and allow us to share in the abundance of their talents and skills. In my life Ruth and M.D. Miller came forward as two such outstanding mentors, and to honor their memory I share here some of my experience of these wondrously gifted and much-loved friends who are and will always be deeply missed.

My first personal encounter with Ruth was by telephone (as her daughter and fellow Oxfordian researcher Bonner Miller Cutting has observed: "We have a saying around here, it all starts with a phone call!"), but even though I had read her books and had been a huge admirer of her work since I discovered it in 1979, for years I couldn't summon up the nerve to call her, chiefly due to a quotation found at the end of her book *Oxfordian Vistas*:

Nowhere is the temptation to write a romance instead of an historical study more compelling than here, and it is for that reason that the greatest care has to be taken in the use of all these documents —Walter Wolf, *Zwei Beritrag zur Zeschichte der achtzehnten Dynastie*.

In those years I had concentrated on theatrical works about Oxford, a play and screenplay, which it seemed she wished to discourage, having placed this forbidding quote at the end of her book. Then in 1987 I picked up a copy of Theatre Communication Group's *The Dramatist's Sourcebook*, and discovered among the listings of prize competitions for 1988, an award being endowed by Ruth and her husband M.D. (administered by the Deep South



Writers Conference at the University of Southwestern Louisiana), with guidelines for submission stipulating that they were seeking a play or screenplay about the life of Edward de Vere, 17th Earl of Oxford. I was stunned, thrilled, and suddenly lost all fear of calling Ruth Loyd Miller. I dialed her 800 number immediately, and bravely announced that I wished to submit my play. Darling Ruth greeted me warmly, truly as if I were an old friend, instantly offering to send me a packet of articles, latest updates to her books as well as material pertaining to the competition. Then, with disarming finesse and infinite charm, she launched into her own version of an Oxfordian vetting process.

Ruth inquired how long I had been an Oxfordian, and how I had arrived at my belief in his identity as Shakespeare: In 1978 a friend had shown me the senior Ogburns' *This Star of England* (I was to learn much later that a friend had given Ruth the same book a decade before). I explained that more or less a decade earlier (it was actually 1966) I had read a book about Marlowe and although I hadn't become a believer in his case, the Stratford paradigm had been completely dismantled for me. When I saw the portrait on the cover of *Star*, I felt an instant sense of recognition. I actually felt I knew this man, that I had seen him before. In any case, I soon had my own copy of the book, and had begun my journey of discovery.

Ruth was then keenly interested to know how my work and career had been received since I had taken up the cause, that is, she was curious if I had lost any employment opportunities because I was known to be an Oxfordian. I replied that if I had I didn't know

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Miller, cont. from p. 5

anything about it (it became clear in the course of our conversation that when Ruth and M.D. began their Oxfordian odyssey, enduring such setbacks had been very much a part of the terrain). In fact, since my explorations of Oxford's life and works were at that time entirely theatrical ones, I told her, what I had experienced was mostly interest in my writing about him as the true Shakespeare. At that time in the 80s there might have been another Oxfordian-themed play or two making the rounds of professional theatres, but not much above that, so my play was first of all a novelty, and it had already been given staged readings at several leading regional stages.

The screenplay I had written in the late 70s seemed to be the first of its kind. I knew this, I told Ruth, because I had taken meetings at all the major studios about it based in large part upon its originality. The timing had not been right for a deal (I had conceived a major epic, then as now a tough sell, and the language was thought a bit too Shakespearean for the mainstream audience), but the writing was thought good enough to land me some screenwriting assignments. This was not what I wanted, of course; I longed to see the film I had written on screen. But no, I told Ruth, I couldn't say that writing about Oxford had ever brought me anything but good fortune and advancement.

This seemed to cheer her, and she turned to more personal matters. Upon learning that I was married to the actor Tom Ligon, she was eager to know if he was an Oxfordian (he is), and she was also happy to hear that he had participated in readings of the play. After an hour or so of exchanging views on Oxford and the current state of the debate, Ruth gently clarified that she and M.D. (as he was called by friends and family) only underwrote the Miller Award, they did not, as she put it, "interfere in any way with the judges' decision. But," she added delicately, "I always tell people if you don't win to be sure to submit again, because you see, the judges change every year."

She was to make the same statement to me in late 1988 (when I didn't win), but by this time we had become great phone

pals and her friendship and endlessly fascinating discourse on Oxford had become of more interest to me than the prize. But Ruth, as I discovered, had her own ideas about me and that award, so at her persistent urging, I promised that I would submit again, and in the following year, my play did win. When I received the news, there was no question in my mind that Tom and I had to travel to Jennings, Louisiana, to meet Ruth and M.D. Ruth insisted that we stay with them, which proved to be one of the highlights of our lives. We flew to New Orleans, then drove to Jennings for our face-to-face encounter

The intrepid pair traveled all over the world to accomplish Ruth's research, to acquire key documents, volumes and portraits pertaining to Oxford, to secure rights to seminal Oxfordian works and to serve as goodwill ambassadors in furthering the cause. M.D., like Ruth, had many facets: Before he was an esteemed judge who integrated his Southern courtroom (in advance of *Brown v. Board of Education*) he had been a POW, a Hellcat fighter pilot shot down in WW II...

with these two Oxfordian legends. What a weekend that was, barely enough time to become acquainted and yet we all connected in that most immediate of ways—we were friends at first sight.

Neither Tom nor I had spoken with M.D. on the phone at that point, so meeting

him was a complete revelation—here was the man who was really, as my dear friend their daughter Bonner put it, "the wind beneath Ruth's wings." In his mind, she was the scholar, he was the facilitator, and how he fulfilled that role! It was Ruth who wrote and edited *Oxfordian Vistas* and it was M.D. who organized and executed the massive index to both volumes of Ruth's annotated reprint of Looney's seminal Oxfordian work *Shakespeare Identified* (<http://www.ruthmiller.com>). The intrepid pair traveled all over the world to accomplish Ruth's research, to acquire key documents, volumes and portraits pertaining to Oxford, to secure rights to seminal Oxfordian works and to serve as goodwill ambassadors in furthering the cause. M.D., like Ruth, had many facets: Before he was an esteemed judge who integrated his Southern courtroom (in advance of *Brown v. Board of Education*) he had been a POW, a Hellcat fighter pilot shot down in WWII, for which he was awarded the Purple Heart (<http://www.axpow.org/millermilos.htm>).

It perhaps goes without saying that it was a profoundly emotional moment for me to receive the Miller Award in their presence, a prize that carried with it the generous sum of \$1500—it was clear that Ruth and M.D. wanted to be certain that recipients were encouraged and supported in going forward with the work. Their generosity was especially meaningful to me as it derived from highly regarded professionals who had nonetheless given years of *pro bono* service to the Oxfordian cause.

I was never to see Ruth and M.D. in person again, although we spent many hours on the telephone thereafter. It is to be noted that up until 2002, I had little awareness of the Oxfordian community outside of Ruth and M.D., and was not connected to the world wide web. One evening in August, after Ruth and I had been turning over new theories for about an hour, she suddenly said (in that heavenly Mississippi Delta drawl), "KC, you know M.D. and I were wondering if you know Roger Stritmatter?" I replied that I didn't. She continued, "He has a new and very fine newsletter called *Shakespeare Matters*." She paused, then: "Clever, don't you think? He's playing on his name a bit, and making

a true statement at the same time" (Actually, it should be acknowledged that the author of the clever name of the present publication is Bill Boyle, and the genesis had no connection to the present editor's last name--Ed).

"Right," I replied, "And who Shakespeare is matters." Ruth laughed, "Yes, I believe that's what they're saying. We think you should know each other," she went on, "Roger's carrying out some excellent research, so you might want to subscribe, the articles are very good, and it will give you a chance to see what's going on in the world of Oxfordian studies."

Not one to resist Ruth after such a testimonial, and as I had just acquired a computer, as soon as I hung up with her I found the Fellowship site, joined with an e-subscription, and was immediately sent an email by Lynne Kositsky who welcomed me and set me up on the Forums. Several thousand posts would follow, as have many cherished friendships with Fellowship members and fellow Oxfordians. In 2004 I became a Trustee of the Fellowship, and today am a contributing editor to *Shakespeare Matters*, writing articles and working with others on essays I believe Ruth and M.D. would be proud of.

Now more than ever, I wish to express my heartfelt gratitude for these bright lights of the Oxfordian firmament, Ruth and M.D. Miller, for their leadership, boundless encouragement and inspiration, and for their generous commitment to Oxfordians and Oxfordian studies, a commitment they undertook and maintained with breathtaking fidelity for over three decades, for it is this steadfast level of commitment that guides and strengthens all of us, and informs the Oxfordian challenge of the 21st century.

Au revoir, beloved friends.

K.C. Ligon was the recipient of the 1989 and 1990 Miller Awards of the Deep South Writers Conference for her play *Isle of Dogs* and her screenplay *The Shadow on the Sun*.

(*Shakespeare's Language, cont. from p. 4*)

not require books, experience, or education to underwrite his literary production. He sat by the banks of the Avon, twiddling his thumbs until inspiration struck.

Daydreaming leaves no fingerprints. Anti-Stratfordians, we are told, don't understand Shakespeare's "negative capability" – his capacity of "being in uncertainties, mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact and reason," as Keats put it in a famous letter to his brothers. It is neither necessary nor

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appropriate here to rebut in detail these beguiling notions. But it deserves to be remarked that orthodox Shakespeareans have not, as a group, displayed a very impressive capacity for "negative capability." As former Folger Education Director Richmond Crinkley has noted, a hagiographic halo hangs over the entire tradition of orthodox bardolatry. Separated from context or rationale, facts predictably take precedence over qualities; but when the same facts become inconvenient reminders of the mystery of Shakespeare, they are ignored, or submerged in the purgatory of irrelevant legends that will not be discussed in graduate school or at academic conferences.

This special issue focuses on education: not Shakespeare's education, but our own. Our two lead stories, by Thomas Regnier and Robert Barrett, Jr.,

relate contemporary experiences teaching Shakespeare with a twist. Familiar to members of the Shakespeare Fellowship for his regular presentations on Shakespeare's legal knowledge at our annual conferences, Regnier recounts his experience teaching Shakespeare and the Law at the University of Miami School of Law. His course, taught for the first time in Spring 2006, uses the plays to teach law and legal reasoning. As a natural adjunct to the legal focus he also exposes students to the authorship question, since authorship is inextricably bound up with scholarship on Shakespeare's law and "the authorship controversy [is] fruitful territory for teaching reasoning and argument" (12).

Barrett's article is a first person account, originally written a dozen years ago, of his exciting – and sometimes nerve-racking — experience teaching the authorship question at Central Kitsap Jr. High School in Washington state. The apoplexy of local traditionalists (since abated), incited a spate of rumor-mongering and demands for Barrett's resignation. His crime? Getting students enthused about studying Shakespeare. His after school program in the authorship question was so popular that he had to select students based on entrance examinations. Although the publication of Barrett's essay has been delayed for several years, we are grateful that the author recently granted us permission to print this essay. It offers a witty and worldly-wise account of the trials and tribulations of a sincere and talented educator making his way in an occupation fraught with vested intellectual interests.

Daniel McKay's essay, "The Persona of the Courtly Poet in the Sonnets," argues that a chief stimulus to the development of the anti-Stratfordian discourse of the 18th and 19th centuries was the publication of Malone's first critical edition of the Sonnets in 1780. McKay's essay demonstrates that the Stratfordian argument that the authorship question is a late phenomenon, is one that, like appetite in Ulysses' formula, "must...at last eat up itself" (1.3.121). The premise of that argument is that 17th and 18th century readers or theatergoers were in a better position than we are to evaluate biographical evidence in relation to the

(*Shakespeare's Language, cont. on p. 8*)

Shakespeare's Language, cont. from p. 8

works, simply by virtue of temporal proximity. On the contrary, McKay cites Gary Taylor's observation that during the fifty years between the Restoration and the publication of Rowe's *Complete Works* (1709) "an educated reader or speaker in 1660 could be expected to know only three things at most about Shakespeare's life: that he was an actor, that he had been born at Stratford, and that he was poorly educated by the standards of restoration high culture" (cited in McKay 19).

In "A First Blast of the Trumpet against the Monstrous Adversary," Christopher

When reading this text your editor is irrepressibly reminded of something from *Through the Looking Glass*: imagine the audacity of the white herring who refused to appear when deposed by King James' representative! After receiving the correction from Paul that "Wytheringes" was in fact a real person, not a figure of speech invented for the entertainment of a child, Nelson acknowledged the error on his website.

Paul reviews recent Oxfordian responses to Professor Alan Nelson's book on Edward de Vere. Paul, as many are aware, was the independent scholar who first noticed one of the most egregious errors in Nelson's book. The story may be known to readers of *Shakespeare Matters*, but it is so revelatory of Nelson's methods and competencies that a retelling may be justified. In the transcript of a Sept. 17, 1604, letter from Henry de Vere to Lord Charles Howard, Nelson inserts a hyphen into the name "Wytheringes" ("wyt-herrings"): "Your lordship was pleased to

send your warrant for Wyt-herringes... reporting the utter refusall of Wyt-herringes to appear before your Lordship." Nelson justified the emendation with this interpretation: "It is necessary to understand that the letter concerns a fish called white-herrings (here hyphenated to enhance comprehensibility)... The text is not in Henry's hand, having evidently been composed by an adult for the entertainment of the child" (432). When reading this text your editor is irrepressibly reminded of something from *Through the Looking Glass*: imagine the audacity of the white herring who refused to appear when deposed by the royal envoy! After receiving the correction from Paul that "Wytheringes" was in fact a real person, not a figure of speech invented for the entertainment of a child, Nelson acknowledged the error on his website.

In this article, Paul surveys some of the action since then, examines in detail four examples of Nelson's incorrect conclusions (bolstered by faulty methodology and faulty assumptions), and notes Nelson's failure to follow up on promised corrections to his website, despite numerous communications to Nelson over the past two years documenting many errors of fact or interpretation in his book. Paul concludes that Nelson may be "refusing to deal with reality... [and may be] so overwhelmed by the sheer bulk of the corrections he's received that he's been paralyzed into inaction" (22).

Fortunately for Professor Nelson, Columbia's James Shapiro is purportedly about to seize the baton to take his own crack at the "monstrous adversary" and his foolish advocates. *C'est plu change, c'est la meme.*

-Ed

Book Review:

***The Shakespeare Wars: Clashing Scholars, Public Fiascoes, Palace Coups*
by Ron Rosenbaum**

New York: Random House, 2006.

Reviewed by Richard F. Whalen

The Shakespeare wars of the title are the arguments among establishment Shakespeare scholars over what Shakespeare wrote in the canonical plays and, especially, which of the two *King Lear* texts or the three *Hamlets* is more truly "Shakespearean." But the sub-title is a better

Rosenbaum shares all his moments of enthusiasm with the reader, and even includes himself in his index, which may be a first for an author. He writes in the first person and addresses the reader throughout. In his preface he says, "I want you to care as much as I care about the bitter dispute over the variations in *Hamlet* and *Lear*..."

description of the book, which covers a multitude of Rosenbaum's enthusiasms.

Rosenbaum is an entertaining writer, if a bit long-winded, and his enthusiasm for Shakespeare's works is admirable, if a bit overwhelming. He writes of "the unbearable pleasures of Shakespeare" and the "delicious mysteries" of the Pavier quartos. He admires an "astonishingly compressed" talk by Stephen Booth, and a "sensational moment" in a presentation by Stephen Greenblatt, although he deplors Greenblatt's fantasy-biography, *Will in the*

(Cont. on p. 30)

(*Shakespeare Meets Frost, cont. from p. 1*)

Flipping through the pages of *A Handbook to Literature* by Holman and Harmon, I stumbled on the entry for “Baconian Theory.” After a relatively restrained and straightforward definition of the term, which incidentally mentioned the Earl of Oxford, the writer concluded by saying, “The evidence for any of these theories is fragmentary and inconclusive at best and, at its worst, absurd; and our steadily growing scholarly knowledge of Shakespeare and his world increasingly discredits these theories without silencing their advocates.” Well! There was little danger I’d venture down that path less traveled by! And, for many years, I didn’t.

Then, on April 18, 1989, I saw and videotaped a PBS *Frontline* program, “The Shakespeare Mystery.” Actually I paid little attention to it at the time, merely cataloging and storing the tape for some possible future use in the classroom. With benefit of hindsight, I see this as a regrettable delay in my education.

A year later I found Ogburn on the shelf of Bloomsbury Books in Ashland, Oregon, while visiting my parents in nearby Medford. I began reading and became so enthralled, I ignored Mom and Dad for the rest of the visit. My first traversal of the 892-page tome was difficult and confusing. Ogburn assumed I knew much more about English history and Shakespeare than I actually did at that time, but I had an ineluctable sense that what I was reading was important. So, I immediately read the book again.

The effect was explosive. I launched a crusade against every major book store in the Pacific Northwest, especially targeting Powell’s Bookstore in Portland and Blue Dragon Bookshop in Ashland, and I carried off authorship booty that overflows my home and classroom libraries today. I contacted the Millers in Louisiana for their priceless offerings by mail, visited bookstores in Victoria, BC, and nearly lapsed into catatonia when I discovered a handsome copy of *This Star of England*, by Dorothy and Charlton Ogburn, on the bottom shelf of William James Bookseller in Port Townsend, Washington—for about \$8.00. I joined SOS and Shakespeare Authorship Roundtable, then flew to Los Angeles to hear Dr. Alan Nelson speak

about tin mines and tin ears.

It was all but impossible to talk in the classroom about what was fast becoming a consuming passion with me. If the “teachable moments” didn’t appear on their own volition, I conjured them up. (The prominent display of a large poster of the incredibly monstrous Droeshout portrait of Shakespeare is especially useful for this purpose.) Once their attention was captured, my ninth graders surprisingly asked question after question, often cutting each other off, scoffing, smiling, making strong eye contact with me, and from time to time penetrating straight to the heart of the authorship issue with questions and

Once their attention was captured, my ninth graders surprisingly asked question after question, often cutting each other off, scoffing, smiling, making strong eye contact with me, and from time to time penetrating straight to the heart of the authorship issue with questions and comments that revealed genuine curiosity and active thinking.

comments that revealed genuine curiosity and active thinking.

Yes, we’re all familiar with the classroom parlor game called Let’s Untrack the Teacher Until the Bell Rings. However, that isn’t what was happening. But what if it was? What English teacher wouldn’t want to pretend he was being had and play the game for 10, or 20, or even 40 minutes by fielding an unstoppable flow of questions from students, not about the Seattle Mariners or the decline of rock, but about Shakespeare?

I dusted off the PBS *Frontline* videotape and discovered that the absurd, fatuous, and self-revealing pontifications of A. L. Rowse struck a chord with the kids and opened up unanticipated opportunities for them to question and discuss important academic issues, as well as details of the authorship topic itself. As their interest grew, I produced handouts: the introductions to books by Whalen and Fowler, the de Vere entry in Michael Hart’s *The 100*, and articles from the SOS web site. I brought in videotapes: travelogues about Stratford-on-Avon and its favorite son, and the shameless A&E Biography of Shakespeare. I put up a laminated poster of Hedingham Castle. A student routed a plaque in wood shop for the classroom that reads “De Vere Lives.”

I built a classroom reference library of authorship texts that I had acquired on my buying spree—duplicate copies that were inferior to the ones I kept at home, of course—and that reflected a variety of positions, from orthodox, Stratfordian biographies to cases built for candidates other than Oxford. I encouraged my advanced kids, who were gathered together in a “challenge” section, to use this library to research project papers on authorship. We discussed elements of critical thinking and mutual respect. And as we read *Romeo and Juliet* in class, the search for authorship clues began to fascinate some students almost as much as their search for sexual innuendo.

It’s hard to keep this kind of activity quiet, as if there should be any need to. So, when some money was freed in the school district last year to fund a few after-school seminars for eager, generally bright students, I was urged by colleagues at my school and district officials to submit a proposal on Shakespeare. And I agreed to do so. However, my submission carried the proviso that the seminar be on Shakespeare authorship, not just Shakespeare.

Having picked up the gauntlet and now feeling bold and feisty—after all, the district had broadcast a need, and I was simply answering the call—I decided to push the glass ceiling. I requested thirty textbooks—fifteen Oxfordian (Richard Whalen’s *Shakespeare: Who Was He?*),

(*Cont. on p. 10*)

(*Shakespeare Meets Robert Frost, cont. from p. 9*)

and another fifteen ostensibly agnostic (John Michell's *Who Wrote Shakespeare?*). The district had expressed willingness to fund a field trip, so, still in a creative and expansive mood, I proposed an overnight field trip to Ashland, 475 miles away, to see a live

Students were returning to tell me that the high school took a dim view of their interest in authorship. When they tried to discuss it in class, they were quickly and firmly squelched. One student was informed that "that's already settled," and another was told it was "stupid." A colleague and friend of mine at the high school said he tried to bring the subject up with a group of English teachers at a meeting and was rebuffed by thinly disguised hostility. One of the teachers told him I should be fired. The flyer and cover letter, over my name, that were mailed to every secondary school in the Pacific Northwest to invite teachers to this conference never reached my friend, presumably because they were neither distributed nor posted at the high school....

performance of *King Lear*.

As Mr. Rogers might characterize this assault on conservative sensibilities, Can you say 'chutzpah,' boys and girls?" Incredibly, the proposal was approved *in toto*. Yes, my school district can be pretty daring and wonderful. So many kids were interested in the seminar, incidentally, I had to require them to submit written, fully justified requests, with grade resumes, in order to limit it

competitively to a manageable size of 15. One parent later put pressure on me through a school counselor to raise the class size to 16 in order to include her daughter. The seminar met for nearly three months and by any measure was a success.

But all was not well.

For several years, ominous clouds had been massing on the horizon. Students were returning to tell me that the high school took a dim view of their interest in authorship. When they tried to discuss it in class, they were quickly and firmly squelched. One student was informed that "that's already settled," and another was told it was "stupid." A colleague and friend at the high school said he tried to bring the subject up with a group of English teachers at a meeting and was rebuffed by thinly disguised hostility. One of the teachers told him I should be fired. The flyer and cover letter, over my name, that were mailed to every secondary school in the Pacific Northwest to invite teachers to this conference never reached my friend, presumably because they were neither distributed nor posted at the high school.

I took a wry amusement in all this. At my school, teachers were genuinely interested in what I was doing--except for one, I should note, a gym teacher who had recently been to Stratford-on-Avon and saw so many souvenir shops she thought it was ridiculous for anyone to think Shakespeare didn't write the plays. Other teachers, though, were borrowing my authorship books and asking for handouts. One teacher moved to San Diego with an armful of materials from me, and another took his materials to a school assignment in Zimbabwe. At the local high school, it might take more time, but the teachers there would come calling eventually, too, and I would lend them books and give them handouts, and then we could all teach authorship together. At least, that's what Queen Mab, the fairies' midwife, was telling me.

The storm broke during the first week of the 1994 school year. The details still are not clear, but supposedly I had said something in my classroom, and one of my former students repeated it to his mother, who repeated it to a family friend, a high school teacher, who repeated it to the English teacher of my former student. She e-mailed me, furious, and she elaborated her tirade with the charge that other teachers at the high school spoke of "horror stories" involving my former students and their "looking for a fight" attitude.

My wry amusement faded. In its place was deep embarrassment; a vague fear that my reputation was ruined in the school district, which would not cause me to lose my job, necessarily, but could affect my future professional opportunities, such as after-school seminars; and a knot in my stomach that lasted a week, despite the angry teacher's finally e-mailing me that she had made a mistake and apologizing. It was the thought, though, of "horror stories" and "looking for a fight" attitudes that plagued my thoughts. Had I really created a monster? Where everything seemed so right, what had I done wrong?

Apparently, a lot, both by commission and omission. I tried to rectify the mess by writing a four-page letter to the English department head at the high school, through my principal, explaining and rationalizing what I had been doing. It took two weeks for the letter to make its way to my friend in the English

department, and today, three weeks later, I still have not received a reply of any sort—by phone, e-mail, or letter. My friend still talks to me, though.

And so I come to the close of my cautionary tale. “A sadder and a wiser man, He rose the morrow morn,” Samuel Taylor Coleridge wrote. But many of you are ahead of me. In the quiet of this room, you see what I couldn’t, or wouldn’t, caught up in the fun of discovery. I did learn a few things, though, that I will quickly

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mention now:

1. Authorship is a wonderful adjunct to Shakespearean curricula in the secondary school classroom. It quickly grabs even the most reluctant students and holds them through the reading and discussion of Shakespearean works. It effectively addresses both cognitive and affective domains, and I am committed to using it.

2. And it gets better: Authorship slides open a window into such contiguous fields as Elizabethan history, academic integrity, critical thinking, other major writers, publishing, textual analysis, and so on.

3. The teacher must strive constantly and mightily to remain fair and objective. To think well and gain an appreciation of a glorious literature are the learning objectives, not indoctrination of kids into the teacher’s private mental world.

4. I believe the furious teacher I alluded to earlier was called a “Stratfordian” to her face by my former student, and not being attuned to the affectionate connotation Oxfordians attach to that epithet, she took offense. And with good reason: It ignores the complexity of intellectual endeavor, wherein there will always be great diversity of opinion, factions, and factions within factions. We need to resist labeling and creating artificial dichotomies

when talking to kids. Young people can work very nicely in the gray area if we don’t underestimate them.

5. Authorship is a difficult topic, though, both as a research problem and, for the layman, as a conceptual problem. My kids easily follow authorship arguments while I present and explain them, but on the way home after school, some of the arguments, even basic ones, sometimes become confounded and fleeting. I focus on a few, clear-cut points, such as the Gad’s Hill parallel in *Henry IV-Part 1*, one of my favorites, the one that first hooked me!

6. I constantly remind my kids that the vast majority of scholars support the historic image of Shakespeare. At this age, I want clear thinkers, not warriors or missionaries. I believe mutual respect is seriously lacking in the authorship debate, and it not only diminishes the participants, it hampers the search for truth.

7. Communicate. I obviously did a poor job of that, and it’s the root of the strained relations I now have with the high school English teachers. I should have been talking to them from the very beginning, certainly at the first signs of trouble. Actually, I always intended to, but I always had more pressing matters to handle. At least, that’s what I thought.

I began my involvement in authorship studies because of a wall I thought was unfairly erected between me and Shakespeare. For the next few weeks, perhaps months or even longer, I will be directing my thoughts and energy towards a second wall, a wall that stands quite in contradistinction from that of Robert Frost’s poem. This wall is strong enough as it is between me at the junior high school and my neighbors at the high school, and this wall certainly does not need to be mended, but torn down.

Robert M. Barrett Jr. recently retired from many years teaching English and Honors English at Central Kitsap Junior High School.

(Teaching Shakespeare and the Law, cont. from p. 1)

often read scenes from the plays aloud. The students were encouraged to voice their opinions on the plays and the legal issues, and we had many lively debates. Some of the most animated occurred when we discussed the validity (or lack thereof) of Shylock’s bond, whether Ophelia was “insane” by modern legal definitions, and the “real meaning” of “let’s kill all the lawyers” in *2 Henry VI*. As part of the course, each student had to write a 30-page research paper on a topic related to Shakespeare and the law.

Legal Issues in the Plays

Because this is a law school course, my first priority is to teach law and legal reasoning. These are some of the legal topics we studied in each play:

Merchant of Venice: law courts and equity courts, justice and mercy, law of debt and contract, Roman Twelve Tables, the legal propriety of Portia’s actions in the trial scene, common law versus civil law.

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(Shakespeare and the Law, cont. from p. 11)

Measure for Measure: law and equity, justice and mercy, crime and punishment, marriage “pre-contracts,” “dead letter” laws, legislating morality, monarch versus parliament.

Hamlet: law of homicide, insanity, benefit of clergy, revenge versus rule of law, property and inheritance law, Magna Carta, English statutes (De Donis, Uses, Wills), *Hales v. Pettit*, fine and recovery, dower, jointure, quarantine, ecclesiastical law on suicide.

Merry Wives of Windsor: property law, law of fraudulent conveyance, *Twyne’s Case*.

Henry the Sixth, Part 2: freedom versus anarchy, role of lawyers in society, law of witchcraft, peasant uprisings.

Richard III: law of succession, law of treason, libel-in-fiction.

Othello: law of defamation, *Davies v. Gardiner*, evidence and standards of proof.

I explained how the authorship debate seems to be an unspoken subtext to much recent orthodox scholarship, such as Stephen Greenblatt’s *Will in the World*....I also found the authorship controversy fruitful territory for teaching reasoning and argument. I gave the class a list of examples of logical fallacies and evasions as described in Robert J. Fogelin’s book on informal logic. Then I read the students some passages from a Stratfordian article. The students were quickly able to spot the fallacies and evasions.

Shakespeare’s plays are a wonderful entry point into English common law topics, and some also give insight into the civil law that dominated most of continental Europe.² Conversely, many of the plays are better understood if one approaches them by way of their legal issues. Shakespeare’s plays are helpful in teaching not just the technical side of the law, but also jurisprudential matters such as the Aristotelian concept of “equity,” as seen especially in *Merchant of Venice* and *Measure for Measure*.

Authorship Question

I mentioned the authorship controversy briefly in the first class and told the students that I am skeptical of the Stratford theory, that I believe that the authorship of the works is an open question, and that I believe that the Oxfordians have a strong case. I did not bring up the subject again until we had finished studying all seven plays and the legal issues in them. As a kind of “summing up” class, we discussed (1) the accuracy of Shakespeare’s legal knowledge, (2) whether Shakespeare had legal training, and (3) the authorship question. I assigned the students some readings, pro³ and con,⁴ on Shakespeare’s legal accuracy. The students admitted that, based on what they had studied, it was difficult, if not impossible, to find any serious legal errors in Shakespeare. I encouraged them to look for legal issues as they continued to study Shakespeare and the law.

I also assigned my own article on the authorship question,⁵ which I think is a good short introduction to the authorship debate, especially for law students and lawyers. The students were open-minded about the issue, and several made Oxfordian-sounding noises while discussing it. At least a few seemed to be gravitating toward the Oxfordian position. I told the students about some of my experiences since joining the authorship debate, including attending the University of Tennessee symposium (“Who Wrote Shakespeare? — An Evidentiary Puzzle”) in 2004 and speaking at Shakespeare Fellowship/Shakespeare Oxford Society gatherings. I explained how the authorship debate seems to be an unspoken subtext to much recent orthodox scholarship, such as Stephen Greenblatt’s *Will in the World*.⁶ Many students said that discussing the authorship question was an excellent way to wrap up the course.

I also found the authorship controversy fruitful territory for teaching reasoning and argument. I gave the class a list of examples of logical fallacies and evasions as described in Robert J. Fogelin’s book on informal logic.⁷ Then I read the students some passages from a Stratfordian article. The students were quickly able to spot the fallacies and evasions, such as (to name a few) “*ad hominem* attack,” “appeal to authority,” “setting up a straw man,” “assurance,” and “slanting.”

Student Papers

Students chose a variety of topics for their research papers — for example, the law of witchcraft in the plays, law of marriage, and natural law versus positive law. The most interesting and original paper I received was about the law of debt in one of Shakespeare’s most obscure plays, *Timon of Athens*. The play is seldom performed, and there is comparatively little criticism on it. As far as the student who wrote the paper could find (and as far as I am aware), there is only one legal analysis of the play, and this consists of slightly more than three pages in one of George W. Keeton’s books.⁸ Keeton, a brilliant legal scholar, found the play unsatisfactory and considered that it had many legal loose ends that the author never tied up. After researching the legal issues further, my student convincingly argued that the play *is* legally coherent and accurate. I won’t go into details here because the

student plans to publish the paper. This conclusion has implications for the authorship question because the more accurate and sophisticated Shakespeare's law is shown to be, the less likely it becomes that the author was a person with no legal training. This is especially significant in a play such as *Timon* where the plot — big spender squanders most of his wealth buying lavish gifts for his friends — has so many parallels to Edward de Vere's life.⁹

A few students chose to do Shakespeare-based moot court problems for their final projects. A moot court is a teaching device used in law schools in which students write appellate briefs and make oral arguments based on a hypothetical appeals court case. Inspired by the case of *People v. Hamlet*, in which the Danish prince appealed his convictions for the murders of, among others, Polonius, Claudius, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern,¹⁰ the students created legal situations based on Shakespeare plays and wrote appellate briefs advocating their clients' causes. One student represented Lady Macbeth in the appeal of her murder conviction. He argued that (1) Lady Macbeth should have been tried separately from her husband because the jury was unfairly prejudiced towards her after hearing evidence of Macbeth's crimes; (2) self-incriminating statements she made while sleepwalking should not have been admitted into evidence; and (3) she was unjustly denied the right to argue an insanity defense.

Two other students teamed up to create a *Measure for Measure* moot court in which Isabella, Juliet, and Claudio's child sued Angelo for, among other things, the wrongful death of Claudio. Of course, creating these moot courts requires a bit of tampering with the plot (e.g., having the Macbeths live to be tried for murder, having Claudio really be executed), but they are loads of fun and good starting points for legal research and analysis. In the last two class sessions of the semester, the students who did moot court projects argued their cases before their fellow students, with me as the judge, just as they would have done before an appeals court. The students who wrote more traditional papers each gave talks to the class on the results of their research.

Conclusion

The course received excellent evaluations from the students, some of whom said it was their best course in law school. A faculty member who sat in on the course also rated it very highly, reporting that the professor "expected the class to engage at a high level." I will be teaching the course again in the spring of 2007. I will probably change the lineup of plays slightly each year in order to explore different plays; but *Merchant of Venice*, *Measure for Measure*, and *Hamlet* will always be part of the course. In 2007, we will study *Henry V* because it will give us a chance to study Theodor Meron's works on the law of war and the rules of chivalry.¹¹

Shakespeare is an exciting vehicle for teaching law, and understanding the law enhances one's understanding of the plays. I think that, with some adjustment, such a course could be taught at the undergraduate level. If anyone is interested in teaching a similar course, feel free to contact me at Thomas.Regnier@gmail.com or TRegnier@aol.com.

NOTES

¹ Baker, J.H. *An Introduction to English Legal History*. London: Butterworths, 4th ed., 2002.

² See Friedler, Edith Z. "Essay: Shakespeare's Contribution to the Teaching of Comparative Law – Some Reflections on *The Merchant of Venice*," *Louisiana Law Review* 60 (2000): 1087-1102.

³ Alexander, Mark. "Shakespeare's 'Bad Law,'" *Shakespeare Oxford Newsletter*, 35:4 (2000): 1, 9-13.

⁴ "Some of Shakespeare's Errors in Legal Terminology" in Devecmon, William C. *In Re Shakespeare's "Legal Acquirements": Notes by an Unbeliever Therein*. New York: Shakespeare Society, 1899, 32-51.

⁵ Regnier, Thomas. "Could Shakespeare Think Like a Lawyer? How Inheritance Law Issues in *Hamlet* May Shed Light on the Authorship Question," *University of Miami Law Review*, 57 (2003): 377-428. This article is available on the Shakespeare Fellowship website at www.shakespearefellowship.org/virtualclassroom/Law/regnier.htm.

⁶ Greenblatt, Stephen. *Will in the World: How Shakespeare Became Shakespeare*. New York: Norton, 2004.

⁷ Fogelin, Robert J. *Understanding Argument: An Introduction to Informal Logic*. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1978.

⁸ Keeton, George W. *Shakespeare and His Legal Problems*. London: A. & C. Black, 1930, 81-84.

⁹ See Anderson, Mark. *"Shakespeare" by Another Name*. New York: Gotham Books, 2005, 184-85, 323-24.

¹⁰ See Assoc. of Bar of New York City, *The Elsinore Appeal*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1996. Daniel J. Kornstein, author of *Kill All the Lawyers? Shakespeare's Legal Appeal* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton Univ. Press, 1994), represented Prince Hamlet; Stephen Gillers, an authority on legal ethics, represented the State of Denmark. The attorneys argued their cases to a panel consisting of two federal judges and one Shakespeare professor.

¹¹ Meron, Theodor. *Henry's Wars and Shakespeare's Laws*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994; Meron, Theodor. *Bloody Constraint: War and Chivalry in Shakespeare*. Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1998.

Elizabeth I: Did she or didn't she?

'Shakespeare' in the Privy Chamber

by K.C. Ligon

Elizabeth I, the visually stunning, engagingly written, brilliantly acted and directed two-part HBO film starring Helen Mirren and Jeremy Irons, has been universally praised as the best version of the monarch's life ever. Nominated for thirteen Emmy Awards, it has won nine, more than any other film or television show this season. Mirren's phenomenal performance as the legendary 'Virgin Queen' reveals an Elizabeth of immense authority yet emotional fragility, delineating the primary conflict of the ruler's life as that of a woman of uncommon intellect who was nonetheless possessed of powerful appetites and emotions that always threatened to dominate her existence if she did not forcibly keep them in check.

The filmmakers set out to portray an Elizabeth for all time, one that would resonate with a contemporary audience, and given the current appetite for behind the scenes celebrity life this inevitably demanded a strong spotlight on the celebrated queen's intimate relationships. Thus the critical question of whether the queen was a true virgin, as opposed to an iconic and political one, loomed from the outset, as well as the issue of who were her true intimates. And with an eye to the entire entertainment package the creators do not simply dramatize their choices, they provide further illumination of them in interviews for the website and the 'making of' featurette that first played on HBO and now appears on the recently released DVD. Interestingly, what the film communicates and what the interviews state is not without a level of contradiction.

No doubt writer Nigel Williams and director Tom Hooper gave serious consideration to the choices made in the last big-budget Elizabeth I film, *Elizabeth*, starring Cate Blanchett, where the queen's sexual relationship with Lord Robert Dudley (later Earl of Leicester) was unequivocally shown, and possibly took

note that the recent *BBC Masterpiece Theatre* version "The Virgin Queen," starring Anne-Marie Duff, reinstated the queen's virginity (with a clearly unconsummated relationship with Dudley).

The casting of the brilliant Jeremy Irons as the Earl of Leicester in *Elizabeth I* proved to be as inspired as that of Mirren, since apart from his singular gifts as an actor Irons also brings a subtext to his portrayal of Elizabeth's favorite: His awareness of the authorship question as it pertains to another courtier who captured her heart, the 17th Earl of Oxford. Irons had quite recently and publicly voiced his skepticism about the relative merits of the Stratfordian case versus that of the de Vere claim in a 2004 interview with Charlie Rose and *Merchant of Venice* co-star Al Pacino and director Michael Radford, all of whom were quite stunned at his remarks, and although he assured them he could expound further on the evidence in favor of de Vere as Shakespeare, "I could go on and on," as he said, Rose brought an immediate end to the interview.

Thus with the aura of that public declaration, Irons' presence in the role of Leicester (a part that the actor well-known for his sensitive and poetic mien and delivery might be said not to have been absolutely perfect for, despite his affinity for Leicester's outdoorsy, athletic pursuits, and at times rough and growling voice) prompts the viewer familiar with Oxford's presence in the Queen's private life to be on the lookout for any aspects of performance that would suggest Oxford, rather than Leicester, in Irons' portrayal. In fact in his HBO interview Irons himself alerts us that he is not 'only' playing Leicester: "She [Elizabeth] had many favorites, but because we only have four hours to tell this story, one has to simplify. And so Leicester represents all the favorites, really, apart from Essex."



Helen Mirren stars as a sensuous Elizabeth I (with Jeremy Irons as a most "Oxfordian" Leicester) in the new HBO release: "She knew that her body as a woman was also a political body. It was something to be bought and sold politically."

In key moments of intimacy between Irons' Leicester and Mirren's Elizabeth, one particular favorite surfaces palpably, and whether it was the intention of author Williams or director Hooper, it seems quite likely that Irons knew well what he would illuminate in those scenes. There is Leicester's paraphrase of the E.O.-signed "Verses Ascribed to Queen Elizabeth" as if it were his own self-revelatory, off-the-cuff poem to the queen, while throughout the film the theme that Leicester's greatest virtue to Elizabeth was his unfailing expression of the *Truth* (evoking de Vere's motto) is reinforced in dialogue and action. Irons' Leicester also possesses a flashing, mercurial wit, his wry humor extending to mockery of the accents of her majesty's French suitor and his entourage.

This ever-creative Leicester also extemporizes dialogue ('foul scorn,' 'heart and stomach of a king') for the Tilbury speech, and provides astute wardrobe advice (that striking armor) for the Queen's appearance in the field. Courtier and queen steal furtive smiles over her majestic readings of his dialogue, giving us Elizabeth the actress with Leicester the auteur, even though it was the flamboyant and theatrical Oxford who wrote court entertainments for the Queen, Oxford who performed before her as the Knight of the Tree of the Sun, Oxford who was the leading Elizabethan courtier poet and playwright. The Tilbury scene as performed by these two master actors also unmistakably invokes the presence of Shakespeare; the tone and character of the speech, the sense of life-and-death occasion, the monarch suddenly and boldly stepping off a raised platform down into the muddy field to exhort the soldiers up close and personal, her stirring oratory that echoes (or inspired) many a call to arms in Shakespeare's history plays.

The big picture with *Elizabeth I* is that the issue of who the true intimates and court insiders were is woven into every aspect of production. The great theme of the contradiction between the monarch's public and personal life is seen and felt in every frame, and the question of her romantic and sexual life inextricably part of that. As Tom Hooper describes it:

...for Elizabeth, whether she has a child or not, whether she got pregnant or not, who her lover was, who she married, these are all decisions that had incredibly important political implications...whether she was a virgin or not, who she married—these were all pressing political concerns...we wanted to show the Queen more with her very intimate circle so that we weren't constantly involved in presenting the Queen as this austere monarch. We wanted to get in the room with her and the people she knew best over the years so that we could see her at her most informal...

Hooper's vision as realized by production designer Eve Stewart involved what he calls the "hierarchy of space" in the queen's palace, as evidenced by the structure of Whitehall:

As you come into the palace you go through a public area, which pretty much anyone can gain access to. And then you come across a guarded entrance to the presence chamber

which is the big yellow room with the famous hallway painting of Henry VIII above Elizabeth's throne. And the presence chamber was sort of like the first level of access to the Queen; this is where she would meet dignitaries and ambassadors, where she would be consulted about petitions from commoners, so it wasn't public, it was controlled but when she was there she was always on show... Then as you pass through the doors of the presence chamber, you come into the privy gallery...which really only her ladies in waiting, her lovers, and her privy counselors have access to, and we're very careful in the film to never show anyone other than those characters in this space. And off the privy

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gallery, you have the privy chamber which is a meeting room a bit like the presence chamber but much smaller, much more intimate. And this is where she receives only her most intimate circle. And then you have this whole suite of rooms leading up to her bedchambers... obviously none of her counselors would go to any of her bedrooms. The only males who have access to her bedroom suite were Essex and Leicester.

Well, perhaps in this film, we might add, but the point is well-taken. Meantime, however, a question arises: Was not the hierarchy of space exactly how Elizabeth exercised control? Hooper himself suggests that:

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(Elizabeth I, cont. from p. 15)

...as the most powerful person in England, she was free to take a young lover in the way that typically middle age men take young female lovers. And it's incredibly unusual to reverse the roles that way in this period. But the Queen had the freedom to do it because of her power.

It must be understood that the film never depicts sexual intercourse between the Queen and anyone, yet the director and writer Williams repeatedly refer to her 'lovers.' There is nary a mention of Ben Jonson's remark that Elizabeth had a "membrana that made her incapable of men." In fact, from the very start (1579), where we see the queen submit to a gynecological examination, we are told quite the opposite: "All is as it should be" pronounces the physician, though the immediate question is not her presumed virginal condition, it is her ability to have children. Williams says:

...the Earl of Leicester...was also most certainly Elizabeth's lover...And the story of the last ten years of her reign is one of faction, and of conflict, and of somebody trying to hold on to the glory of her court, and the glory of that Armada victory, and it all turning sour; especially via the Earl of Essex who is almost a replay of her relationship with the Earl of Leicester....a Protestant patron and indeed almost certainly Elizabeth's lover.

Mirren provides a solution to the apparent contradiction, following the lead of historian Dr. David Starkey, who avers that Elizabeth was probably "technically a virgin" but that Leicester and later Essex would have had "Clintonian sex" with her (the queen being the Clinton figure). Yet despite HBO's relaxed standards with respect to language and sexual content, what we see is a series of arrested, if electric, moments of thwarted fulfillment, inevitably followed by Elizabeth pulling free, wiping away stoic tears, gritting her teeth and getting on with the business of government (and no actual sex, 'Clintonian' or otherwise). Mirren says:

She loved with great passion, great commitment...The big question. Did she or didn't she? Well, no one will ever know. Logically, it seems to me highly unlikely that she would ever have jeopardized her body or her political position...She was a great lover, but she loved power more than anything...So I think if she'd found herself pregnant with an illegitimate child, it would've been an absolute disaster. She could've easily been deposed. And so I don't think she would've ever jeopardized her position like that. She knew that her body as a woman was also a political body. It was something to be bought and sold politically. That's why she was always flirting with foreign princes. She was supposed to be a virgin, and she used it as a political pawn to keep her enemies at bay.

Mirren's comment that Elizabeth was "supposed to be a virgin" hints at an awareness that as a highly intelligent and political animal, Elizabeth flirted with foreign princes with

absolutely no intention of ever marrying any of them. Mirren continues:

So the practical side of my brain doesn't think that she would ever have jeopardized that. But having said that, I suspect she did everything else...I wouldn't be surprised if she got up to a lot of those kinds of sexual games.

And yet we do not actually see that onscreen. Indeed, to view the film in light of these comments, one is struck by what would appear to be a much likelier scenario, that Elizabeth was far cleverer at managing her love life in relation to her iconic status than the filmmakers are actually willing to portray. It begs the question—why does it appear that Elizabeth's "technical" virginity must be preserved? Is it the specter of the various Prince Tudor theories (and their effect on the Stratford paradigm) that causes these theatrical artists to shy away from presenting Elizabeth as a fully sexual and ruthlessly political being? Perhaps the tradition of the Virgin Queen (even if actually perceived to be as fictional as Santa and the Tooth Fairy) is like that of the working class hero Shakespeare, too cherished to give up.

Finally, one wonders, where is the man William Shakespeare in this life of Elizabeth? Was she even aware of him? Williams confidently asserts: "She was fascinated by artists and writers, not only Shakespeare who is one example, but there are many others." If she were that fascinated by him wouldn't he have ascended the levels in the "hierarchy of space"? One would think he would have at least made it into the Presence Chamber.

For Jeremy Irons Shakespeare's presence is perceptible in the dialogue of the film. Speaking of playwright and screenwriter Nigel Williams' script, Irons says:

...he's written with a great rhythm, a language which is sort of contemporary and yet is not contemporary. It has a period flavor mostly in his rhythms, but sometimes in his constructions, sometimes in the words he uses. Because of course this was the period when Shakespeare was writing. Now we can't use Shakespearean language, which is probably more like what they would, and yet there is a ghost of that in the dialogue.

Well said, Sir Jeremy. Yet there is more than a ghost of the concealed poet in Irons' fine performance as a most "Oxfordian" Leicester, though it gives one pause to consider how de Vere would respond to such a conflation. Perhaps with an ironic laugh, observing that 'Shakespeare' was thereby stealthily admitted to the Privy Chamber in the film, as Edward de Vere most certainly was, in life.

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The Persona of the Courtly Poet in the Sonnets

by Daniel McKay

The Shakespeare authorship debate centers around a few key questions. Among the foremost of those is: Why did the authorship debate emerge in the mid-nineteenth century? It was an age with a lot of wacky ideas and flamboyant revisionist impulses: Phrenology, spiritualism, mesmerism, personalism, Mormonism, Christian Science. A cursory look at the nineteenth century will reveal many movements, crazes, and ideas that capture the spirit of the age. The authorship debate is commonly regarded as emerging in this period. Already plagued with having to explain why one of the earliest Oxfordians was a man whose surname was *Looney*, it is vital that those who do not regard the inquiry into Shakespeare's authorship as an illegitimate question confront the question: Why the nineteenth century?

An answer is imminent: The first step is to acknowledge that it is very possible that the authorship question does not emerge in the nineteenth century, but *re-emerges* in that period; the second step is to examine how Shakespeare's work was presented both on stage and in print throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and to observe how the change of consciousness associated with Romanticism led to a new way of evaluating the creative mind behind the works of Shakespeare, a way that allowed for the consideration of ideas that had been hidden in plain sight for centuries.

First, let us consider the possibility that the nineteenth century saw only the re-emergence of a question that was present even in the sixteenth century. Of course, that this is possible does not mean that there is undeniable proof, but there are some very uncanny contemporary references to Shakespeare that indicate the man from Stratford may not be the author. Diana Price has dealt with these in *Shakespeare's Unorthodox Biography: New Evidence of an Authorship Problem*.

Most readers will be familiar with this work, so I will only cursorily cover five contemporaneous events from *Shakespeare's Unorthodox Biography*.

The first early indication that Shakespeare's authorship was already a question within the lifetime of the author is from *Greene's Groatworth of Wit*

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(1592). Greene's allusion to a "tiger's heart wrapped in a player's hide" coupled with the identification of someone who fashions himself as "the only Shake-scene in a country" in the open letter to the playwrights has commonly been called the first time Shakespeare is connected to the authorship of the plays (in this instance, *3 Henry VI*). Diana Price, however, returns

to *Groatworth* in order to examine the two parts of that work that are not normally mentioned: the tale about Roberto and the fable of the Ant and the Grasshopper. The tale of Roberto includes an episode in which Roberto encounters a "gentleman player" who encourages Roberto to make a profession of exploiting other playwrights who write plays for him. Price suggests that the player is a caricature of Shakespeare of Stratford, who is being savaged as a type of usurer who profits from the work of others. In the fable of the Ant and the Grasshopper, Greene portrays the Ant as "another incarnation of Shakspeare," a "Scrooge" who is "resented for his business acumen, miserly habits, and profiteering" (51). Price uses these other parts of *Groatworth* to put the allusion to *3 Henry VI* and Shakespeare in a context. Once she establishes the context, she then introduces the novel yet persuasive reading of the familiar passage that suggests the reference to Shakespeare is a reference to a bombastic performer and poacher of texts, rather than a writer. Price's work introduces the possibility that the first attribution of Shakespeare as the author of the plays is actually the first refutation of that authorship, identifying him instead as a greedy and petty pilferer of other people's work.

Ben Jonson produces a satire of William Shakespeare that is akin to Greene's gentleman player. Satirizing Shakespeare of Stratford's motto, "Not Without Right," with Sogliardo's motto, "Not Without Mustard," Jonson characterizes Soliardo as a "pretentious upstart" (76). Furthermore, Price tells us that Sogliardo's brother, Sordido, "hoards grain, an activity viewed as a 'branch' of usury [...] Shakspeare was cited for hoarding grain during the famine of 1598, the year before the play was produced" (76). Usually

(Cont. on p. 18)

(*The Persona of the Sonnets, cont. from p. 17*)

read as an ambiguous treatment of Shakespeare, the Sogliardo satire in *Every Man Out of His Humour* may in fact be an attempt to expose an imposter playwright.

Price also turns to the three *Parnassus* plays (1598-1602) performed at Cambridge University, which contain satiric caricatures of Shakespeare. The plays depict Gullio, a “mimic” ape of a figure who profits above and beyond that of his paymaster, wears expensive clothes, and has become a landowner, just like the caricatures in *Every Man Out of His Humour* and *Greene’s Groatworth of Wit*. Also, Price perceptively points out that only the courtly poems are associated with Shakespeare, the Shakespeare plays seem to be attributed to Samuel Daniel. In the very least, this indicates that there was significant confusion over the authorship of the plays when Shakespeare was alive, even among a group as educated and aware as the Cambridge players. Price refers to the work of E. A. J. Honingmann, who was the first critic to observe that prior to 1598 nearly all allusions to Shakespeare are to the poetry, not the plays (84).

A fourth indication that the authorship question was contemporary with Shakespeare is an epigram by John Davies published in 1610-11. Price presents a reading of it that reveals the ambiguous character of Davies’ portrait of Shakespeare, centering around Davies’ attribution of Shakespeare as “our English Terrence,” an ancient Roman dramatist known for his comedies and who “was also accused of taking credit for the plays of aristocratic authors Cipio and Lælius” (Price 63). Could Davies be raising the question of authorship even as he backhandedly (“a King among the meaner sort”) praises the Bard?

Finally, Price points out the cryptic reference to Shakespeare as “Our Ever-Living Poet” in the 1609 Sonnet dedication by the publisher Thomas Thorpe. Examining the instances in which “Ever-Living” is used in modern and middle English from before 1609, Price determines that there is no example of it being used as an epithet for the living. A writer is “Ever-Living” in the memory of his readers because he is dead in the flesh.

William Shakespeare of Stratford did not die until 1616.

If we take such clues as indications that there has been an authorship debate as long as there has been a Shakespeare, then we must determine why the question

Gary Taylor calls the Restoration an act of collective, willed oblivion... Eighteen years of legislation vanished from the statue books....the political amnesia may have been a put-on, [but] in the world of the theater, the failure to remember Shakespeare was not. The theaters, including the rebuilt Globe, were closed and all performances suspended in 1642. This supposedly temporary closure was made permanent in 1647; performances did not resume until the arrival of Charles II to the throne in 1660. During these eighteen years, an entire generation of dramatists, actors, and producers was lost to the stage.

disappeared only to reappear in the nineteenth century. Otherwise we will fail to put the authorship debate into an accurate historical context from which other scholarship can emerge. The correct context requires that we look at the fault line of seventeenth century English drama

that runs between the English stage of Shakespeare or Ben Jonson and that of John Dryden. Gary Taylor calls the Restoration an act of collective, willed oblivion. Charles II’s reign was retroactively declared to have begun at the moment of his father’s death, eleven years before. Only acts of Parliament approved by Charles I were deemed legal, all others were nullified. Eighteen years of legislation vanished from the statue books (10).

Whereas the political amnesia may have been a put-on, in the world of the theater the failure to remember Shakespeare was not. The theaters, including the rebuilt Globe, were closed and all performances suspended in 1642. This supposedly temporary closure was made permanent in 1647; performances did not resume until the arrival of Charles II to the throne in 1660. During these eighteen years, an entire generation of dramatists, actors, and producers was lost to the stage.

When the performances resumed, many things had changed. Women were now allowed to perform, thereby influencing the kinds of roles written (or rewritten) for them. Also, theaters reached back to playwrights like Fletcher, Jonson, and Shakespeare for repertoires, forcing contemporary playwrights, who had been denied performances for two decades, to compete not only with each other, but with the best dramatists of the previous generations. There are some additional important changes that Jean Marsden identifies in *The Re-Imagined Text*; among those, the linguistic and moral simplification of adaptations of existing Shakespeare plays and the politicization of the texts to reflect the post-Restoration climate. One example of this is Thomas Shachwell’s *Timon of Athens* (1678), in which Alcibiades “frees Athens from its corrupt rulers” and “lauds the benefits of rebellion against corrupt authority,” a change that Marsden says “represents an explicit political stand against the king and in favor of Parliament” coming at a time when Charles II “was beginning his long struggle against the Whigs in Parliament” (Marsden 44).

The attitude toward literature that reigned during this period straight through the eighteenth century is one in which the main purpose of literature—whether for the stage or not—is to morally instruct the reader or audience. There is a reason this is the age of the essay and satire, and not tragedy. In this spirit, Shakespeare is valued for the instructional worth of his stories more than for his versification. Adaptations of his work abound. John Dryden's *All is True* becomes more popular than *Antony and Cleopatra*, on which it is based. Different adaptations of *Romeo and Juliet* ran at competing theaters at the same time, both of which give the lovers some time together in the tomb before they die.

Of course, the most successful adaptation was Naham Tate's *King Lear*—the only *Lear* that theatergoers could see for 130 years. This adaptation is known for its “happy ending” in which Lear and Cordelia live; but Tate was most proud of his addition of an Edgar and Cordelia love story, which helped to explain what were perceived as otherwise inexplicable character motivations. No matter the adaptation, all were seen as improvements because they clarified the moral principle the play expounded.

The many adaptations of Shakespeare's work continued until the appearance of the first *Complete Works*, edited by Nicholas Rowe in 1709. During this time, Beaumont and Fletcher's plays were performed more frequently than either Shakespeare's or Jonson's by a ratio of two to one. Shakespeare, although revered, was not above criticism. Critics levied that he could be morally ambiguous, such as when he has pure-hearted Cordelia die. Many times it was wished that, echoing Jonson, he had blotted a line—he was too prolix. And the seductive banter and witty double entendre throughout his work, but especially in the comedies, were regarded as crude and antiquated by the Restoration aesthetic.

Many of these judgments continued on through the eighteenth century—they appear in the criticism of Samuel Johnson. However, the eighteenth century, with the beginning of a series of *Complete Works* re-edited and reprinted every couple decades, also sees the return to

performances of Shakespeare's versions of the plays. Of course, the texts were not as we know them today, as all of the successive editors took the liberty of changing many passages “back” to the original the way “Shakespeare had intended.” Of course, with few scholarly guidelines, these changes were further adaptations made according to the individual prejudices and taste of the editor.

Gary Taylor writes that during the fifty years between the Restoration and Rowe's *Complete Works* “an educated reader or speaker in 1660 could be expected to know only three things at most about Shakespeare's life: that he was an actor, that he had been born in Stratford and that he was poorly educated by the standards of Restoration high culture.”

Not until Theobald in 1733, who was the unfortunate subject of Pope's *Dunciad* after he harshly criticized Pope's own edition of Shakespeare, was there an attempt at rigorous scholarship, and even his is very far removed from what we expect of contemporary editors. Each editor claimed they were preserving the meaning of the original Shakespeare, yet each edition would be superseded by another, different, edition. Nobody, of course, would dare admit the subjectivity of each decision, so each edition was forever representing Shakespeare as “Shakespeare intended,” but really reflecting back an image of the opinions of the latest man to tackle editing the *Collected Works*.

Gary Taylor writes that during the fifty years between the Restoration and Rowe's *Complete Works* “an educated reader or speaker in 1660 could be expected to know only three things at most about Shakespeare's life: that he was an actor, that he had been born in Stratford and that he was poorly educated by the standards of Restoration high culture” (12). Starting with Rowe, each of the additions affixed some kind of life to the beginning of the *Complete Works*, but most of this was the kind of apocryphal or unverifiable legend with which we are most familiar.

This led Johnson, in the preface to his 1765 edition, to make the claim that Shakespeare “may now assume the dignity of an ancient, and claim the privilege of established fame and prescriptive veneration.” Because nothing is known of Shakespeare's life, Johnson equates him with Homer, of whom we know nothing. With both of them, there is only the work, all personal biography is separated from the work like slag from ore. Johnson tells us “whatever advantages he might once derive from personal allusions, local customs, or temporary opinions, have for many years been lost, and every topic of moment or motive of sorrow, which the modes of artificial life afforded him, now only obscure the scenes which they once illuminated. The effects of favor and competition are at an end; the tradition of his friendships and his enemies has perished” (9-10).

What is, of course, lost in this distillation is the very real evidence for “favor and competition” in the life of the author. This over-hastiness on the part of Johnson to make Shakespeare into an anonymous ancient, results in him missing some clear indications about the author to which the work points. One such obvious clue is the aspiration of the author of the sonnets to inhabit the persona of the courtly poet.

The first publication to bear Shakespeare's name as author was *Venus and Adonis*, published in 1593. It is a love poem in the courtly vein, bearing a dedication to Henry Wriothesley, Earl of Southampton. Such dedications are a hallmark of the courtly poem. This is

(Cont. on p. 20)

(The Persona of the Sonnets, cont. from p. 17)

followed the next year with *The Rape of Lucrece*, also dedicated to Southampton, which shares with its predecessor sophisticated and learned allusions to classical mythological motifs, the theme of love, and a relatively intricate rhyme scheme, all signs of the work of a poet who, in the very least, aspires to be a courtly poet.

The fact that the same poet composed an entire sonnet cycle (and one, it is worth nothing, that was quite long, exceeding Sidney's *Astrophil and Stella* by 46 poems), and that the sonnet sequence was not initially published (which would mark it as a commercial venture) but passed around, as Meres noted, "among his private friends," was another sign that Shakespeare, at least around the time of their composition, fashioned himself somewhat in the mode of the courtly poet, or courtesan (qtd. in Price 135). Baldesar Castiglione, who literally wrote the book on the subject, would recommend, after all, that "It is more important to make one's meaning clear in writing than in speaking" (72) and, importantly for the content of the sonnets, "If he wants to take my advice, I would urge our courtier to keep his love secret" (270).

The question of who wrote the plays appears in the mid-nineteenth century, after a century of curiosity aimed first at the plays and then the sonnets. The sonnets are an interesting and vital link in the appearance of the authorship question, but they are not a subject of study to which literary critics naturally gravitated. It is the silence about the sonnets and courtly poems, but especially the sonnets, that really haunts Shakespearian studies in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

It is astonishing that Samuel Johnson—who with *The Lives of the Poets* invented modern literary biography and edited the fifth edition of Shakespeare's *Complete Works*—does not write at all about the sonnets. The sonnets were available in sporadically published editions since 1609, even if the readily accessible 1640 edition was what Gary Taylor describes as "textually eccentric" (155). By that he means that often sonnets were combined to create formally spurious

longer poems, and some of the pronouns were changed from male to female. Companion editions to *The Complete Works* appeared with the series of editions that appeared in 1709. Johnson's edition of 1765 also had a supplementary volume of sonnets published at the same time as the plays, although it did not contain any commentary from Johnson. The Johnson critic Bertrand Bronson remarks that

“Draping the poems in the full dignity of an introduction and commentary,” Gary Taylor writes, “in 1790 he incorporated them into his prestigious full-scale edition of the *Plays and Poems*, so that for the first time they became an integral element of the canon” (155)...Producing two prominent editions at the dawn of the Romantic age, when a change of consciousness and renewed emphasis on the individual genius was occurring in both English and Continental literature and art, Malone’s commentary “repeatedly stresses the biographical significance of the poems.”

“Johnson disparaged the sonnets and poems of Shakespeare, and virtually dismissed them from serious examination, considering that what they could impart of wisdom was subsumed and better taught in the plays” (xxi).

In his own *Dictionary* entry for the sonnet in 1773, Johnson relegated it to a

very minor literary form: “It is not very suitable to the English language; and has not been used by any man of eminence since Milton.” He defines a “sonneteer” to be “a small poet, in contempt.” The virtues for which Shakespeare was praised, above all his exemplification of Aristotelian generalized representation and moral instruction, do not apply to the sonnets.

Johnson’s deprecation of sonnets and sonnet writers may be contrasted with the Romantic conception of the early 19th century. In his Shakespearean lectures Coleridge describes Hamlet as the “type” of the private lyric poet. It was natural for Coleridge, the author of the *Biographia Literaria*, which purports to trace the development of the author’s mind, and Wordsworth, the author of the similarly intentioned *Prelude*, to see Shakespeare’s sonnet sequence as the development of the poet’s mind. Even in claiming to reject a biographical reading in a letter to his son Hartley, Coleridge betrays that this is the way in which he understands the sonnets.

All of which brings me to my original question: Why did the authorship debate emerge in the mid-nineteenth century? With the important introduction of the sonnets to the canon coupled with the emphasis on understanding the “mind” of Shakespeare as books like Dodd’s *Beauties of Shakespear* attempted to do, it was a natural question to ask: *Who* possessed this mind? Whose contentious inner life does the sonnet sequence represent? When the two centuries of silence on the sonnets come into view, the parallel period of silence regarding the authorship makes much more sense.

However, it is severely limiting to treat Shakespeare’s work like that of Homer or Euripides, from whom we have lost any connection between their works and their biography. Johnson may be a little too hasty when he says, of Shakespeare, that he “may now begin to assume the dignity of an ancient” if that means intentionally ignoring clues to the psyche and life of the author that remain unexamined (Johnson 9). Johnson almost makes this connection when he observes of Shakespeare, as it had been said of Euripides, “That every verse was a precept [...] that from his works may be collected a system of civil and

oeconomical prudence" (Johnson 11). In fact, it was precisely this task that mid- to late-eighteenth century Shakespearean scholars set themselves to do, as we can see in William Dodd's *Beauties of Shakespear* (1752, with a revised edition of 1780), William Enfield's *The Speaker; or, Miscellaneous Pieces, Selected from the Best English Writers* (1774), Elizabeth Griffith's *The Morality of Shakespeare's Drama Illustrated* (1775), Andrew Beckett's *A Concordance to Shakespeare* (1787), and Vicesimus Knox's *Elegant Extracts: or, Useful & Entertaining Passages in Poetry* (1789) (de Grazia 60-65 and Taylor 108). These works, to one degree or another, attempt to present the "mind" or "morality" of Shakespeare to the late-eighteenth century reading public by extracting quotations from Shakespeare's plays, often without attributing them to the name of the character who is speaking or, amazingly enough, the play from which they were taken. The net result was supposed to be an encounter with the "real" Shakespeare, completely ignoring, of course, the fact that the various roles occurred within the context of a play and were spoken by characters with specious motivations; making them, therefore, an uncertain compass to Shakespeare's soul. Whereas Johnson's idealized Shakespeare is based on a willful reading of the plays as without credible biographical context or content, the late-eighteenth century concordances created a fictional Shakespeare by de-localizing the Shakespearean text. Both approaches share a striking common element: they completely ignore the story of Shakespeare's sonnets.

At the same time, however, renewed attention resulting from the first critical edition of the sonnets, published by Edmond Malone in 1780, was bringing them before a growing readership. Unlike the "eccentric" editions of the past, Malone returned to the original sequence and format of the 1609 edition, along with restoring the correct pronouns. "Draping the poems in the full dignity of an introduction and commentary," Gary Taylor writes, "in 1790 he incorporated them into his prestigious full-scale edition of the Plays and Poems, so that for the first

time they became an integral element of the canon" (155, emphasis added).

Producing two prominent editions at the dawn of the Romantic age, when a change of consciousness and renewed emphasis on the individual genius was occurring in both English and Continental literature and art, Malone's commentary "repeatedly stresses the biographical significance of the poems" (Taylor 155). Taking up where Malone left off, early nineteenth century Shakespearean enthusiasts such as Wordsworth read the sonnets as biographical. Wordsworth, in 1815, insisted that in the sonnets "Shakespeare expresses his own feelings in his own person" and, later in 1827, that "with this Key, Shakspeare unlocked his heart" (qtd. in Taylor 156). Not all were reconciled to this view, however: "Such formidable antagonists as G.L. Kittredge and E.E. Stoll still maintain, like Schiller and Coleridge before them, that Shakespeare's writings reveal only the artist, and that Shakespeare the man must remain a mystery" (Taylor 249).

Nevertheless, in the writings of Coleridge it is clear that, to a significant degree, he understands the sonnets to be fundamentally autobiographical in nature. Concerning the controversial Sonnet 20 ["A woman's face, with nature's own hand painted"], Coleridge writes in a letter to his son Hartley, in which he is reluctant to even mention the possibility that Shakespeare is writing about homoerotic love: "O my son! I pray fervently that thou may'st know inwardly how impossible it was for a Shakespeare not to have been in his heart's heart chaste. I see no elaborate obscurity and very little quaintness – nor do I know any sonnets that will, bear such frequent reperusal" (Coleridge 31). In denying even the possibility that the sonnet is dealing with homoerotic love (And really, how else is an unbiased reader to understand, "But since she [Nature] pricked thee out for women's pleasure, / Mine be thy love and thy love's use their treasure" [13-14] if it is not a man's envy that the women get to enjoy the masculine body he lusts after?), Coleridge is implicitly conceding that the sonnets are to some degree autobiographical. If not, why not simply remark that the author of the verses has yet

again adopted another character to speak his lines?

Taylor claims that "Malone's editorial recovery" of Shakespeare's sonnets was pivotal in the transformation of Shakespeare from the public poet of the stage "into a private lyric poet who could be embraced, celebrated, and appropriated by the Romantics" (Taylor 156). This is true, but it should be emphasized that the private lyric poet was always present in the works of Shakespeare. This lyric poet was ignored by the literati of the Restoration and eighteenth century, who fashioned Shakespeare into a useful figure for their own particular time and struggles.

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A First Blast of the Trumpet against the *Monstrous Adversary*

by Christopher Paul

Dr. R. Thomas Hunter took some hard knocks for his handling of the “Interrogation of Professor Alan Nelson” at the 8th Annual Shakespeare Authorship Studies Conference (formerly known as the Edward de Vere Studies Conference) in April, 2004. Half a year earlier conference organizer Dr. Daniel Wright had solicited contributions via email from a select group of Oxfordians to defend Oxford from what he termed “his principal detractor in print.” Wright hoped “to assemble enough data and observations to ... present [Nelson] with evidence that challenges his conclusions and exposes the errors and shortcomings of his work” (i.e., *Monstrous Adversary*).

Armed with these syndicated slings and arrows, Tom Hunter was given the lead in the afternoon-long event, which was described in the Spring 2004 edition of *Shakespeare Matters* (*SM*) as “a one-on-one examination of Nelson ... to be followed by questions from a panel of prominent Oxfordians (Richard Whalen, Mark Anderson, Stephanie Hughes, Hank Whittemore and Bill Farina), and finally by a Q&A session with the audience of conference attendees.” Though touted as the “most anticipated event” at the conference, followup reports indicated it did not live up to expectations. Hunter was lambasted for consuming the first hour hurling the collective darts at Nelson, which, while highlighting his errors and calling his methodology and biases into question, failed to engage the professor in any dialogue. Hunter recounted later that a misunderstanding due to some last-minute changes in format undermined the end result with Nelson, who he understood “asked to use his rebuttal time at the beginning of the hour.”

As conveyed in *SM*, Nelson’s request for time up front was evidently a preemptive move: “in order to explain corrections he had already posted on his web site (such as his misreading ‘white herrings’ for the proper name ‘Whythering’ [sic]; the latest count from his website on errata of fact or interpretation is 10).” *SM* then reported

**To say a number of
corrections and suggestions
have been communicated to
Nelson in the interim between
the publication of his book and
now would be an
understatement. Certainly one
may refuse a suggestion, but
how does one disagree with a
verifiable correction?**

that Nelson, “in a post-conference email to us, said that he didn’t think he was giving up rebuttal time, and was, he said, ‘in the dumps’ when the hour proceeded without any chance for him to respond to any of the statements Dr. Hunter was reading.”

Although I did not attend the conference, I consider it no mean feat that Hunter was able to get in his licks in a single hour. While it may appear Nelson was at the disadvantage, the dump in which he found himself was the inevitable consequence of his own misguided actions. How, after all, could Nelson have responded had he the chance? In a word, Nelson’s

myriad mistakes are indefensible. Perhaps he felt he was being generous with his willingness to explain at the outset the “corrections” posted on his website, but as of the date of this writing (31 August 2006), Nelson has made no additions or any changes whatsoever to the original ten errata on “Errors or problems of fact/interpretation” since November 2003—despite Nelson’s claim at the top of the web page: “I will add corrections or suggestions emailed to me and give credit where credit is due, except that I will not incorporate corrections or suggestions with which I do not agree” (see <http://socrates.berkeley.edu/~ahnelson/errata.html>).

To say a number of corrections and suggestions have been communicated to Nelson in the interim between the publication of his book and now would be an understatement. Certainly one may refuse a suggestion, but how does one disagree with a verifiable correction? In my view, the static count of ten errata on Nelson’s website suggests one of two plausible interpretations: 1) Refusing to deal with reality, he truly believes the “corrections” he’s received to date are themselves incorrect, despite proof to the contrary; or 2) Refusing to deal with reality, he is so overwhelmed by the sheer bulk of corrections he’s received that he’s been paralyzed into inaction, somewhat akin to a deer caught in the headlights. Either way, Nelson is refusing to deal with reality, and it’s become obvious by now that if he is to be corrected at all, it remains up to Oxfordians to do it—if not in the manner of an “interrogation” (hardly efficacious), then by some other means. To that end, following the 2004 conference, Hunter had this to say, as reported in *SM*:

I will certainly take responsibility for the disappointing result of the Alan Nelson segment of the Portland conference. Instead of trying to survey the impressive Oxfordian response to *Monstrous Adversary*, it would have been more helpful and interesting to focus on specific but representative issues. But, after much discussion with others, I don't know if the expectation—that this program would finally put *Monstrous Adversary* to rest for what it is—could have ever been met, interrogation or no interrogation. I do believe that it is absolutely essential that the work done by Oxfordians to expose the errors and scholarly abuses of the book be made available to the world.

Dr. Noemi Magri expresses a similar sentiment in a Letter to the Editor in the July 2006 *De Vere Society Newsletter*, which was in response to editor Elizabeth Imlay's call for citations pertaining to "Monsters of the 16th Century" (to put Oxford's own monstrosities—à la Nelson—into perspective). Dr. Magri sees the exercise as counterproductive, asking: "Would other people's sins help [Oxford's] reputation as a man or prove his innocence?" Instead, Magri put forward the following suggestion:

One means to defend de Vere might be to confute [Nelson's book], word by word, sentence by sentence, chapter after chapter. Each DVS member may choose one chapter of *Monstrous Adversary* and try to dismantle Nelson's views or attacks contained in it. We should expose any venomous, biased statement which originates from his hatred of de Vere and is unsupported by evidence or does not correspond to facts. Nina Green has criticized Nelson on [the Phaeton Internet discussion group]. We might do something more organized and publish our confutation starting from Chapter 1 (with the exclusion of Chapter 28).

Magri's proposal is a capital notion, if a challenging one. The task would be

enormous, but I agree with Magri and Hunter that such an effort should be made. There is already a great deal of material in this regard to be compiled from researchers such as Magri, Green, Moore, Detobel, Ligon, Brazil, Whalen, and myself, among others. An ongoing endeavor would nevertheless be required for a page-by-page, chapter-by-chapter refutation. The De Vere Society may take a cue from Magri, and more power to it if it does. If, however, no attempt is undertaken in the next year or so, perhaps this project could be

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launched under the aegis of the Shakespeare Fellowship or the Shakespeare Oxford Society (or both, as a joint venture), with the objective of publishing the results on the Internet, where it would indeed, as Hunter envisions, "be made available to the world." Such a scheme may be far too ambitious, but one way or another, the horn should be blown again, with the intention of sounding a terrible and reverberating blast against Nelson's monstrous biography.

Below are four examples of Nelson's errors and *modus operandi* that I offered to Dr. Hunter as part of his arsenal in the first blast (with only a few interpolations for this article). Due to time constraints, only two of these were utilized. There are, unfortunately, too many more where these came from.

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Professor Alan Nelson's biography on his website has this to say:

His specializations are paleography, bibliography, and the reconstruction of the literary life and times of medieval and Renaissance England from documentary sources. His most recent publication is *Monstrous Adversary: The Life of Edward de Vere, Seventeenth Earl of Oxford*.

Presented here are some points of contention which are representative of countless inaccuracies in *Monstrous Adversary*, calling into question the overall trustworthiness of Prof. Nelson's "specializations."

Example One

Nelson's penultimate chapter of *Monstrous Adversary* begins with the following statement:

On 1 July 1604, before Oxford's body was in the ground, steps were taken to secure to Henry de Vere, 18th Earl of Oxford, the hard-won rights to Waltham forest and Havering Park:

Brief of the evidences of Henry de Vere, Earl of Oxford, manifesting his right to the custody and stewardship of the King's forest of Waltham, Essex, and to the custody of the King's house and Park of Havering at Bower, Essex.

Dowager Countess Elizabeth was doubtless eager to have the property transferred to her son. (427)

Nelson's endnote for this entry cites "C[ecil] P[apers], xvi, p. 392 (146/17)." What Nelson has cited is not the Cecil Paper manuscript itself, but the entry from the *Calendar of the manuscripts of the Most Honourable the Marquess of Salisbury*, which is actually to be found on

(Cont. on p. 24)

(A *First Blast*, cont. from p. 23)

page 392 of Volume 15, not Volume 16, as Nelson's endnote indicates. That error notwithstanding, how, one must wonder, has Nelson so confidently dated the document to 1 July 1604? The Calendar of Cecil Papers which Nelson cites gives an uncertain date of 1603 with a question mark enclosed in square brackets, thus:

[?1603]. WALTHAM FOREST: Brief of the evidences of Henry de Vere, Earl of Oxford, manifesting his right to the custody and stewardship of the King's forest of Waltham, Essex, and to the custody of the King's house and Park of Havering at Bower, Essex. 4 pp. (146.17.)

One can compare this passage with Nelson's and see that he has copied it verbatim, with the exception of the uncertain date. The compilers of the calendar were off the mark to suppose this document might have been drawn up sometime in 1603. The *terminus a quo* for such a transaction involving the eighteenth earl could not be earlier than June 24, 1604, the date of the seventeenth earl's death. However, contrary to the date assigned by Nelson, other documentary evidence suggests the most probable date for this record to be sometime between 13 October and 6 December 1611. Had Nelson been diligent, or, for that matter, aware, he could have determined this for himself.

One can only assume that Nelson's error stems from his having (at some point) seen the original four-page document—which is undated—and subsequently misinterpreting the last sheet that contains the marginal Latin notation: “*Julij Jacobi*.” This notation is beside the section dealing with King James' restoration to Edward de Vere of the custody and stewardship of the forest of Essex and house and park of Havering. There is absolutely no question that the center “j”—in other words Roman “i,” hence “1”—indicates the *regnal year*, and that this should be read as anything other than “*July in the first year of James*” (that being 1603), which in turn matches what we know of the grant to which this section refers: that it took place on 18 July 1603 (cf. CSPD 1603-1610; Vol. 2, 22). There are additional marginal notations

elsewhere in the manuscript with earlier dates, but since “*Julij Jacobi*” is the *latest* date in the document, this explains why the calendar editors tentatively dated it “[?1603].”

Nelson, on the other hand, has apparently—and inexplicably—taken “*Julij Jacobi*” to mean “*July 1st in the second year of James*”, i.e. 1604. Even if July 1st were the intention of this notation, i.e. the first day of July, then there would subsequently be no *regnal year* indicated for *Jacobi*.

The mistake of the calendar editor(s), who apparently did not realize that a date of 1603 for the origin of the document itself was irreconcilable with a basic historic

Thus, Henry de Vere's “Brief of evidences” could not possibly be dated 1 July 1604, a mere week after Edward de Vere's death, and nearly three months before the Inquisition.

One can only puzzle over Nelson's baffling error, especially since his true expertise lies in paleography.

event (Oxford's death in 1604) is understandable. However, Nelson's presumption goes much further. Not only is the actual date of this document nowhere indicated, *the date Nelson has thrust upon it is incompatible with and contradicted by the very contents of the document itself*, leading one to question whether Nelson read the whole thing.

The following is from the middle of the third folio sheet:

By an Inquisitio[n] taken after the deathe of Edward Earle of Oxon~ the Earle is found to dye siesed of the said Custodie and Stewardshippe of the said fforrest, & of the said Custodie of the

saide house & Parke of Haueringe & all the severall fees, profit[es], Iurisdicions, & authorities before in the said quo warranto found to belonge to the said officers, and likewise in the said Inquisitio[n] found to haue belonged to the said Earle at his deathe by reason of the offices aforesaid. And herein are likewise found severall pate[nt]s graunted by the said Earle to S[i]r John Raynsforthe & others of the Lieutenancye of the said fforrest, & of the keeping of Haueringe house & Parke, w[hi]ch pate[nt]s were found to bee therin beinge.

The Inquisition *post mortem* for Edward de Vere referred to above took place on 27 September 1604 (cf. TNA: PRO, C142/286/165). Thus, Henry de Vere's “*Brief of evidences*” could not possibly be dated 1 July 1604, a mere week after Edward de Vere's death, and nearly three months *before* the Inquisition. One can only puzzle over Nelson's baffling error, especially since his true expertise lies in paleography. (This is not to say that he is proficient in interpreting documents, only in transcribing them.)

Had Nelson dug a little deeper, or even paid closer attention to certain records he was already familiar with, he might have determined there is other documentary evidence that supports a date for Henry de Vere's “*Brief of Evidences*” having been drawn up sometime between 13 October and 6 December of 1611. We find a prelude on 22 July 1611, wherein the dowager countess of Oxford wrote to Robert Cecil and Henry Howard: “my sonnes right, and interest in the saide fforrest [of Waltham, is] much preiudiced” (TNA: PRO, SP14/65).

On 13 October 1611 Sir Thomas Lake wrote to Robert Cecil—a letter of which Nelson offers a complete transcription (439), while apparently taking no hint from the content:

His maiesty hath commanded me to signifie to your lordship that my lord of Oxford hath been here this day a suitor for his right to Havering Parke... his maiesty is loth to deny right to the meanest subiecte he hath much lesse to a person of his ranke. His highnes

therefore desireth your lordship that for the furtherances of his own resolution my lord of Oxford may be called and his righte looked into and his maiesty advertised how it standeth...

Could it be any plainer? The King evidently granted Lord Henry his rightful stewardship—at least, to Havering—shortly after this, as almost exactly one month later, on 15 November 1611, there is a letter addressed to Henry de Vere, “commanding him to forbear killing deer in Havering Park, whereof he has the charge” (CSPD 1611-1618, Vol. 67, 88).

And three weeks after that, on 6 December 1611 to be exact, we find the countess of Oxford writing to Sir Christopher Hatton (the cousin of the Chancellor of the same name during Queen Elizabeth’s reign):

You knowe his ma[ies]^{tie} hath byn pleased (though not without much difficulty) to give allowance to my sonnes hereditary interest in the Custody of Haueringe house and Parke, whereby there is made vnto him a faire entraunce for recou[er]y of his other righte w[i]thin the fforrest... (BLAdd. 29,549 / 17, f. 31)

So, Havering was finally recovered, but only Havering. Henry de Vere’s other right within the forest, that is, the stewardship of Waltham forest itself, would be delayed for two more years, as we learn from John Chamberlain, who would write to Dudley Carleton on 31 March 1614:

Upon the death of Sir Robert Wroth (who was a great commauder or rather by the Kings favor an intruder in Waltham forrest,) Sir Christofer Hatton set the earle of Oxfords claime on foot, (beeing during his absence abrode put in trust with all his busines), and hath so wrought with the King that though he had in a manner bestowed and geven away all the walkes, and notwithstanding the great opposition and contestation of the earle of Pembroke, the Lord Lile and others, yet he hath not only preserved the earles

right, but gotten the disposing of the walkes... (*The Letters of John Chamberlain*, Norman Egbert McClure, Vol. 1, 520)

Three weeks later, on 25 April 1614, Henry de Vere wrote to Sir Christopher Hatton from Paris:

On page 432 of *Monstrous Adversary* is Nelson’s stupendous gaffe regarding his misinterpretation of the surname “Wytheringes” as a fish called “white-herrings”—a truly stunning misreading since it makes absolutely no sense within the context of the letter, and inevitably leads one to seriously question Nelson’s interpretative abilities elsewhere... Had I not brought this error to Nelson’s attention in front of a live audience in New York... I doubt the “correction” would be listed on his website errata today.

S[i]^r it wold preiudise my thanckefulnes if this paper were able to express so much as I owe you for your Ho[nora]ble and constant frendshipe manifested to me in the late forrest business, for the which as are that hath no means to testifie the dett due vnto you for so greate a courtesy but by thes lines. I wold intreate you therefore to accept of them vntill some opportunitie bee offered wherin I may performe the

part of an honnest detour [=debtor]. (BL Add. 29,549 / 17, f. 33)

Soon thereafter, even from abroad, Earl Henry was actively exercising his right as the new steward. He would write to Hatton on 29 May 1614 telling him to give a buck to one Master Lockwood (BL Add. 29,549 / 17 f. 35), on 18 June 1614 with instructions for Hatton to secure a brace of bucks for his cousin Hunt and Sir John Wentworth (BL Add 29,549 / 17 f. 37). Sir Horatio Vere, writing from London on 15 July 1614, reminded Hatton that Earl Henry had also promised him a buck, which he was then hoping to collect (BL Add 29,549 / 17 f. 39). On 16 July 1614 Earl Henry signed an indenture granting his servant Gawen Harvey the office of Chief Keeper of Chapel Hainault Walk in Waltham Forest for life, in which Henry himself was listed as “keeper in fee of his Ma[ies]^{tes} fforrest of Waltham and Park of Hau[er]ing in his Highnes County of Essex” (ERO D/DMY/15M50/361). Many more letters followed throughout 1614 and over the next several consecutive years revealing Earl Henry in charge of the forest. But considering the context of Sir Thomas Lake’s letter and the countess of Oxford’s letters cited above, Henry de Vere’s “*Brief of evidences*” for his rights to the forest can be dated with reasonable confidence to the period between the middle of October and the first week of December 1611. The date assigned to it by Nelson appears to have been made up out of whole cloth.

Example Two

On page 432 of *Monstrous Adversary* is Nelson’s stupendous gaffe regarding his misinterpretation of the surname “Wytheringes” as a fish called “white-herrings”—a truly stunning misreading since it makes absolutely no sense within the context of the letter, and inevitably leads one to seriously question Nelson’s interpretative abilities elsewhere (which had, in any event, been the case long before the publication of his book). Had I not brought this error to Nelson’s attention in front of a live audience in New York at the 2003 Shakespeare Oxford Society conference, I doubt the “correction” would

(Cont. on p. 26)

(A *First Blast*, cont. from p. 23)

be listed on his website errata today. However, Nelson has probably taken more heat over this particular *faux pas* than any other, and I will not reiterate the circumstances of it here.

On the other hand, directly below the “white-herrings” citation, Nelson continues with a further error: “[W]e are about to discover that [Henry de Vere] was selected almost immediately by King James as a boy-companion for his son and heir Prince Henry.”

In support of this interpretation Nelson offers a full transcription of the dowager countess of Oxford’s letter to Robert Cecil and Henry Howard dated 22 July 1611 (433-7), in which she wrote:

Whereas (at your lordships pleasure) i am ready to make it appeare vnto you, that (**euer since he was put to the Prince**, which is nowe about eight yeares [=c. July 1603]).... About this tyme two yeares [=c. July 1609] Hunt (vnder pretence of kyn[d]redd) first insinuated himselfe into my sonnes Aquaintaunce: who till then (both in **his attendance on the Prince** and exercises of learning at his appointed tymes).... By these, and other lyke seducements, my sonne (contrary to my direction and knowledge) was kept a good space from **repaying to the Prince**.... My sonne thus misled, hath in effect euer since **neglected his attendance on the Prince**.... (emphasis added)

Nelson concludes “Hunt and Henry earned the King’s displeasure by neglecting Prince Henry and the King himself...” (437). Nelson assumed, apparently without checking the historical record, that each reference to “the Prince” in the countess’s letter refers to Prince Henry. This is affirmed in his index under “Henry, Prince (son of James I)”. But once again Nelson is in error. The prince that Henry de Vere was “companion” to was not Prince Henry, but the younger Prince Charles. On 6 January 1605 (Twelfth Night), the King’s four-year-old son Charles was created Duke of York. The eleven-year-old Henry de Vere was officially on hand for the ceremony as “esquire” to Charles. This is documented in Nichols’ *Progresses of James*, Vol. 1,

472. Although Nelson consulted Nichols, he apparently missed this. To my knowledge, there is absolutely no evidence that Henry de Vere was a companion to Prince Henry.

Example Three

On page 424 Nelson writes:

On 15 March [1604] the King rode in triumph through London. While it is uncertain whether Oxford processed with the ‘Earls’, his wife went second

Processing immediately in front of the king is the “Earle Marshall” bearing the sword. On his right is “The Lord Great Constable,” and on his left is “The Lord Great Chamberlaine”! Nelson, stating that “it is uncertain whether Oxford processed with the ‘Earls’” was apparently asleep at the wheel, or at a desk in whichever library he was consulting.

among Queen Anne’s retinue of ‘Ladies, according to their degrees, viz. Dutchesses, Marchionesses, Countesses, Viscountesses, Baronesses, Knights’ wives, and Maids of Honour’...

Nelson’s endnote for this information cites Nichols’ *Progresses of James*, Vol. 1, 327. Indeed, on that page, Nichols lists the Queen’s retinue just as Nelson states. On page 326, the “Earles” to which Nelson refers are generically lumped together in the procession between “Marquisses’ eldest sonnes” and “The Lord Admirall and the Lord Chamberlaine, being not otherwise

employed.” Further down the page is “THE KING, under a canopy.” Processing immediately in front of the king is the “Earle Marshall” bearing the sword. On his right is “The Lord Great Constable,” and on his left is “The Lord Great Chamberlaine”! Nelson, stating that “it is uncertain whether Oxford processed with the ‘Earls’” was apparently asleep at the wheel, or at a desk in whichever library he was consulting Nichols.

Example Four

On page 108 of *Monstrous Adversary*, Nelson cites a letter purportedly written by Gilbert Talbot on 28 June 1574 to his mother, the countess of Shrewsbury, as printed in Nichols’ *Progresses of Elizabeth* (Vol. I, 388-9). On page 110, Nelson cites a letter written by Burghley on 15 July 1574 to the earl of Sussex (BL MS Cotton Titus B.2, f. 295). There is just one small problem: the letters are one and the same. Nelson, quoting each a mere two pages apart in his book, appears surprisingly oblivious to this fact. The error originates with Nichols; how the old antiquary ended up making this a third person account—related by Talbot—of a letter that wouldn’t be written by Burghley for another two and a half weeks, is open to surmise, but that is precisely what he did. In order to compare the two letters it is necessary to cite them both as given by Nelson. The bold font, however, is my own emphasis for ease of comparison between the two. The alleged Talbot letter, which begins Nelson’s Chapter 22 ‘Flight,’ reads thus:

The young Earl of Oxford, of that ancient and Very family of the Veres, had a **cause** or suit, that now came before the Queen; which she did not answer so favourably as was expected, checking him, it seems, for his unthriftiness. And hereupon his behaviour before her gave her some offence. This was advertised from the Lord Chamberlain [=Sussex] to the Lord Treasurer [=Burghley], who, being Master of the Wards, had this Earl under his care; and whom he afterwards matched his daughter Anne unto. The

news of this troubled that Lord; saying, **'He was sorry her Majesty had made such haste; and had answered him so, that he feared the sequel might breed offence, if he were ill counseled;** that is, in case he should upon this yield to such heads as himself, which he was apt enough to do.' And then gave his favourable character of the said young Earl, that **howsoever he might be, for his own private matters, of thrift inconsiderate, he dared avow him to be resolute in dutifulness to the Queen and his country.** And then **prayed God, that the usage of that poor young Earl might not hazard him to the profit of others.**

Obviously, Talbot would never use such phrases in a letter written to his mother, as though she wouldn't already know that Burghley was the Master of the Wards, that Oxford had been under his care, or that he'd married Burghley's daughter Anne. That should be the first red flag raised in front of any serious historian. This is clearly Nichols' own exposition thrust into the mouth of Talbot. It may have happened something like this: Nichols had read Burghley's letter to Sussex conjointly with another, entirely different letter by Talbot, and conflated them in his mind. Perhaps, his notes having gotten jumbled, he had transcribed Burghley's letter under the wrong heading, and was paraphrasing from faulty memory when he recorded the entry in his book. Any number of possibilities could explain the mistake. It is less obvious how Nelson could have alienated the two documents. One page after the previous version, Nelson cites the genuine letter, written by Burghley to Sussex:

My very good Lord I most heartily thank your Lordship for your advertisements of my Lord of Oxfordes **cause**, wherein **I am sorry that hir Maiesty maketh such hast and so to answer hym, as I feare the sequele may brede offence, if he shall be evill Counsell'd.** My Lord, **how so ever my Lord of Oxford be for his own privat matters of thrift vnconsiderat I dare avow hym to be resolyt in dutyfullnes to the Queen and his country ... I pray god the**

vsage of the poore yong Lord may not hazard hym to the proffitt of others.

Nelson followed up the supposed Talbot letter with these comments:

Thus, approaching the Queen with some (unknown) suit, Oxford found himself rebuked 'for his unthriftiness'. When

It is a shame that Nelson's book is so fundamentally flawed at its core. As a skillful collector of archival material, much of it unknown prior to the publication of his book, Oxfordians are indebted to him....[But]encumbered under the ponderous weight of his own biases, Nelson has proved himself incapable of impartially interpreting the piles of material heaped before him. In the end, his transparent agenda is an embarrassment, not only for himself, but also for the whole of academia.

he dared to reply, she checked him. Burghley, however, came to his defence.

Before two days were out, Oxford betrayed his father-in-law's confidence utterly, fleeing abroad without licence...

Nelson followed up Burghley's letter to Sussex with these comments:

"Burghley's sympathy for 'the poore yong Lord'—Oxford was now twenty-four—is only too characteristic."

It is quite clear that Nichols was mistaken in his date and attribution, that the letter Nichols refers to is in fact Burghley's letter to Sussex, written two weeks *after* Oxford had left the country, not two days before. When the two letters are read side by side, there can be no mistake that Nichols is paraphrasing Burghley's letter.

It is amazing—appalling, actually—that Nelson can cite these 'two' letters in his book, separated by one page, and never make the connection that they are one and the same. But this is all too typical of his 'work'.

Exposing Nelson's errors and slipshod methodology, although tedious, is a necessary evil that needs to continue and find its proper format, be that in another book or a place on the Internet. For the time being, the foregoing examples will serve as representative of many more errors almost too vast to elucidate. It is a shame that Nelson's book is so fundamentally flawed at its core. As a skillful collector of archival material, much of it unknown prior to the publication of his book, Oxfordians are indebted to him. This, however, is no saving grace. Encumbered under the ponderous weight of his own biases, Nelson has proved himself incapable of impartially interpreting the piles of material heaped before him. In the end, his transparent agenda is an embarrassment, not only for himself, but also for the whole of academia.

A Visit To Yale's "Searching For Shakespeare" Exhibit

by Alex McNeil

In the summer of 2006 the Yale Center for British Art hosted a major exhibit of Shakespeare-related documents and other period memorabilia. Having read about it in the *Yale Alumni Magazine* (more about that later), I ventured to New Haven with my sister-in-law, Peggy Spencer, on a pleasant Saturday in August.

The exhibit, titled "Searching for Shakespeare," opened at the National Portrait Gallery in London in March 2006, to commemorate its 150th anniversary. The centerpiece of the show is a collection of six portraits, each of which at some time has been touted as a true picture of the Bard of Avon (i.e., William Shakespeare of Stratford-on-Avon). Supplementing those half-dozen portraits was a huge collection of documents—a collection that likely will never be housed under a single roof again; some items had never before been displayed outside of England.

The Yale exhibit featured some items not shown in London, and vice versa; nevertheless, it included the Stratford parish register (opened to the page showing Susanna Shakspeare's baptism in 1582), the 1582 marriage banns, Quiney's letter to Shakspeare asking for a loan, Van Buchell's sketch of the Swan Theatre (c. 1596), Augustine Phillips's testimony at the Essex Rebellion trial in 1601, and Shakspeare's three-page last will and testament from 1616.

In addition, many rare books were on display, most of them on loan from the Beinecke Rare Book Library at Yale or from the Elizabethan Club, a private organization affiliated with Yale. A sampling of these included Golding's translation of Ovid (1567), *Venus and Adonis* (1594), *Lucrece* (1594), Meres's

Palladis Tamia (1598), and quartos of *Romeo and Juliet* (1599, with "manuscript performance notes in a seventeenth-century hand"), *Hamlet* (1604), *King Lear* (1608), *Troilus and Cressida* (1609, with the "From a Never Writer" epistle), *Othello*

**I dared to ask a question:
"Has anyone ever wondered,"
I inquired, "why this man's
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cushion? If you're a literary
figure holding a piece of paper,
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surface." The tour guide
paused, and admitted she
didn't know. "Perhaps it was
tradition," she offered. "What
do you think?" I bit my
tongue...**

(1622), and *Love's Labours Lost* (1631). Rounding out the display were copies of *Shakespeare's Sonnets* (1609), the First Folio (1623) and the Second Folio (1632). Regardless of one's point of view on the authorship question, it was a terrific exhibit.

But Peggy and I *do* have a point of view on the authorship question. We promised each other, however, that we would not make asses of ourselves during

the guided tour, and that if our blood began to boil at any point we would cool each other off. We assembled with about twenty-five others for a guided tour. The tour guide was a volunteer, so we didn't want to be too tough on her.

First stop on the tour was the First Folio, opened to the famous Droeshout engraving. The tour guide welcomed us, and announced that the purpose of the exhibit was not only to commemorate the 150th anniversary of the National Portrait Gallery, but also to demonstrate that there is an "incredible amount of documentation proving that Shakespeare existed and that he was the author of his works." I have no quarrel with the first part of her statement—there is a lot of documentation proving that William Shakspeare existed. As far as I know, no one has ever disputed his existence. But the second part—well, suffice it to say that there are no new documents in this exhibit that "prove" the Stratford man's authorship.

The second stop—a few feet away from the Folio—was a reproduction of the also-famous Stratford bust of Shakespeare, showing the guy with the thick moustache clutching a piece of paper, with his hands resting on a sack (oddly, there is no quill pen in this reproduction—maybe Susanna or Judith was dipping it in ink for her learned father at the time). I dared to ask a question: "Has anyone ever wondered," I inquired, "why this man's hands are resting on a cushion? If you're a literary figure holding a piece of paper, it's not a very good writing surface." The tour guide paused, and admitted she didn't know. "Perhaps it was tradition," she offered. "What do you think?" I bit my tongue (but



Chief Suspects, from Left to right: The “Flower “ Portrait (circa 1800s): The Grafton (1588)...and the leading contender, the Chandos, said by the “Searching for Shakespeare” catalog to “broadly” resemble Droeshout’s folio engraving.

not hard enough) and replied, “Don’t get me started. I don’t think this is a bust of William Shakspere. I think it’s his father, John Shakspere. I also think his hands are resting on a woosack, which would make sense, because he was a wool dealer.”

The tour continued. I have to admit our guide was pretty accurate about some things. As to the Stratford man’s schooling, for example, she didn’t claim that he actually attended one, but said “there’s a fairly well grounded supposition that he would have attended the grammar school.” She also admitted that his whereabouts between 1586 and 1592 – the so-called “Lost Years” — are a matter of conjecture. She also noted that he died a wealthy man, estimating that his estate was worth the modern equivalent of a million pounds. She didn’t explain how someone could have amassed such a fortune from writing plays or from being part owner of a theater.

In addition to the documents and literary works on display, there were quite a few portraits. We admired those of Elizabeth and James. We could practically touch the larger-than-life portrait of Henry Wriothesley, 3rd Earl of Southampton, who was described, of course, as “Shakespeare’s patron.”

In the next group of portraits was Oxford! Yes, the Welbeck Portrait of Edward de Vere was part of the exhibit. However (it seems there’s always a “however” when Oxford and Shakespeare are in the same room), the tour guide did not direct anyone’s attention to it, and even if she had, the caption next to the portrait effectively marginalized him: “He openly flirted with Catholicism and homosexuality, for a while discarding his wife for the company of a Venetian choirboy. From the 1920s, Oxford was championed, like Francis Bacon and Christopher Marlowe, as an alternative author of Shakespeare’s plays.” No mention that he was cited during his lifetime as an accomplished poet and playwright, that he sponsored an acting company, or that he was a patron of the literary arts.

Across from the Welbeck Portrait were portraits of other contemporary writers. Perhaps the placement of the Welbeck Portrait was appropriate after all, we thought, even if inadvertent — there was Oxford directly opposite a coterie of slightly younger poets and dramatists.

The tour guide explained that the inclusion of portraits of Shakespeare’s contemporaries was intended to show that

this was a time when poets and playwrights had acquired sufficient social status to warrant the making of their portraits; therefore, it may be reasonable to suppose that a portrait may have been made of Shakespeare.

Among the portraits of the literary men were those of John Fletcher, Ben Jonson, Michael Drayton and William Drummond. As the tour guide pointed them out, she asked if there were any clues in the pictures to suggest that these were literary men. “Why, yes,” I piped up. “The portrait of Fletcher shows him with a pen, and with paper with words on it. Oh, and also, the pen, the paper and Fletcher’s hands are all resting on a hard surface.” I didn’t point out that that knocked a big hole in her theory that it may have been “tradition” to depict such men resting their hands on cushions, as shown in the Stratford bust.

Then we came to the centerpiece of the exhibit, the collection of six portraits of men thought (at one time or another) to be Shakespeare. I should note that one of the most famous “Shakespeare” paintings — the Ashbourne portrait, owned by the

(Cont. on p. 30)

(A Visit to Yale, cont. from p. 29)

Folger Shakespeare Library – was not part of this exhibit. The six collected portraits were: the Chandos Portrait (it was the first portrait donated to the National Portrait Gallery in 1856); the Grafton Portrait (on loan from the John Rylands University Library at the University of Manchester); the Janssen Portrait (on loan from the Folger); the Soest Portrait (on loan from the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust); the Sanders Portrait (on loan from Lloyd Sullivan of Ottawa, Ontario); and the Flower Portrait (on loan from the Royal Shakespeare Company).

Little need be said about the latter two portraits. In 2005 the Flower Portrait was conclusively shown to have been painted in the early 1800s, on top of a painting of the Madonna and Child from the 1500s. It is obviously a rendering of the Droeshout engraving from the First Folio, though at one time it was alleged to be the *source* of the 1623 engraving. Furthermore, it is hideous. As for the Sanders Portrait, it was the subject of extensive discussion and media coverage when it was again “unearthed” in Canada a few years ago. Although the painting dates from Shakespeare’s lifetime, it is generally agreed that the sitter cannot be the Stratford man.

As for the other four portraits, they are all interesting, but – as the exhibitors even concede – whether any of them is a picture of Shakespeare is anyone’s guess. The oldest of them – the Grafton – is dated to 1588, and depicts “a man of considerable wealth.” How the Stratford man could have become wealthy at age 24, before he had published anything, is difficult to explain. The Chandos Portrait “dates from Shakespeare’s lifetime” and, by tradition at least, is regarded as the most likely candidate to be authentic; the catalog notes, however, that the surface is very worn and that the beard and hair “have been lengthened by later additions.” The catalog also asserts that the Chandos figure “broadly” resembles the Droeshout engraving and the memorial bust, but I don’t see any real similarity.

The Janssen Portrait has also been dated to Shakespeare’s lifetime. Again the catalog claims that its features “seem to resemble the Droeshout engraving” and the bust, but again I didn’t see such a similarity, nor did I see a similarity between the Janssen and the Chandos. Interestingly, the catalog goes on to note that a 1988 technical examination proved that although the painting had been made during Shakespeare’s lifetime, it had been painted over “to look more like the writer,” and has now “been restored to its original appearance.” The last picture, the Soest Portrait, is dated to the “late 1660s as a reconstructed likeness of the writer.” I would agree with the exhibitors that the sitter’s features do resemble those in the Chandos Portrait.

To its credit, the exhibit does not attempt to answer the question whether any of the six portraits actually depicts Shakespeare of Stratford. A little deductive reasoning leads us easily to eliminate several from contention: the Flower and the Soest Portraits are not contemporary, the Janssen Portrait (as originally painted) was of someone else, and the Grafton and Sanders Portraits are, from their dates of composition and from visual details, almost certainly of other persons. That leaves the

Chandos Portrait as the leading – indeed the only – serious contender.

Peggy and I poked around for a while longer. We ended up at the gift shop, where we were delighted to see Mark Anderson’s book, “*Shakespeare*” *By Another Name*, on sale.

About the *Yale Alumni Magazine* – I’m happy to report that it ran my letter in the fall 2006 issue. The article on the “Searching for Shakespeare” exhibit had run in the previous issue, and contained a sidebar with six academics pontificating about the significance of Shakespeare’s bequest of the “second-best bed” to his wife, Anne. I replied:

Shakespeare’s famous bequest of his second-best bed is indeed curious. More curious, however, is what’s *not* in his will. There’s no mention of a book, a letter, or a manuscript. Surely the Bard of Avon must have owned many books; libraries didn’t exist. There’s also no bequest to the Stratford Grammar School, where most biographers assert Shakespeare received a fine education. In fact, there’s no evidence that William Shakespeare of Stratford ever attended any school. And though the scholar Stephen Greenblatt has noted the playwright’s frequent depiction of educated women reading books, it’s curious that Shakespeare of Stratford didn’t bother to see to it that his two daughters learn to read and write.

In fairness, I neglected to disclose in my letter that many years ago I had enrolled in a Shakespeare course as a Yale sophomore, but dropped the class after scoring a 52 on the midterm. So what do I know?

(Rosenbaum, cont. from p. 8)

World.

He shares all his moments of enthusiasm with the reader, and even includes himself in his index, which may be a first for an author. He writes in the first person and addresses the reader throughout. In his preface he says, “I want you to care as much as I care about the bitter dispute over the variations in *Hamlet* and *Lear* and whether Shakespeare may have changed his mind in subtle ways about his greatest works.” That’s one of nine paragraphs starting, “I want you to care. . .” or “I want to convince you. . .”

Chasing down the controversial scholars, Rosenbaum has lunch with Gary Taylor at a Krispy Kreme doughnut shop in Tuscaloosa, is served tea by Harold Jenkins in London, has lunch with Eric Sams at the Civil Service Club in London, interviews Bernice Kliman at her home on Long Island, has a table-thumping dinner with Peter Hall in a Greenwich Village restaurant, meets Stephen Booth on a bus at the Shenandoah Shakespeare Scholars’ Conference. His vignettes and his adroit questioning of these and many other theater stars and campus scholar-stars produce some entertaining tidbits about Stratfordian thinking and posturing.

Also some bits of gossip. Gary Taylor still plans to include in his long-awaited edition of Middleton four plays usually attributed to Shakespeare, *Macbeth*, *Measure for Measure*, *Timon of Athens* and

(Cont. on p. 32)



“We came all the way to Detroit to see our neighbors.” Richard Whalen, author of Shakespeare: Who Was He? and native of Truro, MA., visits with Bob and Joanna Wexler of Boston at the second annual joint SOS-SF Conference. Joanna is responsible for introducing Sir Derek Jacobi, now an honorary trustee of the Fellowship, to the authorship question and the case for de Vere’s authorship. Conference details forthcoming in the winter issue.

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(Rosenbaum, cont. from p. 30)

Troilus and Cressida. Eric Sams wrote to Rosenbaum “that Harold Bloom had recently come around to Sam’s position on the Ur-Hamlet, [c. 1589 or 1594] that it was Shakespeare and not someone else who wrote the lost, early version of the play by that name.”

Although Rosenbaum disavows interest in the case for the seventeenth earl of Oxford as the true author of the works of Shakespeare, he doesn’t care much for the biography of Will Shakspeare of Stratford. “Shakespearean biography,” he says, “with its few indisputable facts, its suppositions, its conjectures, its maybes, does more to distort than illuminate the work.” He opens chapter three with, “As you know, I feel strongly that the biographical approach to Shakespeare is usually futile.” It’s the plays that matter, never mind who wrote them.

His references to the authorship controversy are few and slight. In a short endnote, he says “I don’t care, for the purposes of this book, whether Shakespeare’s work was written by one of the anti-Stratfordian candidates, such as the earl of Oxford.” Maybe that’s because in September 2005 he wrote a long, controversial article in *The New York Observer* critiquing William Niederkorn’s article in *The New York Times* and the case for Oxford in particular.

Rosenbaum’s 568-page, rambling book garnered reviews in major

publications, but it hasn’t made the best-seller lists, maybe because the reviews have been guarded and less than enthusiastic. In the *Yale Alumni Magazine*,

**Although Rosenbaum disavows
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“Shakespearean biography, with
its few indisputable facts, its
suppositions, its conjectures, its
maybes, does more to distort
than illuminate the work.”**

Gordon Rogoff, a professor at Yale, Rosenbaum’s alma mater, aptly describes the book as “overflowing with unedited wisdom. . . a sprawling trawl through the academic thickets” whose targets include Professor Harold Bloom of Yale.

The somewhat admiring review in the *Sunday New York Times Book Review* may nevertheless have given some readers pause. The reviewer called it a “besotted,

passionate new book about contemporary Shakespeare studies. . . a sort of romantic detective story” that requires “a certain measure of lovestruck, manic scholasticism.” In the daily *New York Times*, the paper’s lead reviewer, who had been impressed by Rosenbaum’s *Explaining Hitler* (1988), delivered a crushing blow to his book explaining Shakespeare:

He has written a convoluted, self-indulgent and nearly impenetrable tome that reads like the desultory jottings of a lapsed graduate student in English (which the author once was). Though there are moments when he communicates his passion for Shakespeare, they are scattered forlornly, amid pages and pages of arcane discussions about textual scholarship and “iambic fundamentalism,” windy and inconclusive debates about what is truly Shakespearean and blow-by-blow accounts of feuds between rival scholars that cannot possibly be of any interest (at least as rendered by Mr. Rosenbaum) to the lay reader.

A bit harsh perhaps, but probably on target for the lay reader. Establishment Shakespeareans, however, will no doubt give it a close reading, if not an admiring reading. Oxfordians will find it entertaining, if a bit long-winded.

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Shakespeare Meets Robert Frost

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and Minos Miller*

Teaching Shakespeare’s Law

The Courtly Poet in the Sonnets

*A First Blast of the Trumpet
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