

## *From the Editor*

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The positive and encouraging response to *The Elizabethan Review* has spurred the publication of several of the articles and reviews contained in the present issue. In addition to commenting upon and requesting pieces on a variety of subjects, correspondents also requested more information concerning the Oxfordian thesis. In this regard, the organization in the United States dedicated to disseminating information about the Earl of Oxford's authorship of the Shakespeare canon is The Shakespeare-Oxford Society. Inquiries should be directed to Morse Johnson, Suite 819, 105 West 4th Street, Cincinnati, OH 45202.

In reviewing the previous issue, I found that a significant perspective had been omitted from those offered: the scientific one. Readers will find in this issue "A Statistical Approach to the Shakespeare Authorship Question," co-authored by a chemist and a physicist. Other pieces cast light on Michel de Montaigne's influence on William Shakespeare and other participants of the English Renaissance, and on one of the very first English novels, *The Unfortunate Traveler*, by Thomas Nash, a prolific Elizabethan writer whose own canon encompassed pamphlets, dramas, and poetry as well as fiction.

As historians well know, literature and drama were not the compelling issues of the day for the great majority of Elizabethans—that honor was reserved for the dual questions of national religion and national security. Since the Elizabethan Age was contemporaneous with the Counter Reformation and the Anglo-Spanish War (1585-1604), both issues were to become fused into an overriding national obsession that would affect the daily lives of the "common man" and the activities of the Queen's government and church. To address this neglected aspect of Elizabethan life in an attempt to unravel a tangled skein of history, we present a review of Alan Haynes' *The Elizabethan Secret Service* by a Roman Catholic scholar, whose views of the Elizabethan secret service are at odds with the standard legend as we have come to know it.

Rounding out the present issue of *The Elizabethan Review* are articles that examine Heywood's famous—and ambiguous—complaint, herewith resolved (according to the author), as well as reviews of fiction and nonfiction on Shakespeare's life and works as composed by a theater critic, two poets, and a host of psychiatrists and psychologists.

Gary B. Goldstein

## Letters to the Editor

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The argument regarding the authorship of the Shakespeare Canon is exhumed again! Associate Justice John Paul Stevens, in the inaugural issue of *The Elizabethan Review*, bears his corner of the pall and asks us once again to gaze upon the corpse. His approach, a statutory construction in five acts, is safely juridical and yet, like so many of his predecessors', rests upon ambiguities and uncertainties to point out that, crudely enough, Shakespeare is not Shakespeare. He ably lines up opposing counsel. For the "sweet swan of Avon," he presents the text of the First Folio which "unambiguously identifies" William as the author, supported by "respectable scholars [who] are virtually unanimous in their conviction" that William is Shakespeare. The word "virtually" ushers in the Oxfordians, introduced by that addled chorus of Twain, Whitman, Galsworthy, Freud, and Looney.

Justice Stevens' first act, however, is a curious twist of reasoning. First, excellent jurist that he is, he seeks an affidavit of sorts—"a signed statement identifying himself [Shakespeare] as the author." Shakespeare was apparently too busy to write a statement that he was who he was. But, for the Justice, this would serve as "the kind of unambiguous evidence of authorship" which we need (distinct, we assume, from the unambiguous First Folio). The evidence he then discusses, the "six signatures on legal documents," suggest nothing to

Justice Stevens except "that merely writing his name was a difficult task." Here we have the first glance down our nose at poor Will. His poor penmanship reflects a shallow, dimwitted bumpkin incapable of the achievement erroneously ascribed to him. What then must we make of the penmanship of his Queen? Does her careful block lettering suggest brilliance or cunning? What of the regal signature on the thousands of documents which cluttered Bourbon court life? When we learn that many were done, not by Louis, but by a minister, *qui avait la plume*, can we infer that Louis was slower than Shakespeare? Perhaps Louis did not exist!

Justice Stevens' second act brings up the nobility question. He informs us that the author of the Shakespeare Canon must have been of noble birth since all but one of his plays are about members of the nobility. There are more credible explanations to this gossamer hypothesis. First, who in Shakespeare's day was not attracted to the magnificence and intrigue of Court life? It was quite simply the most fascinating topic of discussion. Second, Shakespeare has been described and criticized as an inveterate social climber. Graham Greene must have shocked the University of Hamburg upon receiving the Shakespeare Prize in 1969 when he referred to Shakespeare as the "supreme poet of conservatism" with the "blind eye exchanged for the coat of arms, the prudent tongue for the friendships

at Court and the great house at Stratford." Such cautious flattery on the part of artists guaranteed not only patronage but quiet and peace far removed from Holborn Hill and Tyburn. Shakespeare could hardly afford to let Jack Cade succeed or turn Campion's Brag into a taunting monologue.

Shakespeare's apparent disregard for the "common man" (a nefarious term), which Justice Stevens discovers in *Julius Caesar*, is no less disrespectful than Dickens. I have always found that, like Dickens, Shakespeare wanted us to love, if not always emulate, the "common man" in all their "sweaty night-caps" and "stinking breath." After all, they were the groundlings who rollicked at the bard's sly mockeries of Court life. A patron's penny filled his purse, but the "common man" laughed and wept with him.

The portrait of Polonius (i.e. Lord Burghley) in *Hamlet* is a caricature easily drawn by any astute Court observer. It also strikes one as a distinct argument *against* Edward de Vere as the author of the Shakespeare Canon. Justice Stevens argues that de Vere used his firsthand knowledge gained in the Burghley household in drawing the portrait of Polonius. However, if de Vere wanted to stay in the good graces of this powerful family, the last thing he would seem to do is hang its dirty linen from the flagstaff of the Globe Theatre.

Justice Stevens' third act introduces in full costume the darker twin, the Edmund of his play,

wherein critical construction is compounded with snobbery "under the dragon's tail" (*King Lear*, I.iii). It is here that the cat's cradle which our authorship scholars have passed, hand to hand, casts its crooked shadow on the wall, and the shadow forms a noose. In short, it is a class war in which the privileged are gifted and the "common man" is, well, common. Justice Stevens assures us that few people could read and write, a conclusion which begs for a rich footnote which commonly fill Supreme Court opinions. Our own editor of *The Elizabethan Review* indicts 85 percent of the "socially restricted" Elizabethan population as "illiterate in its native tongue." (It is a separate debate whether literacy was so poor and, assuming it was, whether Elizabethan England suffered as a society from illiteracy or from the plunder and suppression of its Catholic faith.)

The wonder of it all is that a man with so little formal education, this "unperfect actor on the stage" (Sonnet XXIII) could make us look upon an "unworthy scaffold" and see "the vasty fields of France," (*Henry V*, Prol.) or gaze upon a disgraced daughter and see one "that art most rich, being poor, most choice, forsaken; and most loved, despised" (*King Lear*, I.i).

It is quite simply genius—that touch of imagination, inspiration and grace—which makes a "common man" a poet or a saint. The authorship scholars, mired in the messy penmanship, see the Dumb

Ox, not the Angelic Doctor. Was not our "wooden O" once graced by a presidential "bumpkin" who too looked upon a "vasty field" of a nation's battleground and saw "a final resting place for those who here gave their lives that that nation may live." The authorship scholars can only prattle on about "universal gender discrimination that permeated sixteenth-century England," where they contend "education was for males, not females," ignoring the brilliance of a Margaret More Roper. According to Justice Stevens' fourth act, we must accept instead a "de Vere Canon" because Shakespeare's library is unaccounted for and Shakespeare's son-in-law does not mention "his illustrious father-in-law" in his medical journals.

In answer to this I have always turned to Brother Leo who offers these four points in his *English Literature, A Survey and Commentary* (1828):

1. "In his own day and for three centuries afterwards Shakespeare was accepted as the author of his plays, and numerous contemporary writers acclaimed his genius." A similar litmus test applies to constitutional doctrine enunciated when the framers were still alive.

2. "The main events in Shakespeare's life are known, and there is nothing in them to show either that he did not exist or that he could not have written the plays attributed to him."

3. "An examination of the Shakespeare plays proves that the

man who wrote them was closely identified with the theatre. Shakespeare was...a 'Johannes factotum,' or Jack-of-all-trades, of the stage. The Bacons were not, the Earls of Rutland and Derby and Southampton were not; with the possible exception of Thomas Heywood, no Elizabethan dramatist was so essentially a theatrical man as Shakespeare was."

4. "A comparison of the Shakespearean plays with the known writings of the others shows fundamental differences of style, of vocabulary, of power of expression, of range of interest, and of outlook on life. For instance, it is simply incredible that the same man could have written Bacon's essay on Love and Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*." No doubt Justice Stevens would raise an eyebrow if I were to suggest to him that the Federalist papers were actually written by Richard Henry Lee. More to the point, an examination of what are accepted to be Edward de Vere's work ("His Good Name Being Blemished, He Bewaileth" or "A Lover Rejected Complaineth") pale in comparison to the weakest of the Shakespeare Canon.

What does it all matter? The argument, like venial sin, would be great fun if it were not so malignant. But it has become the banner of certain scholars who, to quote Brother Leo again, "like to defend an improbable cause and who deny the validity of literary tradition." This perhaps is why the debate does matter so much and really,

when not carried on in the spirit of fun, has so little to do with Shakespeare. It is the province of those in the critical construction camp—those word-counters and cultural contextualists who can read *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* and marvel endlessly at, not what *is* there but, as one professor once said, “what *is not* there.” The authorship argument shifts our focus away from the Canon itself—away from “the living face of beauty, [the] earthly reflection of the Heavenly Beauty which is God,” contained in Shakespeare’s exquisite pen.

Christian H. Gannon  
Brooklyn, NY

Mr. Gannon is an attorney with the Port Authority of NY & NJ.

I've read the first issue of *The Elizabethan Review* with interest. Congratulations on the venture. Certainly a coup to get [Justice] John Paul Stevens on board.

David Bevington  
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*The Elizabethan Review* is a handsome publication and I like its resemblance to an early quarto. I also admire the tone you've set for the discourse that will occupy its pages.

Regarding your comments on Shakespeare's use of Dante, I do think Shakespeare (whoever we be-

lieve him to have been) was able to read Italian, French, and Spanish, not to mention Latin and Greek, and it wouldn't surprise me at all to learn of further Dante echoes. I find the echoes of the Crucifixion in *Julius Caesar* interesting, and I wonder if the playwright was not aware that the three characters who occupy the lowest circle of the *Inferno* are Cassius, Brutus, and Judas.

The only issues on which I'd differ from you are (a) whether a grammar-school education of the kind that was offered in Stratford would not have given young men the background to acquire what the author of Shakespeare's works display, and (b) whether the political views in the plays pre-suppose a member of the nobility.

John Andrews  
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After reading the note on whether Shakespeare had read Dante in Italian, I recalled Dorothy Sayers' translation of Dante's work for the Penguin Classics. I was impressed by her notes in Book I (Hell; pp 52-4) describing the secret removal of Dante's body in 1519 not being revealed until 1865—when it was discovered by workmen.

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Congratulations on launching an interesting addition to the sources of knowledge about Shakespeare and his time. In regards to the authorship issue and the Earl of Oxford, two matters catch public interest on Oxford's behalf that unfortunately do not stand the test of truth. I refer to the spelling of the Stratford Shakespeare's name, and the supposed unavailability of sufficient formal education in his background, both of which seem to weaken the argument being made on Oxford's behalf. In discussions with academics, these confirm an amateurish approach to the evidence that encourages dismissiveness.

As to the spelling of the name, it once seemed self-evident to me that the spelling of a person's own name would become habitual from an early point in life. That, however, turns out to be a cultural block on our part.

The facts are otherwise. 1) In Elizabethan times, the convention of regularity in spelling was weak, as proved by looking at the signatures of many educated men, such as Raleigh; 2) in the National Archives of Great Britain, the father of William of Stratford is listed in public documents from his time only as John Shakespeare; 3) in the collection of Oxford's letters by William P. Fowler, Oxford employed at least four different spellings of his own name between 1563 (age 13) and 1603 (age 53): Oxinford, Oxenford, Oxeford, and Oxenforde (the first he used on the first extant letter; the next two

variations he used alternately on a frequent basis; and the fourth spelling was used on his last two letters).

The second troublesome and unnecessary argument is that the actor from Stratford could not have had the classical knowledge the writer of the Canon possessed. Another country boy, Isaac Newton, did pretty well starting out with the usual grammar school education. Cambridge, where he went next, in his day was demoralized and offered little mentoring, but his grammar school Greek and Latin allowed him to read what he needed in the Cambridge library, sufficient for him to have written his own treatises in Latin.

Speaking as a psychologist, [I believe] the case for Oxford stems from the many personal details of Oxford's life that are repeatedly reflected in the Canon; the recognition during Oxford's lifetime of his dramatic and poetic gifts, so compatible with a putative author of the Canon; the specifics of Oxford's life that would have given him background for the world portrayed in the Canon; the high concordance between the Canon and the language and imagery used by Oxford in his early poems, written before the first works in the Canon. The total case, thus, is very strong. As recent discoveries point out, Oxford's claim to credit for the Canon is on a solid basis. It is a pity then that false issues delay total respect for this claim.

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