

Why I'm Not an Oxfordian

David Kathman

William Shakespeare was baptized in Stratford-upon-Avon on April 26, 1564, and was buried in the same town on April 25, 1616. In between, he married and had three children, went to London and became a successful actor and theatrical shareholder, bought the second-largest house in Stratford as well as other property, and wrote the greatest body of plays and poetry in the English language. For the last 150 years or so, a steady stream of writers, many of them quite intelligent but generally without training in Elizabethan literary history, have argued that William Shakespeare of Stratford did not write the plays and poems attributed to him, and that "William Shakespeare" was actually a pseudonym for the real author. In recent decades, Edward de Vere, Seventeenth Earl of Oxford, has become the preferred candidate as an alternate Shakespeare, with many Oxfordians arguing their case passionately in books, journals (including *The Elizabethan Review*), and most recently on the Internet. Despite their passion and industry, Oxfordians and their theories have generally been ignored by the mainstream Shakespeare establishment. When orthodox Shakespeare scholars have responded to Oxfordians, they have often done so in a dismissive and condescending way, leading to accusations that these scholars are afraid to face up to the "real issues" involved. Many Oxfordians believe that such a reaction is motivated by self-interest, and that only the formidable vested interests of the Shakespeare industry prevent Oxford's authorship from being universally recognized.

In this article I will try to explain some of the major reasons why mainstream Shakespeare scholars do not take Oxfordians seriously. I will not attempt to deal with every assertion which has been made by Oxfordians, because that would require at least a book-length treatment; many of the most popular issues are addressed on the Shakespeare Authorship Page on the World Wide Web (<http://www.bcpl.lib.md.us/~tross/ws/will.html>), and have also been discussed vigorously on the humanities.lit.authors.shakespeare@newsgroup.com.

David Kathman, Ph.D., has published over a dozen scholarly papers on linguistics and Shakespeare, co-edits the Shakespeare Authorship Page on the Internet and is working on the New Variorum edition of Shakespeare's poems with Donald Foster.

Instead, I will focus on Charlton Ogburn's book, *The Mysterious William Shakespeare*, using it both as a springboard for discussing larger issues and as a case study in Oxfordian methodology. Obviously, Ogburn does not speak for all Oxfordians on every issue, as he would be the first to admit; nevertheless, his book is generally accepted as the most thorough and detailed exposition of the Oxfordian position, and every serious Oxfordian is familiar with it.

First of all, it may be useful to give a summary of the reasons for the traditional attribution. All the external evidence says the plays and poems were written by William Shakespeare. A man named William Shakespeare, from Stratford, was a member of the acting company which put on the plays. Heminges and Condell in the First Folio explicitly say that their "friend and fellow" Shakespeare was the author of the plays, and a monument to his memory was built in the Stratford church. There was no other William Shakespeare living in London at the time. There is no evidence that anyone else, including Oxford, was ever known as "William Shakespeare". Shakespeare of Stratford was consistently recognized as the author after his death and throughout the seventeenth century. There were abundant resources in Elizabethan London for such a man to absorb the knowledge displayed in the plays, despite Oxfordian attempts to claim otherwise; furthermore, there is no documentary evidence to connect the Seventeenth Earl of Oxford with any of Shakespeare's plays or poems, despite the fact that Oxford's life is quite well documented.

All this is perfectly standard evidence of the type used by literary historians; indeed, the evidence that William Shakespeare of Stratford wrote the plays and poems published under his name is abundant compared to that for many of his fellow writers. Oxfordians, however, see such external evidence as an annoyance to be rationalized away; they have built up a picture of who the author must have been from reading the plays themselves, and that picture does not look like William Shakespeare of Stratford. A large part of the "evidence" used by Oxfordians is internal to the works themselves: reconstructions of what the author "must have" thought and what his background must have been like, and supposed allusions to events in Oxford's life, all taken from the plays and poems. Literary scholars have always treated such internal evidence with the utmost caution, especially when dealing with works written 400 years ago; interpretations are notoriously subjective, and whenever possible should be backed with external evidence. Indeed, such a great literary figure as T. S. Eliot recognized the unreliability of such reconstructions when he wrote the following: "I admit that my own experience, as a minor poet, may have jaundiced my outlook; that I am used to having cosmic significances, which I never suspected, extracted from my work (such as it is) by enthusiastic persons at a distance; and to being informed that something which I meant seriously is *vers de societe*; and to having my personal biography reconstructed from passages which I got out of books, or which I invented out of nothing

because they sounded well; and to having my biography invariably ignored in what I *did* write from personal experience; so that in consequence I am inclined to believe that people are mistaken about Shakespeare just in proportion to the relative superiority of Shakespeare to myself" (Eliot, 108).

Surely such testimony, especially coming from a great literary figure who lived to see voluminous criticism of his works, should make us cautious of relying too much on internal reconstructions of an author's life and opinions. For Charlton Ogburn, though, such internal "evidence" is primary, and if the documentary record does not support it, that is simply evidence that the documentary record has been tampered with. Ogburn is not a humble man; he is absolutely certain that his interpretations of Shakespeare are correct, and sometimes he seems genuinely baffled that any honest person could disagree with him. When he attempts to justify these interpretations using evidence and arguments, though, he invokes an enormous double standard — actually a series of double standards — in which completely different standards of proof apply to Ogburn and his opponents, and which renders his thesis essentially unfalsifiable. Everything about William Shakespeare of Stratford is put under a microscope and interpreted in the most unfavorable way possible; everything about Oxford is interpreted as favorably as possible. Ogburn throws out documentary evidence and ridicules even the most reasonable inferences made by Shakespeare's biographers if they do not accord with his preconceived notion that "Shaksper" was a greedy, illiterate boor; on the other hand, he freely engages in far more fanciful speculation about Oxford in the absence of any documentary evidence. Ogburn expresses strong disagreement with the opinions and interpretations of past Shakespeare scholars, which he has every right to do; but then he presents his own opinions as obvious truths which only a fool could disagree with. All in all, the relentless double standard pervading Ogburn's book makes it difficult to take anything he writes at face value.

For example, Ogburn relentlessly criticizes orthodox Shakespeare scholars for uncritically accepting what their predecessors have written, but he is even more guilty of uncritically accepting what previous anti-Stratfordians have written; he seems unwilling to apply any except the most trivial critical standards to Oxfordian arguments. The result is a disturbing tendency to confidently, even arrogantly, insist on the truth of statements which can be easily shown to be false, simply because they have been a part of anti-Stratfordian dogma for so many years. For example, in discussing the 1609 Quarto of the Sonnets, Ogburn asserts that the title "Shake-speares Sonnets", with the writer's name first, is "a plain indication that the author was dead" (206). He cites *Greenes Groatsworth of Wit* as an example and even invokes the orthodox scholar Sidney Lee in support of his claim. But a quick check of the Short Title Catalogue reveals that this claim is completely groundless. There are dozens of examples of the name of living authors coming first in Elizabethan titles, including *Brittons Bower of Delights* by Nicholas Breton

(1591), numerous works by Thomas Churchyard and Thomas Coryat (e.g. *Churchyardes farewell* (1566), *Churchyards challenge* (1593), *Coryats crambe* (1611), *Coryats crudities* (1611)), and even other works by Robert Greene, such as *Greenes farewell to folly* (1591).

Ogburn makes a similarly false claim when he insists that those who occasionally hyphenated Shakespeare's name in print "can only have been showing that they recognized Shakespeare as a pseudonym", and that "the hyphenation is so clearly inexplicable except as designating the name as fictitious that I do not see how there can ever have been any question about it" (98). Despite the vehemence with which Ogburn expresses it, this claim also has no factual basis. Even if we limit ourselves to title pages, it is possible to find numerous other hyphenated names which clearly referred to real people. For example:

* Charles Fitzgeoffrey's name was regularly hyphenated on the title pages of his works, published between 1596 and 1637 as by "Charles Fitz-Geffry", "Charles Fitz-Geffrey", or "Charles Fitz-Geffrie". Fitzgeoffrey's name was hyphenated much more regularly than Shakespeare's was, yet no one has suggested that he was using a pseudonym.

* When four of Phillip Henslowe's writers wrote a play about Sir John Oldcastle in response to the success of *Falstaff*, the printed version of the play had the title "The first part of the true and honorable historie, of Sir John Old-Castle, the good Lord Cobham."

* When Anthony Munday wrote a pageant in honor of Sir Thomas Campbell's installation as Lord Mayor of London in 1609, the title of the printed version was "Camp-bell, or, The ironmonger's faire field." (This is actually taken from the running title, since the title page of the only surviving copy is missing.)

* The printer of Munday's pageant, Edward Allde, was quite fond of hyphens, and in fact he often hyphenated his own name as All-de on the title pages of works he printed (e.g. Henry Fitzgeoffrey's *Satyres* (1617), Thomas Middleton's *The Sun in Aries* (1621), and John Bradford's *Holy Meditations* (1622)).

* Another printer, Robert Waldegrave, also regularly hyphenated his own name as Walde-grave on the title pages of works he printed from 1582 on. In fact, Waldegrave was the printer of the first four Martin Marprelate pamphlets, written under the most famous pseudonym of the Elizabethan era. The pseudonym "Marprelate" is not hyphenated once in the many times it appears in the text of the pamphlets — but the name "Waldegrave", which also appears many times in the text, is hyphenated every single time.

Another anti-Stratfordian chestnut which Ogburn defends with unfortunate vehemence is the absence of Shakespeare's name from Henslowe's Diary. Ogburn finds this absence highly significant, and he follows many Baconians and Oxfordians before him in claiming that "the absence of [Shakespeare's] name from the most comprehensive rolls of the players in his day is strong indication that his alleged career on the stage is illusory" (101). However, the way he manipulates the facts to reach this conclusion is instructive. Ogburn correctly notes that Henslowe put on some of Shakespeare's plays, and he finds it odd "that while producing Shakespeare's plays Henslowe never once mentioned his name" (100). He does not tell the reader that these plays were all performed in 1592-94, before Henslowe began mentioning the names of any playwrights or actors at all in the Diary; by the time Henslowe did start writing down names in 1597, Shakespeare was a member of the rival Chamberlain's Men and had no association with Henslowe. Ogburn states that "the names of all other prominent playwrights of the time... find a place in [Henslowe's] diary", which is simply a blatant falsehood; the names of Robert Greene and Christopher Marlowe are absent despite the fact that Henslowe performed their plays many times, and Thomas Kyd, George Peele, Thomas Nashe, and Thomas Lodge are similarly missing. Ogburn then snidely remarks that "if Professors Evans and Levin and Dr. McManaway could have cited another case of an actor of Shakespeare's alleged prominence not mentioned by Henslowe or Alleyn it is a fair assumption that they would have done so." As Irving Matus has already pointed out (Matus, 52-3), Richard Burbage, Augustine Phillips, John Heminges, and Henry Condell are among the well-known actors not mentioned by Henslowe; this is because the Diary is a record of Henslowe's company, and by the time he began mentioning any actors by name, all these men (along with Shakespeare) were members of the rival Chamberlain's Men.

The above is just a sampling of the way Ogburn manipulates or ignores facts in order to support elements of anti-Stratfordian doctrine which he is unwilling to criticize; the fact that such statements are so prevalent in the book, and the fact that Ogburn makes them so forcefully and arrogantly, do not speak well for either his standards of scholarship or his objectivity. This lack of attention to facts which disagree with his thesis is only one aspect of Ogburn's bias, though; another major double standard involves standards of evidence for William Shakespeare vs. other contemporary playwrights. Ogburn clearly believes that Shakespeare[2] was an ignoramus, probably illiterate and almost certainly not an actor, despised by all who knew him, spending most of his energies amassing property and collecting on debts, and not seriously believed by anyone at the time to be the author of the Shakespeare canon. In order to support this dubious conclusion, Ogburn contrasts Shakespeare with contemporary playwrights who were presumably not ignoramuses. A major problem is that he unquestionably accepts the same type of evidence for other

playwrights that he rejects for Shakespeare.

For example, Ogburn correctly notes that there is no contemporary documentary record of Shakespeare's schooling. The earliest explicit evidence we have is Nicholas Rowe's statement in 1709 that Shakespeare had been "bred at a free school", and Ogburn interprets this documentary lack to mean that Shakespeare never went to school at all, brushing aside all the circumstantial evidence of the school's quality and the likelihood of Shakespeare's attendance.[3] He then goes on to list the educational accomplishments of a number of contemporary writers, inviting his reader to "[c]ontrast the known facts about these writers' education with the absolute blank regarding Shakspeare's, whose life's record is supposed to be so much better known to us than theirs" (280). There are a couple of problems here. First, Ogburn neglects to mention the many other writers besides Shakespeare who also lack documentary evidence of schooling; this list includes such luminaries as Michael Drayton, John Webster, William Warner, Thomas Dekker, Henry Chettle, and many less-known names. A more serious problem is the fact that for several of the writers whose education Ogburn confidently discusses, the actual documentary evidence is nonexistent or questionable. For example, he says that John Fletcher attended Cambridge, but there are good reasons for believing that the "John Fletcher" in the Cambridge records was not the dramatist (Taunton 1990). He similarly says that George Chapman attended Oxford, but Chapman's name is nowhere to be found in the records there, and our only source for this story is Anthony a Wood, writing a century after the fact (Spivack 1967, 14). Ogburn asserts that Ben Jonson "went first to a private school in St. Martin's Lane and later at Westminster studied under one of the foremost Elizabethan scholars, William Camden" (279-80). In fact, the story about the St. Martin's school was first told 26 years after Jonson's death by William Fuller, whose reliability is elsewhere (19-20) questioned by Ogburn, and Jonson's name is conspicuously absent from the records of Westminster School (Miles 1986, 284n10). The only evidence for Jonson's attendance at Westminster is his later friendship with Camden combined with a reference to "his Master Camden" in Jonson's conversations with Drummond. These conversations were not published until 1711, and the original manuscript has mysteriously disappeared from among Drummond's papers, surviving only in a transcript from around 1700 (Herford and Simpson I, 128-31). I think it is safe to say that if any of the above evidence pertained to Shakespeare, Ogburn would reject it out of hand as unreliable, given that he rejects far more solid evidence relating to the Stratford man; yet for these other writers, such evidence counts as "known facts".

Another example of this double standard can be seen in Ogburn's account of William Shakespeare's death in 1616. Ogburn writes that "apart from the entry in the burial register, Shakspeare's death as far as the record shows went entirely unremarked", and he claims that this "was in an age when the

passing of noted poets called forth copious elegies from their fellows” (112). Such claims have become a mainstay of Oxfordian arguments, but unfortunately they do not stand up to scrutiny. First of all, the claim that Shakespeare’s death went entirely unremarked will be puzzling to any Shakespeare scholar. The poems in the First Folio are the most famous tributes, but there is also William Basse’s poem “On Mr. William Shakespeare, he died in April 1616”. From its title this clearly refers to William Shakespeare of Stratford, and it was circulating in manuscript by 1623 (since Ben Jonson’s Folio poem responds to it); it survives today in around a dozen manuscript copies (Chambers II, 226; Munro I, 286). Another manuscript elegy is written in a copy of the First Folio now at the Folger; it, too, clearly refers to Shakespeare of Stratford, since the same hand has also transcribed the verses from the tomb and monument in the Stratford church (Evans, 60). Neither of these poems can be dated precisely; the first tribute to Shakespeare which can be is a poem in John Taylor’s *The Praise of Hemp-seed* (1620) which lists Shakespeare along with Spenser, Sidney and other famous dead English poets who Taylor says will live on in their verses (Chambers II, 226). Three years later came the First Folio with its well-known poetic tributes, and over the next twenty years many more eulogies for Shakespeare were printed, including those in the Second Folio (1632) and the 1640 Poems.

Of the first three poems noted above, the only one Ogburn mentions is Basse’s, which he dates to 1622 and calls “the first comment we have on Shakespeare’s passing” (40). (He also gives the full title, complete with “he died in April 1616”, without comment.) Thus when Ogburn says that the death of Shakespeare of Stratford went “entirely unremarked” in the record, what he apparently means is that there is no tribute which can be precisely dated to the few years after Shakespeare’s death. But there is nothing suspicious about this at all: the same thing is true of all of Shakespeare’s contemporary playwrights until the death of Ben Jonson 21 years later, and most of their deaths received far less notice overall than Shakespeare’s. The vast majority of printed eulogies in Shakespeare’s day were for members of the nobility, or sometimes for prominent churchmen; when poets did write posthumous tributes to each other, these generally circulated only in manuscript, sometimes for decades at a time.[4] The seven years before the first printed eulogies to Shakespeare appeared in the First Folio is actually remarkably fast, unprecedented for an English playwright, and the number of tributes written to the Bard is more than for virtually any of his contemporaries.

But, the reader may ask, what about the other writers Ogburn mentions who were showered with “copious eulogies from their fellows”? It is true that Francis Bacon and Ben Jonson were both honored with volumes of tributes soon after their deaths, as Ogburn notes (112), but they are not comparable: Bacon was a Viscount and thus the type of person who normally received printed elegies, and Jonson died 21 years after Shakespeare, right around the

time it was starting to become acceptable to honor poets in this way.[5] As for the other writers Ogburn mentions, a close look at his sources reveals that he is once again applying a tremendous double standard: he unquestioningly accepts evidence for these other writers which is in some cases much flimsier than the evidence he rejects for Shakespeare.

* Ogburn quotes an account of Spenser's funeral in which Spenser's fellow poets "vied with each other in Elegiac tributes to his memory" (53) and threw their verses into his grave along with the pens that wrote them. In fact, no contemporary account of Spenser's funeral exists; the story Ogburn quotes comes from the third volume of William Camden's *Annales*, which was not published until 1627, 28 years after Spenser's death (Wells, 139). Given Ogburn's suspicion of eulogies published only seven years after Shakespeare's death, one might reasonably expect him to question an account of Spenser's funeral published 28 years after the fact; yet he accepts this account without hesitation.

* Ogburn asserts that "Francis Beaumont had been mourned with a similar shower [of praise] on his death in the month before Shakespeare's" (112). He cites no source for this statement, undoubtedly because there is no documentary evidence for such a shower. Other than the record of his burial, the earliest notices we have of Beaumont's death are Taylor's poem in *The Praise of Hemp-seed* and Basse's MS eulogy to Shakespeare — the same two poems which contain the earliest mention of Shakespeare's death. The first printed eulogy specifically for Beaumont was "An epitaph upon my dearest brother Francis Beaumont", in the posthumous edition of his brother Sir John Beaumont's poems; this did not appear until 1629, thirteen years after his death and six years after the Shakespeare First Folio.

* Ogburn writes that "Michael Drayton, upon his passing in 1631, was honored by a 'funeral procession to Westminster escorted by gentlemen of the Inns of Court and others of note'" (112). However, there is no contemporary record of Drayton's death or funeral; the exact date of his passing is not even known. The story Ogburn quotes comes from a manuscript note by the antiquary William Fulman, who was born in 1632 — the year after Drayton's death — so it obviously was not based on firsthand knowledge (Newdigate, 219). Ogburn notes that there is a monument to Drayton in Westminster Abbey — which is of course paralleled by Shakespeare's monument in Stratford — and he asserts that "verses attributed to Ben Jonson and others were contributed". Actually, the anonymous verses on Drayton's monument were first attributed to Jonson in 1687, 56 years after Drayton's death; around the same time, John Aubrey (whose reliability Ogburn elsewhere ridicules) attributed the same

verses to Francis Quarles, and yet another manuscript note attributes them to Thomas Randolph (Newdigate, 221).

* Ogburn quotes Charlotte Stopes as saying that “the city and the Stage were clothed in gloom” when Richard Burbage died (112), and he quotes one of five eulogies which Stopes prints.[6] In fact, the only mention of Burbage’s death in the contemporary record is passing mention in two letters, one by John Chamberlain and one by the Earl of Pembroke (Stopes, 116-17). All the eulogies which Stopes reproduces are in undated manuscripts (just like Basse’s elegy to Shakespeare), and in fact no eulogy for Burbage was printed during the fifty years after his death.[7] Ogburn goes on to claim that “Camden... observed Richard Burbage’s passing (‘On Master Burbidge the Tragedian: Exit Burbidge’) and recorded its date (9 March 1618/19) but had nothing to say of Shakspeare’s three years earlier”. He cites Camden’s *Remaines* as his source, but in fact Camden never mentioned Burbage, in his *Remaines* or elsewhere, before his death in 1625. In 1636, John Philipot edited the fifth edition of the Camden’s *Remaines* and added material of his own. It was this edition which first contained the epitaph Ogburn quotes, but without the date of death; this was apparently added by the editors of the 1870 edition of the *Remaines* which Ogburn used.

The above examples illustrate the double standard Oxfordians apply in order to make William Shakespeare of Stratford look bad in comparison to other contemporary playwrights. The flip side of this is the double standard they apply in order to make Oxford look as good as possible: the slightest evidence favorable to Oxford is seized upon and expanded into elaborate scenarios, even as far more solid evidence for Shakespeare is dismissed with little more than a wave of the hand. One good example is Ogburn’s treatment of the acting careers of Shakespeare and Oxford; he recognizes that the “William Shakespeare” who wrote the plays was recognized as an actor, so he tries to deny that the Stratford man was an actor while constructing an acting career for Oxford out of whole cloth. Ogburn pulls out all the stops in an effort to discredit the considerable evidence for Shakespeare’s stage career. His deceptive and selective discussion of Henslowe’s Diary, discussed above, is one part of this effort, and Irvin Matus has effectively countered Ogburn’s efforts to cast doubt on the documentary evidence of Shakespeare as an actor (Matus, 52-64).[8] When Ogburn is unable to find any excuse for doubting the authenticity of a record, he simply declares that the record is doubtful without providing any evidence. For example, the name “William Shakespeare” appears second in the list of players in the patent for the King’s Men and first in the list of King’s Men who received red cloth in 1604 for James’ coronation procession, surely indicating his prominence in the company. Ogburn, how-

ever, simply announces that “the identity of the Shakespeare in the two cases remains problematical” (30); presumably we are supposed to imagine that the reference is to Oxford under a pseudonym, despite the massive problems with such a scenario. The bequest to “my Fellowe William Shakespeare” in the will of King’s Man Augustine Phillips cannot be to Oxford, since it occurs after his death, so Ogburn declares that “Shakspere [of Stratford] could have been meant, or another” (31). We are not told who else this “William Shakespeare” could be, if it was not the man who left bequests in his will to Richard Burbage, John Heminges, and Henry Condell. Ogburn in these instances is acting like a defense attorney rather than a scholar, using any means possible (including baseless innuendo) to cast doubt on facts he doesn’t like.

In sharp contrast to his hyper-skepticism of the perfectly ordinary records of Shakespeare’s acting career, Ogburn is eager to construct a stage career for Oxford, even in the absence of any documentary evidence. The closest thing to a record of Oxford acting is a letter by Gilbert Talbot, describing “a device presented by the Earl of Oxford, the Earl of Surrey, and the Lords Thomas and Windsor” at Court during Shrovetide 1579. Ogburn mentions this letter in passing (617), but his chief “evidence” for Oxford’s alleged stage career is John Davies of Hereford’s epigram “To Our English Terence, Mr. Will: Shake-speare”, published in 1610 in Davies’ *The Scourge of Folly*. The entire poem is worth quoting here.

Some say (good Will) which I, in sport, do sing,
Had’st thou not played some Kingly parts in sport,
Thou hadst been a companion for a King;
And been a King among the meaner sort.
Some others rail; but, rail as they think fit,
Thou hast no railing, but, a reigning Wit:
And honesty thou sow’st, which they do reap;
So, to increase their stock which they do keep.

After quoting the poem, Ogburn says that “I cannot see any interpretation but one to put on it: ‘Shake-speare’ was a nobleman who lost caste by appearing on the stage, though he took kingly parts and played them only in sport” (104). A little later he says that Davies appears to be telling us “that Shake-speare was indeed a man of high birth, probably an earl, who lowered himself by taking parts on the stage, albeit under a pseudonym” (105); the clear implication (which Ogburn never makes explicitly) is that Davies was addressing Oxford in this poem.

Despite Ogburn’s characteristic certainty, a reading of the entire volume in which the poem appears makes it abundantly clear that Ogburn’s reading is doubtful in the extreme, and that Davies was *not* addressing Oxford here. First of all, there is the tone: casual, playful, jocular, in keeping with

Davies' other poems to stage figures and poets. In contrast, Davies' poems to member of the nobility (of which there are many in the volume) are serious and respectful. For example, his poem to King James begins, "For bounty, clemency, and chastity, / (Three virtues which in Caesars seldom meet) / No king that ever swayed this monarchy / To rules of grace and peace, hath made so meet" (Davies, 51), and his poems to various Earls contain similar flattery. It is difficult to imagine Davies addressing an Earl with the poem reproduced above without committing a serious breach of etiquette. A more important objection, though, is the fact that the poem is addressed directly to Shakespeare and written in the present tense. All the other present-tense poems in the volume are written to people who were alive in late 1610; whenever a poem is addressed to a dead person, Davies clearly indicates this fact (e.g. "In praise of Sr Henry and Sr Phillip Sidney, Syre and Sonne deceased" (Davies, 16) and "An Epitaph upon the death of the most noble Sr Thomas Gorge, decesing in March, Anno Salutis, 1610" (Davies, 23)). Since Oxford had died in 1604, Davies was clearly not addressing him as "Shakespeare".

But what about the references to "kings" which Ogburn finds so significant in the poem? These are simply examples of Davies playing on the name of the King's Men, the acting troupe to which Shakespeare belonged. There are two other poems in the volume addressed to members of the King's Men: "To the Roscius of these times Mr. W[illiam] Ostler" (Davies, 31) and "To honest-gamesome Robin Armin, That tickles the spleene like an harmless vermin" (Davies, 60). Both of these poems play on the word "king" just as the Shakespeare poem does: Davies asks Ostler, "where was thine action when thy crowne was riven, / Sole king of actors", and his poem to Armin mentions "kings" three times. The only other poem in the volume which mentions "kings" is the one addressed to King James himself, though the poem to John Fletcher (who wrote plays for the King's Men) plays twice on the word "reign".[9] It appears that Davies was merely fond of wordplay, and that Ogburn's elaborate exegesis of the poem to Shakespeare — along with his "evidence" for Oxford's stage career — collapses when looked at in context.

Ogburn's absolute certainty that his interpretation of the Davies poem is correct, even though he has apparently not even looked at the context of that poem, involves yet another double standard he applies in his book. This standard can be illustrated by looking at Ogburn's discussion of two prefaces well-known in Shakespeare studies: Henry Chettle's 1592 preface to his *Kind-Harts Dreame*, and the anonymous preface to the 1609 Quarto of Shakespeare's *Troilus and Cressida*. First, consider Chettle's preface, which was part of the well-known controversy surrounding *Greenes Groatsworth of Wit* in late 1592. *Groatsworth* was one of a spate of books which came out upon the death of Robert Greene in September of that year, purporting to have been written on his deathbed[10]; it contains the well-known epistle to three playwrights, most likely Marlowe, Nashe, and Peele, which in turn contains the attack on "the only

Shake-scene in a country” which has generally been taken to be an attack on Shakespeare. Three months later Chettle published *Kind-Harts Dreame*, containing a preface in which he wrote the following:

About three moneths since died M. Robert Greene, leaving many papers in sundry Booke sellers hands, among other his Groats-worth of wit, in which a letter written to divers play-makers, is offensively by one or two of them taken, and because on the dead they cannot be avenged, they willfully forge in their conceites a living Author: and after tossing it two and fro, no remedy, but it must light on me.
(Chettle, 5-6)

Chettle then went on to describe the reactions of the two offended playwrights: one of them (“whose learning I reverence”) has generally been taken to be Marlowe, and the other, to whom Chettle apologizes handsomely (“I am as sory, as if the originall fault had beene my fault”) is generally taken to be Shakespeare.

Ogburn, however, will have none of this. He insists that the second offended playwright cannot be Shakespeare, because “Chettle wrote that the playwright who had taken offense and whom he was sorry not to have spared *was one of the three playwrights addressed by Greene*” Actually, Chettle did not write this: he wrote that “a letter written to divers play-makers, is offensively by one or two of them taken”, which is not nearly so unambiguous as Ogburn would have us believe. As other writers (e.g. Chambers, I, 59; Marriott, A7) have pointed out, Chettle’s language here is sufficiently vague (“divers”, “one or two”) as to make us believe that he was not writing with Greene’s exact words in front of him, but rather was recalling the episode in general terms. Given that the “famous gracer of Tragedians” (Marlowe) and the “upstart Crow” are the only two people likely to have taken offense at what was written in the epistle, and given Chettle’s reference in his apology to “the qualitie he professes” (a reference to acting), it is entirely reasonable to interpret the apology as referring to Marlowe and Shakespeare. Yet Ogburn sneers at E. K. Chambers for considering the context and allowing for the looseness of Chettle’s language: “Chettle was confused, it seems, and Chambers straightens him out. Chambers, three and a half centuries later, knows better than Chettle what Chettle meant” (62). A strictly literal interpretation of Chettle’s words is all that is possible, we are told.

Ogburn sings a different tune, however, when he discusses the anonymous prefatory epistle to the second issue of the 1609 Quarto of *Troilus and Cressida*. Ogburn finds much that is mysterious in the epistle, which consists mostly of praise for the author and this “new play, never stal’d with the Stage, never clapper-clawd with the palmes of the vulger” (Chambers, II, 216). The epistle refers to the “scape” this play has made from the “grand possess-

ors”; Ogburn baldly asserts that these possessors must have been “members of the nobility” (205) rather than an acting company, despite the abundant evidence (some of it discussed by Matus, 73) that acting companies were reluctant to have their plays printed. Ogburn also asserts that the epistle appeared in the first edition of *Troilus*, but was omitted from a second edition because it was too “daring”; in fact, it has long been established that the edition with the epistle was the second (Williams, 25-33). More interesting for our purposes, though, is the following sentence from the epistle, referring to the author of the play: “And beleve this, that when hee is gone, and his Commedies out of sale, you will scramble for them, and set up a new English Inquisition” (Chambers, II, 217). This sentence appears to be telling us very clearly that the author is still alive: *when* he is gone, you *will* scramble for [his comedies]. Since Oxford had died in 1604, Ogburn cannot allow such a straightforward interpretation, so he has to scramble. He writes: “But this situation has already come to pass” (206), ignoring the fact that editions of five of Shakespeare’s plays were printed in 1608-9, along with the Sonnets, an edition of *Venus and Adonis*, and another play (*A Yorkshire Tragedy*) falsely attributed to him. Ogburn further writes: “one does not in any case in referring to a living writer coolly speak of how things will be when he is dead, even if one could foresee how they would be.” It is difficult to decipher exactly what Ogburn is trying to say here; he seems to be simply asserting that the sentence in question does not mean what it seems to mean. Apparently, the writer of the epistle was confused, and Ogburn straightens him out. Ogburn, nearly four centuries later, knows better than the writer of the epistle what the writer meant.

I have tried in this article to explain the major ways in which Oxfordian methods differ from those used by literary scholars, using Ogburn’s book as a case study. Oxfordians typically ignore or rationalize away the external evidence; they apply a sometime radical double standard in order to make Shakespeare look bad in comparison to other playwrights, and to make Oxford look good; they confidently interpret texts without looking at the context those texts appeared in; they are distressingly reluctant to criticize previous Oxfordian writers, even when those writers are clearly wrong. Not all Oxfordians are equally guilty of these things; there are some who, to their credit, have tried to raise the standards of the movement and put it on a more scholarly footing. Even if the worst of the bad scholarship is trimmed away, though, the heart of the Oxfordian case rests on double standards and enshrinement of subjective interpretations as fact. Ogburn’s book is essentially an elaborately presented rationalization for his fiercely-held ideas about who should have written Shakespeare’s works, dressed up in the trappings of scholarship but employing a series of double standards which make it impossible to disprove his basic thesis. This is a harsh assessment, but one which I believe would be shared by any Shakespeare scholar who took the time to work through Ogburn’s book. I realize that Oxfordians will disagree with much of

what I have written, but I hope that it nevertheless causes them to take a second look at some of their assumptions and methods. The one thing which unites Oxfordians and orthodox Shakespeareans is a love for Shakespeare's works, and even if we disagree about some very basic issues, we can agree that it does matter who wrote those works.

Notes

1] Marlowe (p. 44) and Nashe (pp. 63, 67) are mentioned in "entries" in the diary which are nineteenth-century forgeries by John Payne Collier.

2] I will use the spelling "Shakespeare" for the man from Stratford, because that was by far the most common spelling used to refer to him during his lifetime. I have discussed the spelling of Shakespeare's name at great length in my essay "The Spelling and Pronunciation of Shakespeare's Name", available on the Shakespeare Authorship web site at <http://www.bcpl.lib.md.us/~tross/ws/name1.html>.

3] Several of Shakespeare's Stratford contemporaries unquestionably knew Latin and apparently received good educations, despite coming from very similar backgrounds and never attending a university — most notable among these being Richard Field and Richard Quiney (cf. Eccles, 54-62, and Fripp, 30-32). Ogburn snidely dismisses T.W. Baldwin's monumental study *William Shakspeare's Small Latine and Lesse Greeke* as a "postulation" of an "ideal grammar school" (278), ignoring the mass of documentary evidence Baldwin compiled about the curricula of Elizabethan schools.

4] The one possible example prior to Shakespeare of a printed elegy within seven years of a playwright's death is *Greenes Funeralls* by "R. B.", a 17-page pamphlet of poems printed in 1594, two years after Robert Greene's death. But the poems make no mention of Greene's plays, concentrating entirely on his prose works, and the printer's introduction states that it was published "contrarie to the Authors expectation" (McKerrow, 69), consistent with the practice that elegies for poets circulated in manuscript and were not printed.

5] The volume in honor of Jonson, *Jonsonus Virbius* (1638), was an unprecedented honor for an English poet, and was a turning point after which printed posthumous tributes to "mere" poets became acceptable. Nevertheless, the volume almost never came about; Doctor Brian Duppa had been gathering manuscript elegies for Jonson, but Sir Kenelm Digby had to write Duppa to urge that the collection be printed, or else it would have remained in manuscript (Bradley and Adams, 201).

6] Ogburn mistakenly attributes the eulogy he quotes to Thomas Middleton, when it is actually anonymous. The quoted poem immediately follows Middleton's four-line poem in Stopes' book (Stopes, 117), and Ogburn has apparently mistaken it for a continuation of Middleton's.

7] In 1671, the third edition of Richard Flecknoe's *Epigrams* contained a poem entitled "To Charles Hart. The praises of Burbadge, or of an Excellent Actor" (Flecknoe, 56). As the title implies, this poem honors Flecknoe's contemporary actor Hart by comparing him to the great Burbage.

8] One series of relevant documents which are not discussed by either Ogburn or Matus are a series of legal documents which list "Richard Burbage and William Shakespeare, gentlemen" as the primary tenants of a "playhouse" which is obviously the Globe (Kathman, 73-78). The designation "gentlemen" shows that the reference is clearly to Shakespeare of Stratford and not to a nobleman in disguise, and in any case pseudonyms had to be clearly spelled out in legal documents such as these.

9] As for the specific reference to playing "kingly parts in sport", this could of course refer to Shakespeare playing the parts of kings in his own plays; in fact, Donald Foster's reconstruction of Shakespeare's acting roles using the SHAXICON database (Foster, 25-32) shows that he most likely played the King of France in *All's Well*, King Henry in the two parts of *Henry IV*, King Ferdinand in *Love's Labour's Lost*, Duncan in *Macbeth*, and Theseus in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.

10] Ogburn spends several pages describing Warren Austin's computer study which concluded that *Goatsworth* was most likely written by Chettle and not Greene, claiming that the study "invalidates an essential premise of Stratfordian biography" (62). Even if one accepts Austin's conclusion, it is difficult to see what difference it makes whether the pamphlet was written by Greene, or by Chettle posing as Greene; the substance of the attack on "Shake-scene" is the same regardless.

References

(All quotations and page numbers from *The Mysterious William Shakespeare* refer to the 1992 edition, published by EPM Publications.)

Baldwin, T. W. *William Shakspeare's Small Latine and Lesse Greeke*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1944.

Beaumont, Sir John. *Bosworth-Field: With a Taste of the Variety of Other*

- Poems*. London: F. Kyngston for H. Seile, 1629.
- Bentley, Gerard Eades. *The Jacobean and Caroline Stage*. 7 volumes. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1941-1956.
- Bradley, Jesse Franklin, and Joseph Quincy Adams, eds. *The Jonson Allusion-Book*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1922.
- Camden, William. *Remaines of a greater worke, concerning Britain*. 5th edition, with additions by John Philipot. London: T. Harper for J. Waterson, 1636.
- Chambers, E. K. *William Shakespeare: A Study of Facts and Problems*. 2 volumes. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1930.
- Chettle, Henry. *Kind-Hartes Dreame*. (with William Kemp, *Nine Daies Wonder*). Edited by G. B. Harrison. New York: Barnes & Noble, 1966.
- Chettle, Henry, and Robert Greene. *Greene's Groatsworth of Wit: Bought with a Million of Repentance (1592)*. Edited by D. Allen Carroll. Binghamton, N.Y.: Medieval & Renaissance Texts & Studies, 1994.
- Davies, John, of Hereford. *The Complete Works of John Davies of Hereford*. 2 volumes. Edited by Alexander B. Grosart. Printed for private circulation, 1878.
- Drayton, Michael. *The Works of Michael Drayton*. Edited by J. William Hebel. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1941.
- Eccles, Mark. *Shakespeare in Warwickshire*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1961.
- Eliot, T. S. *Selected Essays, 1917-1932*. New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1932.
- Evans, Robert C. "Whome None But Death Could Shake': An Unreported Epitaph on Shakespeare". *Shakespeare Quarterly* 39 (1988), 60.
- Flecknoe, Richard. *Epigrams of All Sorts, Made at Several Times, on Several Occasions*. Third edition. London: Printed for the Author, 1671.
- Foster, Donald. "SHAXICON '95". *Shakespeare Newsletter*, no. 225 (Summer 1995), 25, 30, 32.
- Fripp, Edgar I. *Master Richard Quyny*. Oxford University Press, 1924.
- Henslowe, Philip. *Henslowe's Diary*. Edited by R. A. Foakes and R. T. Rickert. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1961.
- Herford, C. H., and Percy Simpson, eds. *Ben Jonson. Volumes I & II: The Man and His Work*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1925.
- Kathman, David. "Six Biographical Records 'Re-Discovered': Some Neglected Contemporary References to Shakespeare". *Shakespeare Newsletter* no. 227 (Winter 1995), 73,76,78.
- The Marprelate Tracts (1588-1589)*. Facsimile reprint. Leeds, England: Scolar Press, 1967.
- Marriott, Elizabeth. *Bacon or Shakespeare? An Historical Enquiry*. Third Edition, with an appendix. London: Elliot Stock, 1899.
- Matus, Irvin. *Shakespeare, IN FACT*. New York: Continuum, 1994.
- McKerrow, R. B., ed. *Greenes Newes both from Heauen and Hell 1593 and*

- Greenes Funeralls 1594*. London: Sidgwick & Jackson, 1911.
- Miles, Rosalind. *Ben Jonson: His Life and Work*. London and New York: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1986.
- Munro, John, ed. *The Shakspeare Allusion-Book*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1932.
- Newdigate, Bernard. *Michael Drayton and His Circle*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1941.
- Spivack, Charlotte. *George Chapman*. New York: Twayne, 1967.
- Stopes, Charlotte Carmichael. *Burbage and Shakespeare's Stage*. London: Alexander Moring, 1913.
- Taunton, Nina. "Did John Fletcher the Playwright Go to University?" *Notes and Queries*, June 1990, p. 170.
- Wells, William. *Spenser Allusions In the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1972.
- Williams, Philip, Jr. "The 'Second Issue' of Shakespeare's *Troilus and Cressida*, 1609". *Studies in Bibliography*, vol. 2 (1949-50), 25-33.