The Lame Storyteller
by Peter Moore
Hamburg, Germany: Verlag Uwe Laugwitz, 2009, xvi + 345 pages
Reviewed by Warren Hope

Peter Moore's scholarly essays on Shakespeare are of two types. The first consist of what might best be described as traditional academic Shakespearean studies.

They range from brief notes to full-blown articles that do not touch at all on the authorship question or reveal Moore's view that Edward de Vere, Earl of Oxford, was Shakespeare. The second type do deal with the authorship question and clearly reflect Moore's position. Gary Goldstein, the book's editor, explains that Moore aimed to establish himself as a traditional Shakespeare scholar in the hope that he would then be able to find a publisher for a book-length manuscript on Shakespeare's *Sonnets*. Although that hope unfortunately went unfulfilled, we are lucky to have this book because it forces us to notice what might otherwise have been missed: Peter Moore is one of the very best Oxfordian scholars to emerge in the last twenty-five years.

Moore's essays on the sonnets show his scope and his method. For instance, these essays tend to confirm the traditional academic consensus that sonnets 1 to 126 are all addressed to the Earl of Southampton. Moore also argues in favor of the idea that the sonnets as arranged in the 1609 edition represent the order of composition of the poems if it is accepted that the poems written to the so-called Dark Lady overlap with some of the poems addressed to the so-called Fair Youth, that is, Southampton. In short, Moore establishes firm common ground with academics in general and Stratfordians in particular and in so doing no doubt does much to attract their attention. It is clear that he actually holds these positions but also that he is as it were avoiding prejudices in the hope that doing so will gain him a hearing from an academic audience.

But Moore sharply parts company with the academics when he proposes that Robert Devereux, Earl of Essex, is the so-called Rival Poet of the sonnets. The reason this represents a sharp break with the academics is because part of his motive is to show a dereliction of duty on their part—an irrational unwillingness to consider the possibility that a courtier-poet might be Shakespeare's rival because of assumptions about the identity of Shakespeare. Moore's case for Essex is a relatively strong one that he sums up this way:

> Shakespeare's Sonnets describe a rival who was Southampton's friend, a poet, learned, tall, proud, probably a sailor, who had an affable familiar ghost who dealt in intelligence, who received assistance in his writing from friends whose name makes a plausible Latin pun on Bacon, who was associated with the word "virtue" and with cosmetics, who boosted Southampton's fame while being in his debt, and who could be said to have a sick muse. This is quite a detailed portrait, and Essex matches it perfectly.

Fault can be found with this case—Moore fails to quote a single line of Essex's verse in support of his argument—and, oddly enough, Moore is willing to weaken his relatively strong case by pointing out that one of the two poets generally thought of as the rival poet, Marlowe and Chapman, still might be involved. He suggests that Chapman might have written poems to Southampton on Essex's behalf. Moore also states in a footnote, "If the arguments offered in this article in favor of Essex as the Rival are applied one by one to Sir Walter Ralegh, it will be seen that a surprisingly strong case can be made for him as the Rival Poet."

The point, of course, is that the author of the sonnets, the addressee of the sonnets to the Fair Youth, and the Rival Poet are or at least might be all courtiers. In other words, the identification of the Rival Poet was for Moore firmly tied to the authorship question.

For readers of this book to see Moore's position on the sonnets in all of its valuable complexity requires that they connect these articles with "The Fable of the World Twice Told," an essay that deals at length with Oxford's life. In that essay Moore deals in part with Oxford's eldest daughter's marriage to William Stanley, Earl of Derby, and the reports of Stanley's jealousy caused by rumors that the Countess had been unfaithful to her husband with the Earl of Essex. These rumors, reported to Sir Robert Cecil, Oxford's brother-in-law, by spies of Cecil's in the Stanley household, are at once reminiscent of early troubles in Oxford's own marriage to Ann Cecil, the mother of the Countess of Derby, but also open up reconsiderations of some of the sonnets. Moore writes:

> Sonnets 69 and 70 are addressed to "thee," who is said to be the victim of slander, who, however, is partly at fault. Now things get a bit complicated. Shakespeare always addresses the Dark Lady as "thee," but Sonnets 1 to 126 are sometimes to "you" and sometimes to "thee." No one has ever given a good explanation for these pronoun shifts, but some of them could result from a change in the person being addressed. I have always believed that the first 126 Sonnets were to or about the same person, the Earl of Southampton, but Sonnets 69 and 70 can be plausibly explained as to Elizabeth, Countess of Derby.

In short, Moore's acceptance of the traditional academic view of the sonnets

is not an unquestioning acceptance of dogma but rather an attempt to accept what seems reasonable unless documentary evidence comes along that suggests an alternative. The neat, simple, and traditional view that the first 126 sonnets are all addressed to the same person, based on a suppression of any concern about the shifting pronouns in those sonnets, is shaken when the idea that two of the sonnets in the sequence might have been addressed by Oxford to his eldest daughter forces itself on him. The result is not only increased respect for the honesty with which Moore struggled to come to terms with the sonnets, but also increased regret that he did not publish his book-length study of Shakespeare's most personal poems.

Moore also devotes an entire essay to Surrey's writings as a source for two key speeches by Hamlet on the nature of man. Surrey's verse paraphrase of Psalm 8 and a companion poem to it which begins "The storms are past" are shown by Moore to have provided Shakespeare with ideas and words that appear in Hamlet's "quintessence of dust" speech and also the soliloquy by Hamlet beginning, "How all occasions do inform against me." This is solid work that should not only provide notes to future editions of Hamlet but also clarifies some questions concerning when Surrey's pieces were composed. Moore shows that they were written in the tower after he had been convicted of treason and awaited beheading, a position which is at variance with the views of a number of Surrey scholars and editors. And yet this solid work does not yield its full value unless we realize that Moore thinks of Shakespeare as Oxford.

Moore's work on Surrey becomes most valuable when we realize he thinks of Shakespeare as Oxford. Why would William Shaksper of Stratford take so much interest in a courtier who was convicted of treason and beheaded eighteen years before he was born? More importantly, how could William Shaksper of Stratford have gained access to Surrey's manuscripts, as Moore insists Shakespeare must have done? The answers to these questions become irrelevant when it is recognized that Surrey was Oxford's uncle by marriage. Surrey is also credited with "inventing" blank verse in his translations of Virgil and is thought to be the first English poet to have used the verse form that has come to be known as the Shakespearean sonnet. In short, when Moore's work on Surrey is placed in the Oxfordian context it yields its full meaning, value, and importance. We are reminded that J. Thomas Looney said long ago that Elsinore as presented in *Hamlet* is merely Windsor recast—and Windsor was the scene of Surrey's youthful romance with Oxford's aunt.

While it is certainly true that Moore's non-Oxfordian work is valuable in itself—how many scholars can be said to have made points worth remembering about *Hamlet, Lear, Macbeth, Troilus and Cressida*, and the *Sonnets*?—it is also true that Moore's best work is directly related to the authorship question. In part this is a matter of style. Moore is a good polemicist with a strong sense of humor and these pleasurable elements in his work are restrained almost out of existence when he writes for an academic audience. But it is also the case that Moore's Oxfordian work differs in substance as well as style because it is tied to life rather than to philosophy, theology, or verbal echoes and similarities.

The longest essay in the book deals with the chronology of Shakespeare's plays

as established by E.K. Chambers long ago. Moore shows that academic, Stratfordian critics have for years lamented that Chambers's dating of the composition of the plays between 1590 and 1613 was too late by a number of years and should be pushed back into the 1580s. Moore also shows that despite these lamentations no academic critic has stopped relying on Chambers or set about replacing his structure with a sufficiently revised version. Moore possibly thought that here was a chance to find common ground with Stratfordians by suggesting a revision of the Chambers chronology along the lines suggested by Chambers's academic critics. Moore in fact makes a strong case for dating the composition of the plays between 1584 and 1604—dates that are compatible with the authorship of the plays by Oxford and that would pose problems for adherents of the traditional attribution of the plays to William Shaksper of Stratford. In doing so, Moore establishes some probative procedures with regard to trying to settle on the dates of composition of the plays and especially urges extreme care when using topical allusions to date the plays.

Still, it must be said that Moore weakens his effort to establish a chronology for the composition of the plays by staying strictly with Stratfordian sources. For instance, he is correct to argue that Cairncross's *The Problem of Hamlet* (1936) poses severe problems for the traditional date of the composition of *Hamlet*, but he does not draw attention to the fact that J. Thomas Looney made the same point decades before him.

Most importantly, though, Moore is guilty of a fault he would have been quick to find and correct in Chambers. He argues for 1587-1588 as the years of composition for *The Comedy of Errors* based on a topical allusion—the very kind of evidence he appropriately urges others to take care with because they can be introduced in revisions of plays. In arguing for this date, he ignores the existence of a court play from a decade earlier—1576-1577—entitled the *History of Error* and thought by many traditional scholars to have been an anonymous play that Shakespeare revised. As Eva Turner Clark argued, Oxford as Shakespeare could have been the author of this play when William Shaksper was a thirteen-year-old in Stratford. For me, Moore could have strengthened this very valuable essay by being more willing to challenge the traditional attribution of the plays in it.

Moore often regrets his inability to have access to archives in England. Some of the roads of research he suggests make it seem unfortunate that he did not have an academic job with students to supervise. In his essay on the Rival Poet he expressed the thought that the papers of Anthony Bacon or Lord Henry Howard, later the Earl of Northampton, might shed light on Essex's possible connection with Shakespeare's *Sonnets*. When Moore writes about the praise of Oxford by George Chapman he expresses the wish that an Oxfordian scholar in England might locate the manuscript of Chapman's poem in praise of Sir Horace Vere entitled "Pro Vere" in the hope that gaps in the printed version might be filled. He also thought that people with access to rare reference works might be able to find support in Coxeter for J. Thomas Looney's suggestion that Oxford might have had a hand in Arthur Golding's translations of Ovid's *Metamorphosis*. The cooperation between Moore and Alan Nelson temporarily provided him with the access to archives that he had lacked.

The title essay of the volume, "The Lame Storyteller, Poor and Despised," uses Nelson's findings to show that specific phrases in the sonnets that cannot be applied to William Shaksper in any credible way actually depict Oxford's reality. It is perhaps the best piece in the book. If so, a very close second and a solid supplement is Moore's evaluation of the votes for the Order of the Garter that Oxford received over the years. Moore explains that he had the original and valuable idea that these votes could serve as indicators of the popularity and prestige of courtiers. As a result, he urged Alan Nelson to obtain the records of the votes and grant Moore access to them. Nelson kindly did so, knowing full well that the result was likely to be interpreted as support for Oxford's identity with Shakespeare—and it was. The result was to show that when the Shakespearean plays and poems were becoming public Oxford was virtually an outcast, receiving a single vote for the Garter during the last fourteen years of his life.

It is to Moore's credit that despite his cooperative relationship with Alan Nelson, he pulled no punches when he came to review Nelson's embarrassment *Monstrous Adversary* in a piece with the wonderful title, "Demonography 101." I will not dull the pleasure that awaits Oxfordians who have not yet read this piece by discussing it here. It is enough to say that this piece alone is worth the price of the book. In addition, though, Moore's urging that Oxfordians use the identification of Sidney's Stella with Penelope Rich as a scholarly analogy for the authorship question should be taken up and publicized as much as possible. On the other hand, Moore's admonition that Oxfordian scholarship too often replaces digging in documents with wishful thinking should be heeded as a relevant warning.

Too often the work of Oxfordian scholars is hidden away in tiny periodicals with small readerships, poor production values, and little distribution. It is good that Peter Moore's work has been gathered into a book so that it might reach appreciative readers now and in the future. His work deserves to find its way onto library shelves as well as into the hands of sympathetic readers. All Oxfordians can and should take pride as well as pleasure in it.