MY OTHER CAR IS A SHAKESPEARE *A Response to*

Shahan & Whalen's "Apples to Oranges in Bard Stylometrics"

Ward E.Y. Elliott & Robert J. Valenza

IT'S to the credit of the Oxfordians that some of them have actually tried to challenge our evidence over the years, and that THE OXFORDIAN has been open to both sides of the debate. John Shahan and Richard Whalen's critique (*Apples* 2006) is the latest of several such critiques, and one of the better ones. But we don't find it persuasive.

They urge us to forget what we can see of Oxford's poems directly, and consider what we cannot see but might infer from commentators, just like those license frames you sometimes find on junkable cars: "My other car is a Porsche." They argue that Oxford's visible verse is green oranges, and our Shakespeare baseline ripe apples, and that we shouldn't be comparing them. What do we have of Shakespeare but mature poems and plays? What do we have of Oxford but juvenilia, half of it song lyrics, which are not represented in our smaller-block Shakespeare baselines, and for which our tests have not been validated? Just because we have found a colossal mismatch between Shakespeare's and Oxford's stylistic marker traits, they argue, it doesn't necessarily mean we have eliminated Oxford as a credible Shakespeare claimant. All it means is that the only Oxford verse we have is so juvenile, and so different in genre from our Shakespeare baseline that the two *corpora* are not comparable, and differences between them, even the gross ones we found, can't disprove common authorship. This is especially so, they argue, where we can reasonably suppose that Oxford wrote more poems or plays than have survived, and where we know for sure that some of his contemporaries called him a "most excellent" writer. How can we claim to have eliminated Oxford when we know that his other car, now lost, could have been "Most Excellent," just like Shakespeare? Wouldn't it be wiser to put aside what Oxford did write and focus on what he might have written?

The genre problem

When dealing with a single candidate like Oxford, we have tried to stay away from words like "elimination," to avoid overclaiming our case, and to let the strong evidence speak for itself. We have conceded that some or all of the poems in the *Paradyse of Daynty Deuises* could be song lyrics, for which our tests have not been validated, and that they might have been written in Oxford's teens (*TLR* 392). But arguing something is not the same as proving it, and it is not

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clear to us that even proving it could save the Oxford candidacy. If we stripped Oxford's verse of every non-iambic pentameter line, and every line from the *Paradyse of Daynty Deuises*, we would still have a gross mismatch with Shakespeare. Oxford's cut-down sample would still be thousands of times less like Shakespeare than Shakespeare's own most discrepant like-sized baseline block. Shakespeare at his peak was able to turn out about one 750-word block of verse a week. At this rate, it would have taken him 167 years to produce by chance something as different from his known baseline verse as Oxford's iambic-pentameter non-songs. It seems to us that it would take a very desperate person to consider such a mismatch consistent with a plausible Oxford claim.

Like most analysts, we generally prefer a larger, more representative baseline to a smaller, less representative one. Iambic pentameter (I-5) comparison seems to us the simple, straightforward, proper way of comparing someone to Shakespeare, that is, to compare the sample text with Shakespeare's normal meter, not with a meter that he exhibits only rarely and inconsistently.

To put Shakespeare's rich blend of verse and non-verse varietals into homely proportions better suited for milk and flour than for fine wine, let's suppose that we could fit everything from his single-authored plays into an oversized 1.33-gallon jeroboam. Three-quarters of the jeroboam, let's say an even gallon, is verse. One-quarter is prose, immaterial to the Oxford claim. Adding Shakespeare's poems and his verse from co-authored plays would each increase the gallon by a cup and a half, but we'll ignore his disputed verse here and save his poems (which are 99% I-5) for later to make up for the cupful of non-I-5 verse to be deducted from his plays.

Every gallon has 16 cups; every cup has 16 tablespoons. Of our play-verse gallon, 94%, or 15 cups, is I-5. 6%, about one cupful, is a variety of other meters, including songs. We'll subtract this non-I-5 and replace it with Shakespeare's poems, which are 99% I-5. Songs are maybe two or three percent of the gallon, half a cup or a quarter of a cup, depending on whether you think the long witches' scenes from *Macbeth* should count as songs. We don't, but the three spoonfuls' worth of difference between the two measures is trivial. What we did in the *Tennessee Law Review*, in essence, was to compare half of Oxford's verse, let's say half a spoonful, to a generous iambic pentameter baseline representing a cup and a half of Shakespeare's poems for two poems-only tests, and a gallon of Shakespeare's verse for the other ten tests. What we have just done in this article is to compare a further cut-down sample, 28% of Oxford's known verse, again, with the biggest available comparable Shakespeare baselines. We believe our *TLR* comparison is the proper one, all of Oxford's iambic pentameter against all of Shakespeare's in our pertinent baselines, but either way, the odds against Oxford are prohibitively high.

What Messrs. Shahan and Whalen seem to want is something quite different: a comparison of some or all of Oxford's poems against the exceptional 2% of Shakespeare, his song lyrics, that is, one spoonful of Oxford against just four spoonfuls of Shakespeare.

Shahan-Whalen's thin-slicing strategy, which they learned from Nina Green, is probably the best one they could use, but not all Oxfordians subscribe to it. Others prefer a thick-slicing strategy which presents Oxford not only as the True Shakespeare, but also as much of the True Gascoigne, True Lyly, and True Golding, and the author of *Horestes, Guy of Warwick, The Spanish Tragedy, the Famous Victories of Henry V*, and many other works, to say nothing of the True Spenser, Marlowe, Sidney, Peele, and Greene. It would be wonderful news for Shake-

speare-lovers, if true, to see his work so wondrously multiplied, but in practice this vast conjectured Oxford Apocrypha would be catastrophic for the Oxford candidacy because too much of it has been tested by us and shown to be grossly mismatched with Shakespeare, but with no help possible from the juvenilia and genre defenses. Oxfordians can have either a big, indefensible Oxford Canon like Brame and Popova's, or a much smaller, more defensible one like what we take to be Shahan's and Whalen's—but it can't be both. If Shahan and Whalen are serious about their deflation of the Oxford Canon, they need to put some daylight between it and the inflated, irredentist, hopelessly indefensible Oxford canons still popular with other Oxfordians.

Can salami-slicing save Oxford?

Hence, we acknowledge that generic salami-slicing could benefit the Oxford case, but not without addressing gross inconsistencies with other prominent Oxfordian positions. But does even the cut-down version have enough in common with Shakespeare to rescue Oxford's candidacy? We think not. Nina Green tried it in vain fifteen years ago, in a visit to our computer lab in Claremont, anticipating the Shahan-Whalen arguments in connection with our then-new modal test. Then, as now, this test showed Oxford's poems to be many standard deviations outside our Shakespeare profiles. We sliced our Oxford corpus for her in every way that we, or she could think of, starting with cutting out the eight poems from the *Paradyse of Daynty Deuises*. Each slice somewhat reduced the astronomical odds against the whole corpus purely by reducing sample size, but no amount of slicing could get any part of the Oxford corpus anywhere near to fitting our Shakespeare profiles on that one test. Now we are doing essentially the same exercise, only with a dozen or so tests, but with the same discouraging outcome for Oxford: what we have of Oxford, no matter how we cut it down, is still a gross mismatch with what we have of Shakespeare.

Moreover, it's one thing to slice up the Oxford corpus to try to fit Shakespeare, but it is quite another thing to slice up the Shakespeare corpus to try to fit Oxford, as our critics would have us do, comparing four spoonfuls of Shakespeare with one spoonful of Oxford. When Nina Green asked us to do it, we declined, considering it too narrow, too Oxford-centric, too subjective and inconclusive, and too much work for us to replicate for Shakespeare's songs the process that took our students six years to work out for his poems and plays. But we reminded her of our still-standing offer to let her do it, if she wished, using our software. We also wondered if she could find

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us five lines of Shakespeare song in iambic pentameter. She hasn't taken us up on either of these, nor have Messrs. Shahan and Whalen.

What would happen if she, or we, had actually carried through a slice-to-sliver, songs-to-songs comparison and it had shown some matches? Would a few matches with the 2% sliver of Shakespeare outweigh the gross mismatches with the 94% slab of Shakespeare? We doubt it. Even if you thought a few thousand words of baseline song lyrics were enough to outweigh a half million words of iambic pentameter, which we don't, a ton of consistencies rarely proves something as much as a pound of inconsistencies disproves it (our 2004, 337-341).

What if she had, or we had, made her slice-to-sliver comparison and it had shown a mismatch? Does any reader of THE OXFORDIAN think it would have changed her mind? We don't. More likely, she would take a closer qualitative look at Shakespeare's songs and discover that they are far from consistent with each other, that none of them sound remotely like Oxford's "songs," and that her Shakespeare sliver is so obviously different from her Oxford slice, that the already-tiny sliver itself has to be further cut down, perhaps to nothing more than a pile of shavings more like hamburger than like salami. It would not be a hard task. She could easily argue any or all of the following:

- All of Shakespeare's songs are from plays, but none, as far as we know, of Oxford's.

- Shakespeare's favorite song meters are iambic tetrameter and iambic trimeter; but three-quarters of Oxford's eight "songs" from the *Paradyse of Daynty Deuises* are in meters Shakespeare almost never used for songs.

- Most of Shakespeare's songs are sweet, sunny, jaunty, light, spare, worldly, knowing, tongue-in-cheek, outgoing, and, above all, entertaining. "We'll strive to please you every day" (*TN* 5.1.408), but none of Oxford's.

- Many of Shakespeare's songs are set to popular tunes not his, but none of Oxford's.

- Many of Shakespeare's songs have been set to music, but, as far as we know, only one of Steven May's "possible" Oxford's: "If women could be fair and yet not fond."

- Shakespeare's songs, unlike Oxford's, seldom parade the author's classical learning except to parody it (*AYL* 3.2.141-48).

Unlike Shakespeare's songs, Oxford's songs are sour, plodding, woeful, pedantic, verbose, and crudely alliterative, and few of them are in Shakespeare's favorite song meters. Turning sounds of woe into hey nonny nonnies was the last thing on Oxford's mind. Contrast, if you will, the much-sung Shakespeare snatch below with the never-sung Oxford snatch that follows it:

> Then sigh not so, But let them go,
> And be you blithe and bonny,
> Converting all your sounds of woe
> Into hey nonny, nonny.   (Ado 2.3.66-69)

> Drown me you trickling tears, you wailful wights of woe,
> Come help these hands to rend my hairs, my rueful haps to show.
> On whom the scorching flames of love, doth feed you see,
> Ah a lalalantida my dear dame, hath thus tormented me.
>
> <div align="right">Oxford #3 (May 27)</div>

If Oxford were our student and handed in a Shakespeare song as his, we would wonder where he bought it, so glaring are the differences between his style and Shakespeare's. But if the mismatch is that glaring, we would wonder afresh what led Shahan, Whalen, and Green to ask us for their oddly-conceived "song"–to–song comparison in the first place. As far as we can tell, the genre defense is a blind alley, qualitatively, as well as quantitatively, and we see little reason to pursue it further.

The dating/juvenilia problem

What about the juvenilia/caterpillar/grub argument, which attempts further to discount Oxford's known poems, not just by distinguishing them generically from Shakespeare, but also by backdating some or all of them to Oxford's teens? Could it be that Oxford was sixteen—or maybe thirteen?—when he wrote all those woebegone fourteeners about his rueful haps, and that his youth and inexperience explain his clumsy style? Or that all sixteen of his known poems were written as a teenager (Shahan 116-17), and kept in a drawer till published years or decades later? Maybe, but there are problems with this theory. It is particularly improbable with plays (see *TLR* 379-89, esp. 381 n.152). As for poems, it is rare, but hardly unknown, for talented teenagers to write and publish good ones. Elizabeth Barrett Browning wrote her first epic at twelve and published her first poem, anonymously, at fourteen. We wonder if Shahan-Whalen could refer us to any competent mature poet whose juvenilia were as clumsy as Oxford's known poems at any stage of his life? Alexander Pope's lines from *Solitude*, written before he was twelve, show no sign at all of Oxford's verbosity or heavy-footedness:

> Thus let me live, unseen, unknown;
> Thus unlamented let me die;
> Steal from the world, and not a stone
> Tell where I lie.

We did not originate the Oxford-as-clumsy juvenile argument and don't find it very convincing, though, as far as we know, we were the first to use the caterpillar/grub image as a handy shorthand label for it. The idea that juvenile work must be sour and clumsy—or, more precisely, the idea that sour, clumsy work must therefore be juvenile—is an old Oxfordian standby, much urged in all the Ogburns' books (Ogburns Ch. 6; Ogburn 390-97), and in Joseph Sobran's (Appendix 2), no less than in Shahan-Whalen's article. Oxford himself pleaded it to his guardian, William Cecil: "[I]f I have done any thing amiss that I have merited your offence impute (it) to my young years and lack of experience. . ." (Fowler 19). For years we have been

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treating this position as at least arguable, and have addressed it seriously in all our Oxford articles (such as *TLR* 390-96).

But we don't put much stock in it. It does not match what we know about our own stylistic development, nor that of our poetically inclined students, friends, and relatives. It doesn't match what we know of other great poets—not just Pope and Barrett Browning, but Milton, Spenser, Donne, Byron, Keats, Shelley, Tennyson, Frost, Eliot, Robert Penn Warren, and John Crowe Ransom. All of these not only wrote polished, publishable poems, but got them into print when they were twenty-one or younger. We would be surprised if most of these college-age writers were publishing poems that spent years in a drawer or in private circulation to friends.

In particular, it doesn't match what we know of Oxford himself, from his first letter in English at nineteen, to Cecil (above) to one of his last, to Cecil's son Robert, at fifty-three (Fowler 19, 802). Both letters, like most of his poems, are written with the same characteristically stilted, courtly verbosity, unchanged by the passage of time. Oxford's early letters show no more signs of a distinctive juvenile style than his late ones; why should we suppose that his poems, which likewise show few, if any, signs of stylistic development, were different? As for Oxford's supposed penchant for leaving worthy works unpublished in a drawer, we need look no further than to his own words, at twenty-three, when publishing *Cardanus Comforte*, apparently against the author's wishes. He abjured "the concealment of so worthy a work" and thought it "an unpardonable error, to have murdered the same in the waste bottoms of my chests" (118). This is hardly the language of someone who shrinks from publication. As David Galenson put it, Oxford was no Emily Dickinson.

And that is just the bare, Steven May version of Oxford viewed mostly without the massive embellishments of Oxfordian lore. Would he seem quite so juvenile if we heard from marquee Oxfordians that he was, at twenty-one, "exceptionally mature for his age in both experience and understanding" (Ogburns 41)? Or, if we learned that, at twenty-three, Oxford was the Queen's Favorite, her secret husband, and father of her never-acknowledged changeling Prince Tudor (Ogburns Ch. 60)? We doubt it. What about the Oxford Apocrypha, all those bushels of never-acknowledged works that he was supposedly pouring out from the 1570s on, which supposedly belong in the Shakespeare Canon? If they weren't so fatally at odds both with what we know of Shakespeare (above), and with what we could guess about Oxford from the poems he did publish, and from his avowed loathing for leaving worthy works in the waste bottoms of his chests, these might help his case by filling the embarrassing fifteen years of silence between the end of the backdated Oxford poems of Shahan-Whalen's imagination, let's say before 1575, and the beginning of clear references to Shakespeare's plays around 1590-91 (*TLR* 376-389, 452-53).

Moreover, they might also help fill another yawning creativity gap between Oxford and Shakespeare, hitherto unmentioned: Judging from their surviving writing, Shakespeare was not just 100 times better than Oxford, he was also 80 times more productive. Shakespeare wrote about 3,500 lines of verse a year for twenty years, most of them immortal; Oxford, in the Shahan-Whalen scenario, wrote about 40 lines of woebegone juvenilia a year for ten years, then, for fifteen years, wrote nothing at all that he or anyone else could be bothered to save—but then, at forty-three, supposedly burst from his cocoon to become a literary supernova overnight. He suddenly moved from producing a teaspoon of vinegary Château Malheureux ordinaire a year for

his first twenty-five years to producing a cup a year of incomparable Château Lafite Rothschild for his last twenty, a bigger, less credible jump for Oxford at age forty-three than Barry Bonds's fabulous hitting surge at age thirty-six, and before steroids, too.

Unfortunately, as we have shown, the Oxford Apocrypha have too much Shakespeare discrepancy of their own to bridge the abyss, and Oxfordian attempts to fill the abyss with back-dated Shakespeare plays have not been a success (*TLR* 376-390). Hence, Shahan-Whalen's "unrepresentative juvenile experiments" argument has grave quantitative, as well as qualitative problems: it's wholly unsubstantiated for the other half of Oxford's poems which appeared after 1576; it doesn't fit what we know of other great poets' juvenilia; it leaves an unexplained fifteen years of total silence between the larva and the butterfly, followed by an unexplained overnight transition to supernova in productivity as well as quality. The Oxfordians' last resort is the "other car" argument that we have only the dregs of Oxford's early writing because no one troubled to preserve his more "representative" mature writing that made people say he was "most excellent." But, if Shakespeare produced a gallon of Lafite in twenty years, and Oxford is the True Shakespeare, we have to suppose not only that his lost poems and plays must have tasted and tested like Lafite, but that there must also have been a gallon of them over Oxford's twenty-eight year pre-Shakespeare writing life. A gallon is 30-odd *Julius Caesar*s and half a million words of verse, three dozen Porsches, not just one. Where could they have gone?

The sampling problem: Did we wrongly ignore Oxford's lost golden apples?

Shahan and Whalen reproach us for testing only the spoonful of Oxford's verse that we have, and for supposing that, just because these were a gross mismatch with Shakespeare, that it eliminates Oxford as a credible claimant. What about the lost jug of Lafite, the lost fleet of Porsches, the lost bushel of golden apples? Aren't we aware that Oxford was widely and extravagantly praised by Harvey, Webbe, Puttenham, and Meres as "most excellent" of courtier poets, and "first" among "those who have written excellently well?" Surely this must mean that Oxford must have written many most excellent poems and plays that have not come down to us, much better than the meager spoonful in the Oxford Canon. Might not these "most excellent" vanished works have tasted and tested like Lafite?

Even if we ignored his huge productivity mismatch with Shakespeare, it's improbable. Oxford's reputation does sound Olympian when you hear only those old superlatives about him, taken out of context. But he doesn't sound so Olympian when viewed in the context of comparably extravagant gold medals heaped on others by the same people in the same pages. Oxford, for example is only one of 125 "best" or "most excellent" writers, painters, and musicians on Meres's list, and by no means the most prominent (Schoenbaum 26). Moreover, the inclusion of both Oxford and Shakespeare clearly suggests that Meres thought of them as two different persons. Oops! Can we trust such a man's judgment? Webbe praises Gascoigne, Thomas Phaer, Munday, and Spenser in no less extravagant language (33-34). For Puttenham, Oxford was one of more than twenty latter-day "chief lanterns of light," all of whom, however, were outshone by the Queen, "whose learned, delicate, noble Muse, easily surmounteth all the rest that have written before her time or since (Ch. 31)."

Could it be that a bit of flattery and hype has crept into these literary judgments, that it is not confined to the Queen, and that, therefore, the extravagant superlatives for the higher nobility should be taken with a pinch of salt? Would Messrs. Shahan and Whalen think we have unfairly and unscientifically excluded Queen Elizabeth as the True Shakespeare because Putten-ham tells us that her noble Muse easily surmounteth everyone else's, present and past? We wouldn't. We are reminded of Twain's comparison of the Stratford man's case to a dinosaur reconstructed out of only nine bones of fact and a ton of conjectural plaster, only this one has fewer bones and more plaster.

We are not persuaded by Shahan-Whalen's argument that all such flattery must have vanished by 1589, when Oxford was supposedly off the A-List and too poor to be worth flattering (Shahan 117). Wasn't Oxford still the first lord of the realm then, and getting a princely annuity of £1,000 a year from the Queen, worth about $360,000 in today's money? If he was short of money, it was not because he had none, but because he was spending too much of it on living large and patronizing more players and writers than he could pay for. Steven May reminds us that Oxford "received 9 of his 30-odd book dedications after that date [1588]. Yes, he was a discredited nobody at Court by then, but he continued to patronize at least some writers and musicians. He remained a prime target for dedications—and flattery." In an age and milieu where flattery and hype were the coin of the realm, and where fortune and favor at Court fluctuated drastically and unpredictably, he also had more than enough rank and connections to justify flattery even if he had no money at all. We don't believe everything we read on a dust jacket, especially if it doesn't match the only visible pages of the book; and we would commend a similar skepticism to Messrs. Shahan and Whalen.

But let us suppose for argument's sake that flattery and hype are wholly absent and that Oxford's vanished sonnets, comedies, and Latin verses are not only much better than his known verse, but better than those of the other courtier poets, let's say better than Raleigh, Sidney, Essex, Dyer, and Greville, and either that there really was a gallon of lost gold-medal Oxford wine out there, or that a few lost spoonfuls of it would be enough to make Oxford Shakespeare's equal. Would that be enough to make him the True Shakespeare, but not the Queen or the dozens of others on the Most Excellent lists? It seems to us quite a leap of faith.

Do the Oxford apocrypha contradict what we can see under the streetlight?

Now let us put a few of our favorite images together with one of Shahan-Whalen's and look at their inference that there must once have been something like the Porsche fleet, the bushel of golden apples, or the lost Lafite out there, only it's not under the lamplight where we have been drunkenly looking for the keys (Shahan 121-23). If looking where you can see is a sin, we are the worst of sinners, and also the least repentant. So was Bacon, who also liked to use the observable to explain the not-so-observable, not the other way around. But all we have shown, they argue, is that too much of what we can see of Oxford is at odds with what we can see of Shakespeare. What about what we don't see of Oxford but could easily surmise? How can we claim to have eliminated him as a credible claimant when all we have tested is his observed oranges-verse against an observed Shakespeare baseline of apples-verse? Oxford could easily

have written golden apples-verse which might compare with Shakespeare, but none of it has sur-vived; there is no way we can test it and, therefore, there is no way we can claim to have elim-inated Oxford as a testable candidate. Q.E.D.

We do think authors have measurable, predictable stylistic profiles, especially Shakespeare, and we are sure enough of this to have offered a thousand-dollar bet, since raised to a thousand pounds, that no one can find an untested non-Shakespeare play that our computers and stan-dard procedures would identify as a Shakespeare could-be (*TLR* 363-65). More than 200 such plays exist, but no one has accepted our bet. What more could we possibly do to illustrate the improbability of Oxford's or anyone's case being salvageable if we only could resurrect and test his unknown work?

For one kind of "unknown," the Oxford Apocrypha, our bet puts our money where our mouth is, but only for believers, not necessarily for Shahan and Whalen, who have been silent on this point, but can hardly remain so if their actual goal is getting to the truth of who wrote what, not just campaigning for Oxford. We have tested enough of it to conclude that none of what we tested matches Shakespeare and that further testing would be a waste of our time.

What if we are wrong? Let's suppose that Brame and Popova—or Shahan, or Whalen, or anybody—found, say, a Lyly play that we haven't tested and wanted to call us out because their evidence tells them it must be Oxford and therefore must be Shakespeare. If it's a whole play, it is fair game for testing pursuant to our bet. If it's really Shakespeare, it should test like Shakespeare, and our critics could hit us where it hurts. They could test the play, call us on our wager, hoist us with our own petard, and collect a thousand pounds from us. They wouldn't even have to risk any money of their own. They could pretest dozens of plays themselves, using our donated software, to make certain that they have settled on the right one before risking their money. If they found one, we could have some serious explaining to do. They would be a thou-sand pounds richer, and famous as, say, Donald Foster was for having discovered a could-be new Shakespeare work—all at no risk because with pretesting they could always back out if their hunch turns out to be wrong. We would certainly recommend this simple, low-risk, high-payoff course for anyone who seriously doubts our guiding assumptions, thinks there is Shakespeare gold among the untested Oxford Apocrypha and would like a nice Baconian way to verify their hunches and pick up some easy cash from us as well.

Why hasn't anyone done so? Is it because they still don't trust our tests, even though they unfailingly say "could be" to known Shakespeare baseline plays and "couldn't be" to known plays by others? Or could it be because they, too, suspect that we are right, that our profiles are sound, and that winning the bet might not be so easy after all? Could it be that you don't have to test all of Lyly's or Jonson's or Greene's dozens of plays to guess that none of them match Shake-speare? And that others don't want to waste their time testing the obvious any more than we do? If it is obvious for Lyly and the others, we would think it also obvious for Oxford. You don't have to test everything he might have written to know he's an unlikely Shakespeare. Testing what he has written which is still available should be enough. We should further note here that, for Oxfordians, even proving the Lyly play is a Shakespeare could-be, if they can do it, is only half the task. The other half is to prove that it is also an Oxford could-be.

That leaves a final category of unknown, which we take to be the bedrock of Shahan-

Whalen's case: the mysterious, wholly lost works which must have won Oxford all those enco-mia from his contemporaries for being the best of the best. Golden apples of the mind! Here, not only Oxford's authorship, but the very work is conjectural. Let us call this category the Oxford Ephemera, hypothetical works which might once have added to Oxford's reputation but have since disappeared, not having been published or saved. We would guess that this is what Shahan-Whalen are talking about in their looking-under-the-streetlight metaphor, not the Oxford Apocrypha, because the Oxford Apocrypha by our definition, are either already tested and failed, or could be tested but haven't been. This exchange would be much aided by a clear statement by Shahan-Whalen as to which unknown Oxford works they are arguing for, the Apocrypha, the Ephemera, or both. If it's Apocrypha, it's under the streetlight, and could be covered by our bet. If it's Ephemera, it will probably never be under the streetlight, and we can't eliminate it with our tests—but why didn't anyone bother to save it?

But we have also said that this argument, which might rescue Oxford from being the gross Shakespeare mismatch you can see from his observable poems and from the tested Apocrypha, makes a giant change in the Oxford we read about in the days of Louis Benezet and the Ogburns as all but indistinguishable from Shakespeare. Now his signed poems are properly recognized as a mismatch, a juvenile misadventure, and an embarrassment for his claim. Good researchers should put them aside as a distraction and make it plain that the best evidence for his claim is precisely the evidence we don't have, not the evidence we do have. The case for Oxford would be much enhanced if we could make his known poems go away.

Looking where the light is

Let us conclude by going back to John Shahan's favorite metaphor which for years has been a high point of this discussion. It's a good way to illustrate differences between our worldview and his, ours that relies on the observed and supposes that that what you see is what you get, and his that relies more on the (by us) unobservable, and supposes that a good rumor, or even a bad one, is four aces, while an inconvenient observation is worth nothing. Things are not always what they seem. We think Oxford is in trouble because what we know of him from our tests doesn't in the least match what we know of Shakespeare. Shahan and Whalen argue, in effect, that our tests are so inappropriate for juvenile poems like Oxford's that their rumors must out-weigh them. No matter how good our fancy night-vision devices may be with known Shakespeare and known non-Shakespeare, they suggest, they are useless for works like the unknown, unknowable, but rumored Oxford Ephemera where there is no light at all for meth-ods like ours, but plenty of inferred light for methods like theirs.

For us, the streetlight metaphor, for an American audience, now goes like this: Our students were searching for lost keys to Shakespeare's hidden fleet of Most Excellent cars—which, let us suppose had to be Porsches, sleek, hot, coveted, top of the line, all to be opened and run only with the right kind of key. Looking under the streetlight with their powerful new optics, they found twenty-nine keys marked Shakespeare, that is, the test results from all of our Shakespeare baseline poems and plays, Porsches all. Every such key fitted every Porsche exactly. They also found thirty-seven keys with various claimants' and non-claimants' names on them. None of

them came within a mile of fitting any of the observed Porsches.

Of the thirty-seven rejected keys, one was Oxford's. It didn't fit any Porsche, but it did fit some other kind of car more emblematic of Oxford, let's say a 1951 Packard Patrician—a heavy, chromed, wallowing dinosaur representing the next-to-the-last gasp of a line once favored by the élite of an earlier generation. Too bad, our students thought, it's another mismatch.

But wait! Someone comes along and says that the Packard key isn't a car key at all. It may say Packard on it, and bear the Packard Motor Company's famous hexagonal symbol, but, if you consider it closely, you must realize that it actually is the key to a 1985 Packard-Bell computer, or maybe a juvenile Hewlett-Packard, anything but a car. It's oranges, not apples! Whoever thought it was a car must surely have gotten both the date and the genre wrong. What a goof! You should never compare such a computer key of such a date to a car key of a different date. It would be much better to compare it to Shakespeare's computer, which, however, turns out to have been a 1986 Commodore, not a Packard Bell. Oops.

But wait again! Didn't several people of note say that the dinosaur once had a bumper sticker proclaiming that "My other car is a Porsche?" Only this one, along with a few dozen others like it on other authors' cars, actually said: "My other cars are The Most Excellent!" Sure, we don't have anything in hand like a key to this Most Excellent fleet, it is long since lost, along with the exemplary cars themselves. But it doesn't really matter because the evidence from this bumper sticker (never mind the other ones) says it too clearly to admit of doubt: "My other cars are The Most Excellent!" Everyone knows that Porsches are The Most Excellent! What else could the other cars be but the entire lost fleet of Porsches? Bingo! Q.E.D.! Once again, Twain put it nicely: "There's something fascinating about science. One gets such wholesale return of conjecture out of such a trifling investment of fact."

Would you go with the Packard of the eye, sitting in plain view under Oxford's decaying porte-cochère, or with the Porsche fleet of the mind, inferred from Oxford's bumper sticker, but not from the many others just like it? How many people would believe that all, or even any, of the owners of the clunkers of the eye actually had Porsches just out of sight? Not us, though we admit that we don't have the other cars, if there are such, at hand to test and prove the contrary. Porsches of the mind are hard to disprove. Nevertheless, we suspect that most people share our notions, and Bacon's, that things often are what they seem, and that what you see is more likely to be what you get than what you can't see. What we see, we fear, is still not very encouraging for the Oxford claim. ❦

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