

Editorial

Midnight in the Garden of the SAQ

Readers will know that *Shakespeare Beyond Doubt* contributor, Hardy Cook, also runs SHAKSPER, an online discussion group. Recently the issue of free debate surfaced as a topic, and its moderator, a retired professor, stoutly defended his commitment to openness. No one, he announced, had ever been, nor ever would be, refused publication.

We knew that wasn't true, having been banned ourselves in the past. So we sent Mr. Cook the following, with the amusing result that we were banned again:

Given your commitment to free expression, reaffirmed in recent weeks, I am sure you will not hesitate to support the public condemnation of Dr Paul Edmondson, co-editor of *Shakespeare Beyond Doubt* and Head of Education and Research at Stratford.

In his *SBD* chapter, Edmondson demands the complete suppression of all debate, a literal silencing of the opposition. "Shakespeare has enemies," he begins ominously, followed by the command that the rest of us just STFU. This is not a request or suggestion. The "anti-Shakespearians" may *claim* they just want to talk, but their real intent, Dr Edmondson warns us, is creating a situation where "everyone can have their say."

That's right. The face of iniquity is free speech, and virtue lies in putting an end to it. Are you, Stanley Wells, Carol Rutter, and all the rest who profess a commitment to academic freedom, willing to disassociate yourselves from this?

I wonder too whether CUP's editors checked Edmondson's text before approving it. If they didn't they should be fired, because that's their job; and if they did, even more so. If Professor John Mack could be threatened with dismissal from Harvard for listening credulously to the accounts of alien abductees, what are the responsibilities of an equally great university sanctioning intellectual fascism? Does its press really support the suppression of debate?

For Edmondson, Freedom is literally Slavery and Ignorance literally Strength—our slavery and ignorance, his freedom and strength. This is because, as he again warns us, free-thinking and free-speaking scholars might actually "propose alternative nominees." Worse still, if "everyone has their say," other than Big Stratford, students and lay people alike might actually "feel empowered" and could even—OMG!—"contradict authorities."

Yes, we might. It's called thinking independently. The Birthplace Trust folk, and you, Sir, need to take a step back.

The freedom-loving Cook replied as follows:

Let me congratulate you on sending me an e-mail for which I am damned if I do anything and damned if I do not.

Regarding "I am sure you will not hesitate to support the public condemnation of Dr Paul Edmondson," *I certainly will not.* [Cook's emphasis.]

Regarding the reasons upon which you pose this Catch-22, you have completely cherry picked [*sic*] your quotations and presented them in a manner to express what you would like them to say and not, in fact, what the complete quotation expresses. Further, your missive is full of logical fallacies. Your e-mail is so contemptible that it does not merit a reply, and I have no doubt that you will be distributing my response to you as soon as you receive it. As I said, you have sent me a Catch-22 for which I am damned if I respond to it and damned if I do not. Lay on, MacEgan.

There seems little to add to this, except that it's Cook and his friends who cry "Hold, enough!" Born of woman but no man, his response to my laying on was to hastily lay off—"I just don't want to play anymore." So damned be he.

Lip Service

As Cook's hypocrisy makes clear, in the present debate lip service is paid to academic freedom, but in practice space and opportunity are refused when unorthodox opinions are expressed too persuasively.

We should take heart from this because it's an admission of defeat by the Birthplace Trust cardinals and archbishops, and their flunkies like Cook. Among the depressing aspects of *Shakespeare Beyond Doubt*—since its authors effectively control the big presses, appointments and the award of honors—is that it contains absolutely nothing new. This is a book that could have been written 20 years or more ago: despite huge advances in the non-Stratfordian case, the *SBD* writers have literally nothing to say in reply. Either they don't know about it or, more likely, they don't care enough to read it. Their minds are made up, i.e., closed. Not one of these *soi-disant* scholars is even aware of the irony.

It's also true that almost all recent discoveries in the authorship field have been made by Oxfordians. This is not to underestimate the important work of non-Oxfordians like Diana Price and Ros Barber, both formidable scholars whose work has substantially reinforced our case. We include Roger Stritmatter's remarkable study of de Vere's bible, supplemented by Richard Waugaman's analyses of the *Psalms* and related texts. Tony Pointon's *The Man Who Was Never Shakespeare* is another recent classic, as are Richard Roe's *The Shakespeare Guide to Italy*, and Robin Fox's *Shakespeare's Education*. Kevin Gilvary's *Dating Shakespeare's Plays* also deserves attention, along with Lynne Kositsky's and Roger Stritmatter's work redating *The Tempest*. It all adds up to a paradigm shift that could—that will—rock the academic world.

We like to think too that this publication and its sister journal, *Brief Chronicles*, contain research, scholarly discussion, and unexpected syntheses that must eventually be taken properly into account. It may be midnight in the garden of the SAQ, but the honors are neither shared nor equal. On their side, the past, pretty but lifeless as Ophelia. On ours, the future, a kind of Tudor peace after the uncivil wars, bringing together the best of traditional Shakespeare scholarship with the better insights afforded those willing to embrace literary and historical realities.