

# All That Is Shakespeare Melts into Air

The New Oxford Shakespeare Authorship Companion reviewed by  
Michael Dudley, Gary Goldstein, and Shelly Maycock.

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*The New Oxford Shakespeare Authorship Companion. Edited by Gary Taylor & Gabriel Egan. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017. \$168.84 USD.*

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The Shakespeare deniers are at it again. Here is yet another book filled with so-called “evidence” hidden in the texts – which only the deniers can decode – to support their conspiracy theory that Shakespeare didn’t write Shakespeare. It’s the old hoary argument that a commoner from Stratford-Upon-Avon could not have possibly written the greatest works in the English language.

By himself, at any rate.

Yes, the argument in *The New Oxford Shakespeare Authorship Companion* – a supplementary volume to Oxford University Press’ prestigious new edition of the Shakespeare plays – is that Shakespeare wrote with some eleven collaborators and co-authors. These would include Christopher Marlowe, Thomas Middleton, Thomas Dekker, and Anonymous on seventeen of the dramas; the editors also suggest we need to expand the size of the canon from 37 to 44 plays, only two-thirds of which are entirely by Shakespeare. Yet, as we shall see, the theories and methods used to reach these conclusions are as problematic as the scholarship’s all but single-minded focus on cryptic analysis at the level of single words and even syllables, in service of a group authorship theory. The rhetorical conceit in the opening paragraph above is intended to be more than tongue-in-cheek; instead, it underscores the extent to which the Shakespeare establishment has started to resemble the nineteenth century Baconians it professes to abhor.

The premise behind these latest claims of collaboration is the idea that the author of the canon was a “working dramatist” (or “artisan”) who initially made his mark in the London theatre world as a “fixer up” of other men’s plays, when he wasn’t actively plagiarizing them. In the words of co-editor Gary Taylor of Florida State University, “Shakespeare made an honest living stealing other men’s work” (21). The idea of a newcomer fixing up plays of working dramatists is a strange one, and there is almost no external evidence to corroborate it.

All of which begs the question why OUP would even bother calling this mammoth

four-volume work the New Oxford Shakespeare, when *New Oxford Elizabethan and Jacobean Artisans* might be more apropos. It seems that academics of the traditional stripe are getting weary of their own scholarship. Because there is nothing more to be said about William Shakspeare's biography, and because every Folio play has been scrutinized and analyzed from a limited, Stratfordian perspective down to the level of minutiae, they have turned to collaboration as a promising new field of research.

But their reliance on stylometrics and other types of internal evidence has led them into a thicket of theories and some contradictory and conflicting data and conclusions. Most significantly, the editors have failed to recognize the importance of Shakespeare's often-observed habit of revising his own plays – which is the main reason for the uneven writing in some of them – and that the anonymous plays appear to be his juvenilia.

This is a complete revision of the 1986 Oxford *Complete Works*, also co-edited by Taylor with Stanley Wells. For the New Oxford Shakespeare (hereafter NOS), Taylor's co-editors are John Jowett, Deputy Director of the Shakespeare Institute at the University of Birmingham, Terri Bourus from Indiana University, and Gabriel Egan of De Montfort University in Leicester. What they have accomplished appears, on its face, quite impressive.

The plays and poems are presented in two versions, each of which are directed at different audiences. There is a *Modern Critical Edition* aimed at undergraduates and general readers, in which the text has been freshly edited with modern punctuation and spelling and thorough explanatory notes. Additionally, there is a *Critical Reference Edition* (itself comprising two volumes) retaining original spellings and inconsistencies, as well as highlighting variations between the quarto editions and the Folios.

It is the fourth volume of the NOS – the *Authorship Companion* edited by Taylor and Egan – that has drawn the most attention from reviewers and critics, for it attempts to establish empirical grounds for extensive co-authorship and collaboration. To develop this argument, the *Authorship Companion* is divided into two main sections – a brief *Methods* section followed by nearly 500 pages of *Case Studies* – each of which features essays by the editors and other contributors, all of whom are leading

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international figures in Shakespeare scholarship and the digital humanities. Taylor himself contributed or co-authored no fewer than six essays, while Egan wrote two. The last seventy-two pages comprise *Datasets*, a largely mind-numbing series of lists of phrases and single words matched to each article in the book, indicating their supposed correspondence with the alleged co-authors.

Part One begins with a 24-page introduction by Taylor, (“Artiginality: Authorship after Postmodernism”) that attempts to ground the book in a materialist methodology, arguing that Shakespeare must be understood as emerging from an “assemblage of technologies and social networks associated with routinized commercial theatrical performances and another socio-technological assemblage associated with handpress printing” (8). For Taylor, this technological and paper materialism extends to the “centrality of handwriting” (8) on which he spends an inordinate amount of time, observing that, because there is a “relationship between a particular biological hand and an identifiably unique handwriting” (10), “a theory of the work becomes possible once we distinguish between the activity of speaking and the very specific work of producing handwritten manuscripts” (13). Both of these assertions are, on their face, extremely strange: the pitiful examples of Shakspeare’s extant handwriting are not associated with play manuscripts, nor do we have any other example of him “speaking” apart from his notoriously uninteresting will.

For Taylor, the inquiry into authorship is reducible to a question of whether or not it

is possible to construct a philosophical definition of authorship that avoids the Kantian dream of pure free individuality but also avoids the Foucauldian nightmare of pure subjected institutionality? Is it possible to construct a theory of authorship that more adequately accounts for the material history of ‘author’ as both a verb and a noun, as both an agent and an object? (7)

This comes across as unconscious self-parody. Apparently we are supposed to accept that it is a great literary achievement to avoid the Scylla of believing that we live in the best of all possible worlds where authors are entirely unpredictable, self-creating narcissists, and the Charybdis of thinking they are to be exclusively defined by the bureaucratic state. This is a false dilemma.

While it may seem at first that seeking to have their work “embod[y] the historical reality and theoretical coherence of the worker-function” (13) lends gravitas – to say nothing of a patina of Marxism – to their enterprise, the editors’ materialism actually presents a number of shortcomings – logical, historical, literary and methodological. The first is the sheer inadequacy of materialism as a foundation upon which to theorize about the authorship of Shakespeare, given the utter lack of (a) original manuscripts in the author’s hand (b) other non-literary writing by Shakspeare, or (c) any handwriting apart from six barely legible scrawls of Shakspeare’s full name. In other words, there are few physical materials (including the oft-debunked “Hand D”)

relevant to Shakespeare's authorship worth analyzing, at least not from a Stratfordian perspective. For this reason it seems that the emphasis on materialism as an explanatory construct plays more of a compensatory than a scholarly role in this discourse, a little like the handkerchief in *Othello*, with the effect of distracting from the well-known evidentiary problems of orthodox Shakespeare studies.

The second problem is that the editors' positioning of Shakespeare as an industrious artisan/worker among his peers lacks anything approaching external historical evidence. The third (and surely deliberately-introduced) issue is that an ostensible focus on artefacts and their production removes the analysis from the realm of the literary, allowing these scholars to dispense almost entirely with the content or meaning of the texts in question, which are instead digitally deconstructed and parsed down to the last syllable.

This brings us to the final core objection, and it is a fatal one. Materialism – as defined by Taylor in terms of the “assemblage” of technologies associated with printing and with handwriting – has, in fact, almost no bearing on the subjects or methods actually used. These are, with few exceptions, the most immaterial imaginable, consisting of computer-aided stylometric tests of digital text using the *Literature Online* (LION), *Early English Books Online-Text Creation Partnership* (EEBO–TCP) and *Oxford Scholarly Editions Online* (OSEO) databases.

These digital stylistic methods are introduced, reviewed, and critiqued in the following seven essays. Co-editor Gabriel Egan provides an overview of the history of Shakespeare attribution studies, going all the way back to Alexander Pope's 1725 edition of the *Complete Works* (in which Pope expressed doubt concerning the authorship of *Love's Labour's Lost*, *The Winter's Tale*, and *Titus Andronicus*) up to contemporary investigations in the digital humanities. Conspicuously absent from this history is the widespread and enduring post-Stratfordian conviction that the traditional attribution is entirely mistaken, which Egan casually dismisses as an “unscholarly question” (41).

Subsequent methodological chapters examine word-match and other tests in LION and the EEBO-TCP databases, with a focus on such plays as *Arden of Faversham*, *Titus* and the *Henry VI* plays. MacDonald Jackson (“One Horse Races”) argues for rigorous repetition of analyses for all likely candidates rather than making a case by running the analysis for one favored author (making the exclusion of Oxford all the more inexcusable), while Egan critiques the “Limitations of [Brian] Vickers's Trigram Tests” used to claim Thomas Kyd's co-authorship of *Arden*. Two chapters on the authorship of portions of *Titus* follow: Taylor and Doug Duhaime's examination of the “Fly Scene” and Anna Pruitt's test of an automated text searching package in LION, also challenging Vickers's conclusions. Francis X. Connor considers claims for Shakespeare's poetic apocrypha (e.g., “Shall I Die?”) followed by Jackson's second contribution, an occasionally testy and personal meta-analysis of studies of *Arden*

and *A Lover's Complaint*, including responses to his own article by Darren Freebury-Jones.

These methods are employed, Taylor stresses in his introduction, for ethical reasons, in the name of “giving people credit for the work that they have done” (20). This is more than a tad hypocritical, given the academy’s dogmatic dismissal over the past century of Oxfordians who have argued precisely this point while supplying the corroborative biographical detail that has consistently been lacking in the orthodox tradition. At the same time, it is fascinating to note how close Taylor repeatedly comes to echoing key anti-Stratfordian beliefs: that authorial identity can be mistaken, even through deliberate deception (12), and that Shakespeare’s plays were not written for the public but were instead created for aristocratic and royal audiences, as Shakespeare was a court dramatist (15, 17). That the proposition of Oxford’s authorship should be so unthinkable to Taylor and his colleagues is the height of cognitive dissonance.

The sixteen case studies (plus the book-length essay “The Canon and Chronology of Shakespeare’s Works” co-written by Taylor and Rory Loughnane) are arranged in a nominally coherent order such that they often anticipate or refer back to others in an attempt to build a larger argument. The only two contributions for which materialism would have the slightest bearing are Taylor’s essay on manuscript sources for two poems attributed to Shakespeare and David Grant’s chapter on the printing history of *The Spanish Tragedy*. For the most part however, readers are subjected to a dizzying array of Delta, Zeta and Iota tests in the aforementioned databases seeking bigram, trigram and tetragram constructions (i.e., measures of adjacency) as well as – for good measure – nearest shrunken centroids. Needless to say, readers who love Shakespeare for his actual writing may find many of these passages dismayingly and numbingly reductionistic:

We found all of what are called the function-word skip bigrams in the segments, by discarding all words other than the listed function words and joining the first to occur of the listed function words and the second to do so, then the second with the third, and so on. (Thus the sentence “I wonder how the King escaped our hands!” yields three bigrams, *I + how*, *how + the*, and *the + our*.) We then found the 500 function-word skip bigrams which were commonest in the authorial set and rarest in the others, and vice versa, following the usual Zeta procedures for this variant (Burrows and Craig, 207).

While measures of adjacency are a legitimate tool in stylistic analysis, in style and purpose these chapters bear more than a passing resemblance to the second volume of Ignatius Donnelly’s *The Great Cryptogram*, the author and his timeless literary accomplishments all but sinking beneath the weightless burden of data and diagrams.

Even on its own terms, however, the *Authorship Companion* does not bear scrutiny.

The editors cannot explain why the first two acts of *Pericles* had to be co-authored by pamphlet writer George Wilkins in 1608 – while Shakspeare was still alive (570-71). According to the British Library, the First Quarto (1609) “was apparently printed from a surreptitious and corrupt reported text. Many verse passages were set as prose, and many prose passages were set as verse. The title-page names Shakespeare alone as the author” (“Pericles”). Is a “corrupt reported text” an appropriate one from which to identify an author’s linguistic habits? Such relevant but unanswered questions proliferate. The editors further claim that three other plays, *Cardenio*, *Henry VIII* and *The Two Noble Kinsmen*, had to be co-authored by John Fletcher – also while Shakspeare was alive (Chapter 23). As the question has already been rejected as “un-scholarly,” Egan and Taylor cannot bring themselves to consider that for a master playwright in the maturity of his craft to leave four plays unfinished might mean that he was no longer alive. Such alternatives are instead excluded from the consideration of both the authors and the readers of this expensive book.

This probably explains why OUP asserts that Thomas Middleton was required to co-author *Timon of Athens* and to adapt *Macbeth* and *Measure for Measure* (Chapter 17), or that Christopher Marlowe and other dramatists were required to co-author all three parts of *Henry VI* (Chapter 25) or that Shakespeare and “Anonymous” co-authored *Edward III* and *Arden of Feversham* (Chapter 10). In short, Shakespeare didn’t leave plays unfinished because he was incapable of writing by virtue of his death in 1604; instead he actively co-authored plays with a plethora of other writers throughout his career. This is a clever way of reducing Shakespeare’s authorial voice and artistic stature at the same time.

Given the sweeping nature of the proposed changes to the attribution of the canon, we need to ask: does the word usage study on which OUP based their key findings, published in the summer 2016 issue of *Shakespeare Quarterly* (“Attributing the Authorship of the *Henry VI* Plays by Word Adjacency” by Santiago Segarra and Gabriel Egan [et al]) really demonstrate that all these co-authors collaborated with Shakespeare? The problem – which Segarra admits to elsewhere, but perhaps doesn’t fully recognize – exists at the core of their argument. They claim that the author of *Henry VI* could only be Christopher Marlowe or George Peele, but then they say it is not possible to compare the two. According to Segarra, “If you had to pick two [candidates], then you would go for Marlowe and Peele, but in the latter’s case, we don’t have a large enough sample to fully train the classifier” (Lerner and Mott).

OUP’s editorial solution did not convince Darren Freebury-Jones, a research fellow and attribution scholar at Cardiff University, who pointed out that, while statistical analysis, like literary analysis, can aspire to an objective viewpoint, it not only relies upon subjective interpretation but cannot, on its own, account for the “voices” of the plays’ characters, nor the contemporary tendency towards parody and allusion in Elizabethan plays. He writes,



Taylor and colleagues don't appear to have paused to consider whether individual words, denuded of their linguistic context, can be relied upon in analyses of early modern plays – a genre that contains a multitude of characters, each of which speak with individualized voices... Can the mere regularity with which certain words and phrases appear in the text really distinguish between different authors – considering at the time of writing allusion, parody and appropriation were rife? Shakespeare borrowed words and phrases from Marlowe's plays. Marlowe borrowed phrases and images from Shakespeare, and also from... Thomas Kyd, who in turn borrowed phrases from him. Matters are complicated further by the fact that there are many other hands – composers, editors, scribes – involved in the creation of the folios through which the plays have survived the centuries to reach us today.

(Freebury-Jones 2016).

Citing the 1932 work of Muriel St. Clare Byrne, in *Bibliographical Clues in Collaborate Plays*, Freebury-Jones further notes that the number of parallels alone cannot be used to distinguish authors. Scholars must also examine the qualitative aspects of shared phrases – and whether these reveal distinct combinations of both thought and language, indicative of a single mind (*ibid*).

There is also profound disagreement over both methodology and conclusions among scholars working in attribution studies, and this is reflected in the *Companion's* frequent criticisms of the interpretations of other scholars. While Freebury-Jones believes that Thomas Kyd co-wrote *1 Henry VI*, another scholar of collaboration, Paul Vincent finds the hands of Thomas Nashe and Anonymous, while Sir Brian Vickers announced that he had “no hesitation in ascribing parts of Acts 2 and 4, and the whole of Acts 3 and 5 [of the play], to Kyd. In my conjectural reconstruction, the play was originally co-authored by Nashe and Kyd in about 1591” (Vickers 3).

In 1995, Gary Taylor assigned *1 Henry VI* to Shakespeare, Nashe “and two others” and gave Act 1 to Nashe. Thus, we have four different scholars assigning the play to five or six authors, and Act 1 alone to three of them. Who are we supposed to believe? And doesn't a failure to agree on a coherent methodology, coupled with the disparate and sometimes contradictory results of the practitioners invalidate, or at least call into question, the premises of the enquiry – at least to the extent of suggesting the value of scholarly humility about the results of the findings?

The *Authorship Companion* asks us to deny Shakespeare a third of the text in the canon based on computer-based analysis. The problem is that computers must be fed with data that can be incomplete or inaccurate, or data – in this case, phrases, words, and syllables – delimited to produce a range of answers which academics wish to put forward. (As previously mentioned, Edward de Vere's writing is excluded from all analyses.) This is critical, not only because the vocabulary of English was increasing

exponentially during the period in question, but because it was also changing in more fundamental matters, such as pronouns, possessives, punctuation, and verb forms.

For example, take the stylometric test for feminine endings. Poetry in that period first sought to achieve regularity of meter and then moved toward studied irregularity. This trend is found in sixteenth century English poetry in general, in dramatic verse in the second half of the century, and in Shakespeare's works. In the Shakespeare canon, the percentage of feminine endings trended upward, generally speaking, during the author's writing career, from figures as low as 5% or 6% (*A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *1 Henry IV*) to as high as 33% in some later plays (*The Winter's Tale*, *Cymbeline*, *The Tempest*). Thus, it is unlikely that the frequency of feminine endings in any particular play, or portion of a play, will rule out, or rule in, Shakespeare's authorship. This is assuming that their chronology is correct, which it probably is not.

There is much contemporary evidence, which the NOS editors failed to consider. Even though Francis Meres in *Palladis Tamia* named twenty-two contemporary authors, including William Shakespeare, none of the other twenty-one had any contact, in writing or reported, with Shakespeare (Hayes).

Moreover, all this stylometric gerrymandering of the text flies in the face of the historical evidence, which suggests that "Shakespeare" – whoever he was – wrote at least the vast majority of the contents of the *Folio*. While other writers ensured that their collaborative ventures were acknowledged on title pages, we are asked to believe that Shakespeare's collaborators, with the exception of Fletcher in the very late and definitely posthumous *Two Noble Kinsmen*, were content to have their works appropriated under the bard's name. All three writers of *Eastward Ho* – Ben Jonson, John Marston, and George Chapman – while sometimes mortal enemies, collaborated to ensure that each received an equal part of the honor for their collaborative satire. Ben Jonson revised *Sejanus* rather than name his collaborator or defraud him of the injury of seeing his work published under another's name. Everywhere we look, we see evidence for the important and widely acknowledged role that collaboration played in the Elizabethan theatre. The one place we don't see it is in the record of Shakespearean publications, which are, with only the slightest exception, always presented as the work of one man (leaving aside the commercially motivated false publisher's ascriptions of *Lochrine* and *The London Prodigal*).

No contemporary ever suggested that there was more than one writer for any of Shakespeare's plays before *Two Noble Kinsmen* in 1634, certainly not Jonson, or Heminges and Condell in the 1623 *First Folio*. Indeed, the OUP editors ignore additional contemporary evidence by theater producer Philip Henslowe, who recorded two payments in his diary to Ben Jonson for additions to Thomas Kyd's *The Spanish Tragedy*, dated 25 September 1601 and 22 June 1602. The OUP editors instead ascribe authorship of these 1602 additions to Shakespeare and Heywood (260).



Thus, while the general progression in English dramatic forms is undeniable, to accept that the Shakespearean plays follow this pattern in some sort of consistent way is doubly flawed. It is flawed in the first case because it requires our assent to the ludicrous notion that plays such as *Pericles* or *Cymbeline* are actually Jacobean plays, written long after plays with such a profusion of end-stopped verse as *Midsummer Night's Dream*. The second erroneous assumption is to disregard authorial intention as it is expressed and understood in the design of a literary work. It is possible that *Midsummer Night's Dream* has much end-stopped verse not because it is an early, immature work by an artist who could not conceive a different set of linguistic structures, but because the preponderance of end-stopped forms was consistent with his stylistic preferences or subserved his larger thematic purposes. An informed discussion would explore this possibility before assuming that Shakespeare, in lockstep with the evolving tradition, simply wrote more and more feminine endings as he matured. That he generally did so is, of course, not at issue; the weirdly Baconian idea that such terminations can be used like fingerprints to assign accurate relative dates to the plays (in the absence of more reliable forms of evidence) is.

Apparently, Gary Taylor has forgotten what he wrote in 1989 regarding the basis of stylometrics and, with it, collaboration theory: “texts are made; they become – they do not flash instantaneously into perfect and unalterable being. Over a certain period, an author makes a text; during a later period, in response to internal and external stimuli, the author remakes the same text and the revised text results from a kind of posthumous collaboration between a deceased younger self and a living older self” (359).

In the *Companion's* final and longest chapter (Ch. 25), “The Canon and Chronology of Shakespeare's Works,” a book-length document authored by Taylor and Loughnane, that we see the *Authorship Companion* continues to ignore genuine problems. The Stratfordian authorship case favors their smokescreen of showy terminology-coinage and stylometric approaches not designed with formal linguistics or forensic linguistics' statistical evidentiary methods, both of which produce much more reliable conclusions.

As a general rule, the stylometric method relies on the idea that the bulk of a particular play was written at one particular time, not considering the clear evidence of revisions by the author over time. Stylometric results are easily manipulated if the proper statistically valid controls and objective databases of linguistic variations are not compiled and clearly defined. The authors state that they intend “to offer a comprehensive synthesis of the current state of the art in studies of what Shakespeare wrote, when he wrote it, and – where relevant – who else was involved in the writing” (417). But they do not even come close to being either comprehensive or state of the art, and instead come out with the tired cliché that their retailored “Shakespeare is Shakespeare.”

As we have argued, the OUP *Companion* volume attempts to redefine if not undermine the nature and integrity of the authorial voice. In the process, it seems to ignore the early modern rhetorical concepts of *imitatio* and *emulatio*: that authors borrowed from other accomplished writers and classical models in tribute in order to emulate, to honor by improving. What is not ignored in the final synthesis chapter is the problematic, time-honored, cliché claim that the authorial voice has a Stratfordian identity. In this sense, the *Companion* does little that is new, and its repetition continues to muddy the narrative surrounding what scholars mean by *authorship*.

Although the unwary or uncritical reader may never notice it, many of the ‘facts’ summarized in their final chapter on the canon and its authorship have never been proven and have in many cases long been questioned by many reasonable and well-informed students of Shakespeare. What should be a masterful narrative of the culmination of textual, attribution and bibliographic studies for graduate students, starts by misrepresenting both those responsible for, and the processes that resulted in, the *First Folio*’s publication, in order to represent the *Folio* as a product of group craftsmanship, rather than a work of ‘original’ art. Though there remains no proof of his actual ‘Wrighting,’ Shakspeare is deemed principal playwright of the company. (In this, the OUP editors emphasize a false distinction between craftsmanship/art: their made-up word *wrighting* becomes a coinage to emphasize that the plays are wrighted [crafted] rather than written.)

The will’s afterthought beneficiaries, Heminges and Condell – per the standard SBT/Folger narrative – are vaguely held up as the arbiters of the *First Folio* contents while the other paratext contributors and patrons are completely ignored. Failing to heed their colleagues, Patterson and Dunn’s warnings about overlooking “prefatory rhetoric” and its implications for early modern “authorship and authority,” Taylor and Loughnane fail to help modern students comprehend the key authorial puzzles set forth in the *First Folio* paratexts (Dunn xi).

In the first half of the chapter, the “external evidence” section, long-privileged assumptions about the chronology and its start- and end-dates are mostly taken for granted as the essay imagines why some texts were included and others excluded, backing this by citing external testimony to their authorship, but not explaining with any realistic portrayal, the cruxes involved. The costliness of the printing of the *Folio* is alluded to without any suggestion of who might have funded the project. As usual, the narrative poems’ authorship is discussed without any revelations about how the subject matter is in anyway appropriate to the status of whoever penned them. Indeed, it is hard to know who the editors mean when they say “Shakespeare,” as that seems too problematic for them to aspire to, reducing much of the book to a kind of exercise in late-Stratfordian Proustian futility. Thus, the new *Authorship Companion* demonstrates the irrelevance of the author’s particulars to its purpose.

The chapter’s second section, about “Internal Evidence,” is long in drawing

conclusions about the collaboration studies featured in the volume's 23 chapters as they function as evidence for the book's theory of collaborative workmanship. It is outside the scope of this review essay to address all the flaws and misrepresentations employed in the *New Oxford Shakespeare's* complex of collaboration theorizing. However, it would be more practical to call for Oxfordian and post-Stratfordian scholars to independently review these case studies in light of proper state of the art in scientific/linguistic analysis such as those used by professional forensic linguists – those who identify the authors of texts or documents for court cases by analyzing the language patterns individuals use, and who are required to prove, using Frye or Daubert standards and under cross examination, that their conclusions are robustly scientific.

Such evaluations may help to establish more statistically certain proofs of identity or authorship, or to refute attributions that defy chronological or contextual logic, and to reintroduce excluded authorial samples such as the ample data from Edward de Vere or other relevant candidates as evidence (See, e.g., Fowler 1986).

One thing that is new about this volume is that it does reflect the important current trend to make the world safer for the study of other early modern writers. The idea that the authors have published books on neglected period writers, for example, Middleton, whose reputations they understandably would want to enhance, is reiterated in *The New Yorker* review of the edition by Daniel Pollack-Pelzner: "If Shakespeare worshippers have told one story in order to discredit his contemporary rivals, the *New Oxford* is telling a story that aims to give the credit back" (Pollack-Pelzner). This is obviously a concern or consequence of this trend in collaboration studies, to grant and justify collaboration scholars' turfs, niches and earning opportunities. On the other hand, it also seems designed to aid in a continuing dodge over the historically essential question of the author's actual identity and the opportunities for study and scholarship intrinsic to first identifying the correct author, or at least hypothetically considering alternatives to the hackneyed and dishonest SBT narrative.

Just as James Shapiro, Stanley Wells, and other Stratfordians spend so much time discussing the motives of skeptics rather than the substance of our arguments, one has to wonder at the motivations behind this monumental effort. At 741 pages, the *Authorship Companion* represents an astonishing amount of energy directed at delegitimizing and dethroning Shakespeare. While Taylor says it is a matter of ethics and the sincere desire to give credit where credit is due, it seems intended instead to be a deliberate attempt to pre-empt the actual debate over authorship.

Ultimately, the *Authorship Companion* comes across as profoundly anti-Shakespearean, a triumph of instrumentality over substance. As anti-Stratfordian Lewis Lapham observes in the Spring 2017 issue of *Lapham's Quarterly* ("Discovery"):

Technology is the so arranging of the world that it is the thing that thinks

and the man who is reduced to the state of a thing . . . Our technologies produce continuously improved means toward increasingly ill-defined ends. We have acquired a great many new weapons and information systems, but we don't know at what or at whom to point the digital enhancements . . . Data streams can't connect the dots to anything other than themselves. Watson and Siri can access the Library of Congress, but they can't read books. Machines don't do metaphor. They process words as lifeless objects, not as living subjects, so they don't know what the words mean. Not knowing what the words mean, they can't hack into the civilizing heap of human consciousness (of myth and memory and emotion) that is the making of ourselves as human beings (20).

*The Authorship Companion* “processes words as lifeless objects” and as such fails more than is usual in the field to capture Shakespeare as a human being – or as Gary Taylor refers to him, “a biological organism named William Shakespeare” (8). *The New Oxford Shakespeare* should therefore not be received as just another edition of Shakespeare's plays. Instead, it is both a statement of something approaching apostasy and a desperate attempt to persuade the reader that Shakespeare orthodoxy still has relevance and authority. While the editors and contributors of *The Authorship Companion* are finally conceding that there is an authorship question, their eagerness to diminish, dismiss and dethrone Shakespeare in the name of retaining their grip on the terms of debate over authorship indicates that they seem to be willing to destroy Shakespeare in order to save him.

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