And so would I, gladly…
I speak to those who know; to those who don't
my mind's a blank. I never say a word.
(Tr. Robert Fagles)

The cryptic line, 'The ox is on my tongue,' said to be 'A proverbial expression (of uncertain origin) for enforced silence' (Loeb, *Aeschylus* 8, n. 1), is used to explain the watchman's silence to his master. A prose version of the same passage, above, is taken from Herbert Weir Smyth's translation of the play in the Loeb Classical Library collection:

Ah well, may the master of the house come home and may I clasp his welcome hand in mine! For the rest I'm dumb; a great ox stands upon my tongue—yet the house itself, could it but speak, might tell a tale full plain; since for my part, of my own choice I have words for such as know, and to those who know not, I have lost my memory.

It seems that Shakespeare was telling readers and playgoers with a classical education that the story behind *Hamlet* could not be bruited about in public, and chose a clever pun from antiquity to make his statement … to those who know.

Indeed, the very year that the Second Quarto of *Hamlet* was published, in 1604, also was the year the great Spanish novelist, Miguel de Cervantes, wrote his short novel, *The Dialog of the Dogs* (later published in 1613). In it, he uses the same phrase, 'He has an ox on his tongue,' to convey the same message of official silence.

Berganza: When I was at college, I remember hearing a teacher repeat a Latin phrase, '*Habet bovem in lingua*.' … You must know that the Athenians had among their coin one which was stamped with the figure of an ox; whenever a judge failed to give justice in consequence of having been bribed, they said, 'He has an ox on his tongue.' (32)

It appears that Cervantes was commenting on Shakespeare's allusion to the proverb in his own way – or perhaps also used the term as it applied to his own life given his troubles with the law. In either case, it is clear that Shakespeare knew he had an ox on his tongue. G.G.

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Two Reviews by Kevin Gilary

1) *The Man who was Never Shakespeare*
by A. J. Pointon

Softback, £12, Parapress 2011, 304pp
ISBN: 978-1-898594-88-8
www.parapress.co.uk

It's been a long wait – but well worthwhile. Though open minded on the authorship candidates, Tony Pointon has been a regular at De Vere Society meetings and his knowledge and incisive understanding of the Authorship Question has been outstanding. Finally, we have the fruits of his enquiring mind in seventeen closely argued chapters.

Tony is Emeritus Professor of Physics at Portsmouth University with close links to the Admiralty. He is also an expert on Charles Dickens, the bicentenary of whose birth was recently celebrated in Portsmouth. Thus Pointon has many reasons to be distracted from his long-held interest in the identity of Shakespeare.

Listening to Tony, I have always felt that I am struggling to keep up whereas he is impatient to get on with his next point. So it is with his book, which hurtles us through a whole array of arguments as to why the man from Stratford could never have written the immortal works of Shakespeare. Even the most learned heretic will find something new herein.

Pointon is keen on the idea of 'identity theft': that the name William Shakespeare was originally just a pseudonym and that it was only in 1623 that anyone attempted to suggest that this pseudonym was referring to a real person. He lists the variety of ways in which the man from Stratford spelt his name (and refers to him as 'Shakspere'), noting that he never used the spelling 'Shakespeare' which was used invariably (often hyphenated) for the author's name in print.

He describes the award of a coat of arms, which would normally be included on the title page of any work attributed to him. He considers the equivocal dedications by Jonson, Digges and Mabbe which gave a few veiled clues for anyone curious enough to enquire about the author, but which were insufficient to direct the unsuspecting to the business man from Stratford. Pointon evaluates the thin evidence that Shakspere was an actor. He also deals carefully with Shakspere's career in Stratford, noting that William held no public office and left no mementoes, and shows how unlikely it would have been for anyone in the provincial town ever to suspect him of being an author, acclaimed or otherwise.

Pointon draws together many sensible points regarding the Droeshout engraving and the Stratford monument, arguing that Dugdale's 1656 drawing of the man with a woolsack is probably the best likeness of the man from Stratford. Perhaps the best part of the book deals with various myths: the 'dating' myth; the false claim that Shakespeare used vocabulary based on Warwickshire or that the works have any special reference to local places near Stratford-upon-Avon. Although the main purpose of the book is not to consider other candidates, Pointon does briefly review the usual suspects (pp. 201-216).

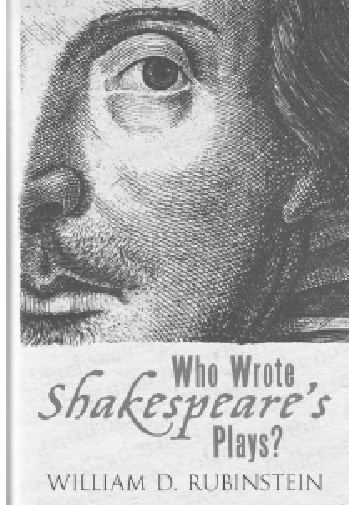
Two or three small criticisms do not detract from the book: first, this reviewer was occasionally confused by the use of the name 'Shakspere' to refer to the man from Stratford and 'Shakespeare' for the author – simply because they look so similar; second, some references are left a little vague, no doubt as part of the effort to keep the whole volume under 300 pages; third, and perhaps most important, I feel that the argument of 'identity-theft' over the 'front-man' theory needs further elaboration. The choice of the name William Shakespeare (without hyphen) for the dedication to *Venus & Adonis* in 1593 seems remarkably close to the name of one William Shakspere who coincidentally came to London about this time, perhaps a little later, and worked in the theatres.

The book is beautifully produced, with 16 illustrations, 10 appendices, a thorough bibliography of almost 200 items and a comprehensive index. This book is not just a must-read but also a must-buy for everyone interested in Shakespeare, especially for those not yet persuaded that there is an Authorship Question. It has taken its place on my main bookshelf alongside John Michell's *Who Wrote Shakespeare?* (1996) and Diana Price's *Shakespeare's Unorthodox Biography* (2001). Oxfordians will want a second copy to lend to friendly enquirers so as to show that our doubts about Shakespeare are not as daft or as snobbish as some people assert.

2) *Who Wrote Shakespeare's Plays?*
by William D. Rubinstein

Hardback, pp 160 pages, £18.99.
Amberley Publishing, Stroud, 2012
ISBN 978-1445601908

Bill Rubinstein is well known to many members of the De Vere Society, after making the address at the dinner to mark the quatercentenary of Oxford's death. As a professor of history at the University of Aberystwyth, he takes a refreshingly open approach to the Shakespeare Authorship Question (AQ). Bill is good friends with the DVS and many of his points resonate closely with the Oxfordian case for authorship. Nevertheless, Rubinstein is not an Oxfordian and along with Brenda James published *The Truth Will Out* in 2005, which argued that Henry Neville was the concealed author of the works of Shakespeare. Some of the material in this book is necessarily repeated in *Who Wrote Shakespeare's Plays?* but not as much as might be expected.



Sixteen years have passed since John Michel offered a complete overview of the AQ in *Who Wrote Shakespeare?* Rubinstein now covers much the same ground in *Who Wrote Shakespeare's Plays?* but with reference to the many impressive contributions to the debate which have been made in the intervening period. He begins by recounting the grounds for doubting the man from Stratford in the longest chapter of the book. While there is nothing particularly new to this reviewer, its straightforward and non-confrontational style makes it a useful overview for all readers.

There follows a chapter devoted to the main candidates, starting with the Stratford man himself, referring to him confusingly and ahistorically as William Shakespeare. Rubinstein presents numbered points for and against each candidate, dealing with Oxford (who receives the longest treatment), Bacon, Marlowe, Mary Sidney, William Stanley, Roger Manners, and finally Henry Neville. None of these treatments is meant to be exhaustive, but a serious and balanced introduction is supplied for each person, with mention of the main studies written to advance their several cases.

For Oxfordians, the most interesting chapter will be about Edward de Vere. After a thorough introduction to Oxford, Rubinstein's points in favour of Oxford's candidacy are:

(1) background and education;
(2) contemporary reputation (but only Meres is noted);
(3) parallels between events in the plays and in Oxford's life, with brief reference to *Hamlet*, *The Merchant of Venice* and *1 Henry IV.*
4) his annuity and his knowledge of Italy, which are surprisingly grouped together;
(5) parallels in his poetry with Shakespeare;
(6) the Geneva Bible;

7) The 'ever-living poet' reference in 1609; (8) Oxford lived near a Stratford (east of London) and owned estates near a River Avon and a Forest of Arden.

Rubinstein, however, is not convinced. He makes the following points against Oxfordian authorship:

(1) **Lack of direct evidence linking Oxford to the works.** (This reviewer cringed at the phrase 'not an iota' and was willing to shriek aloud should there be an 'egregious error' or 'not a scintilla'.) Perhaps Rubinstein overstates the number of manuscripts left by Oxford: fewer than fifty letters to and from him are scarcely 'voluminous' while the devastating fire at Hedingham Castle on 25 September 1918 destroyed a lot of the family archives.

Rubinstein notes that Meres refers to Oxford and Shakespeare separately, as if they were different people. But then, how reliable is Meres? Did he personally interview all the contemporary writers? When Greene's *Groatsworth of Wit* was published, many contemporaries thought that the work was actually by Henry Chettle or Thomas Nashe. Today, some people find the novels of Mary Westmancott clearly inferior to those by Agatha Christie without realising that they are the same person. Rubinstein then states that there is no evidence to link Oxford to the Lord Chamberlain's Men. This might be surprising but not impossible for someone who wished to remained anonymous.

(2) **The wrong dates**. Rubinstein is keen to preserve the standard chronology of the plays and denigrates "Oxfordian attempts to argue for a sweeping revision of the dates." He refers later (page 91) to this reviewer's *Dating Shakespeare's Plays* (2010) which contests the established date for each play and argues that only a date range can be established and that no plays must necessarily post-date 1604, the year of Oxford's death. He says that these attempts have 'persuaded no-one who is not already a convinced Oxfordian' but offers no case for any play being dated post 1604.

(3) **Oxford ran his own theatre company and as he was short of money he could have eased his financial plight by putting on crowd-pleasers such as the Falstaff plays, rather than assign them to the Lord Chamberlain's men.** Rubinstein overlooks the fact that the patrons were unlikely to make money from their playing companies. Oxford in the 1590s could no more have staged his own plays in public with the expensive costumes than penurious modern playwrights could, without extensive backing, produce their own plays in the West End or on Broadway today.

(4) **Oxford's surviving verse is nothing like Shakespeare's.** Rubinstein has clearly been listening to the Stratfordian cry to arms with this point. I challenge him to administer to his literature undergraduates the Benezet Test, which splices together segments of Oxford's poetry with Shakespeare's in a way which nobody in my experience has yet been able to puzzle out.

The next points are unnumbered: Rubinstein accepts the findings of Elliott and Valenza that frequency counts eliminate Oxford's case, without stating that their findings have been challenged by John Shahan and Richard Whalen. (See three articles from *The Oxfordian* (2009 and 2010) posted on the website: **www.shakespeare-oxford.com**). Rubinstein then downplays the parallels between Oxford's life and plays such as *Hamlet*.

(5) **Oxford had little or no relationship with Southampton.** While mentioning that Southampton refused to marry Oxford's daughter, Rubinstein ignores the link that Southampton was a royal ward (he mistakenly says Burghley's ward) at Cecil House while Lady Elizabeth Vere was living there.

(6) **Rubinstein dismisses some claims by Oxfordians ('not a shred of evidence') for attributing otherwise anonymous plays from the 1570s and 1580s to Oxford.** He would admit, of course, that Oxford must have written a number of very good plays to account for his reputation. Does he have any better suggestions? He also asks why Oxford would have delayed publishing plays until 1594.

(7) **Finally, Rubinstein questions the Oxfordian account of the First Folio and asks why it was not published as a posthumous tribute.**

Much of the review is taken with arguments against Oxfordian authorship, but overall, it is a well-balanced treatment of the subject. This reviewer does not feel shaken in his confidence that Oxford wrote the works, but accepts Rubinstein's point that more direct evidence is needed. Perhaps the biggest criticism is that the arguments are mentioned more as headlines, rather than developed in detail. Rubinstein is very well read in the field and surely there could have been more scope for his acute observations.

The volume is finely produced, with 10 illustrations, a very select bibliography (although many studies are mentioned in the running text) and an index. Overall, this book is a very helpful addition to the Authorship Question, especially for its discussion of other candidates. Oxfordians will want it for themselves and could well recommend it to interested friends.

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