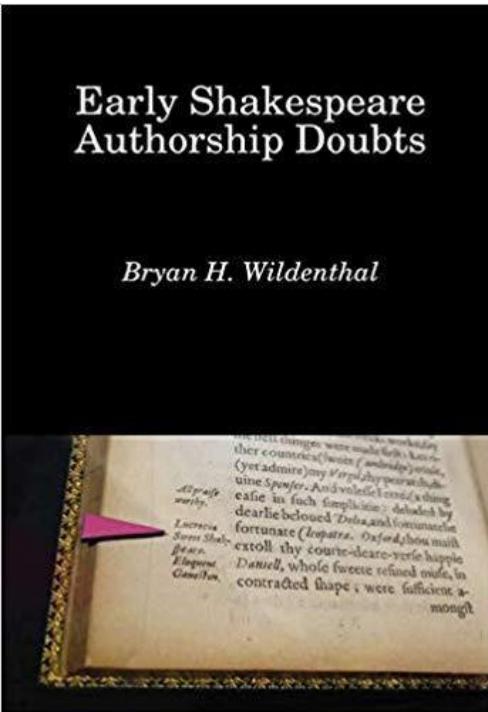


## Reviews

### Early Shakespeare Authorship Doubts

by Bryan H. Wildenthal

Review by Alice Crampin



*Early Shakespeare Authorship Doubts* by Bryan H. Wildenthal, a vice president of the Shakespeare Oxford Fellowship, is an impressive compilation. It deserves a prominent place on any Shakespeare Authorship bookshelf and is likely to become well thumbed. It will certainly be very useful to those of us who have many, many bits of the circumstantial evidence about the Authorship whirling around in our brains, but, too often, the detail is just out of our reach, especially when, conducting an argument, we find ourselves challenged for chapter and verse. Professor Wildenthal has it all sorted and sourced, with extensive

notes; and his book will be ready and waiting when you want to check your facts. He is an eminent lawyer and his forensic approach is very evident in his exposition.

This is probably not the book for anyone just starting on an exploration of the authorship question. Wildenthal draws heavily on the

work of previous scholars, both Stratfordian and non-Stratfordian, and he strongly urges any readers, who have not already done so, to peruse the books of Mark Anderson (*Shakespeare By Another Name*), Diana Price (*Shakespeare: The Unorthodox Biography*) and Katherine Chiljan (*Shakespeare, Suppressed*), before tackling the minutiae in his own book. He also frequently cites the work of DVS chairman Alexander Waugh, and indeed, leaves much of the discussion about what the dedication of the *Sonnets* can tell us to Alexander's ongoing studies.

Wildenthal's focus is on doubts that emerged about the Authorship during the lifetime of Shakspeare of Stratford. Many of these, like Greene's *Groatsworth of Wit* are familiar to us, but they are subjected to the most rigorous re-analysis of the texts, plus a review of the many interpretations that have been placed on them over the years, by doubters and non-doubters alike. You may feel you have consumed as many explanations of *Groatsworth* as you have had hot dinners, but I think you will find all is comfortably digested and settled when you have read Wildenthal.

Many other examples, some not quite so well known, are gathered together and subjected to the same comprehensive and fair-minded investigation of their possible hidden allusions. I was glad to see Thomas Freeman's 1614 verse included, together with the likelihood of his being Anne Vavasour's son from her later relationship.

The verse includes these lines:

Besides in plaies thy wit windes like Meander  
Whence needy new-composers borrow more  
Thence Terence doth from Plautus or Menander ...

which give a much-needed shove to some Stratfordian theories about dating and co-authorship.

It is to be hoped that there will one day be subsequent volumes dealing with the rest of the 17th century and the 18th, where the trail is more obscured, but is certainly not extinguished. Alexander Waugh's exciting "X Knew" series of videos are leading the way here, and interesting undercurrents in 18th century awareness are becoming increasingly apparent.

Claims that authorship doubts only arose in the 19th century are finally being shown up as utterly spurious – naïve at best – and Professor Wildenthal's work is an outstanding contribution to articulating the facts.

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