

he were to adopt any theory upon the subject, it 'would rather be physiological and pathological than chronological'. This is attracting academic approval. Oxfordians have been following Coleridge's approach for a long time now.

We could be forgiven for thinking that Shapiro's book represents William Shakespeare's Last Hurrah as an authorship candidate, but there is still three centuries-worth of academic mud passing as scholarship to be washed away.

R.M.

1. A brilliant riposte by one of our American members Sidney Lubow
2. H. Bloom: *Shakespeare's Invention of the Human* (Fourth Estate 1999) p.31
3. Without crediting our member John Rollett for the unmasking
4. GREAT OXFORD (Parapress 2005) pp.212-223
5. Nicoll: *Essay in Shakespeare's Later Comedies* (Penguin 1971) p.160. Granville Barker: Preface to *Hamlet* (Batsford 1970) p.36
6. Only the reference to the production in 1599 of *Henry V* as related to Essex's 1599 Irish expedition is applauded: it is a rehash of an earlier play which records the triumph of the Earl of Ormonde in Ireland in 1579 based in part on *The Famous Victories*
7. Lectures on Shakespeare by Coleridge (G. Bell and Sons London 1914) p.9.



Shakespeare and his Authors

Review by Richard Malim

Shakespeare and his Authors : Critical Perspectives on the Authorship Question

Ed: William Leahy

Pp.157 + bibliography and index: Continuum 2010 (hardback £75, paperback £24.99)

Bill Leahy is the head of the School of Arts at Brunel University and is responsible for the Authorship Studies course at the University. In this book of essays he provides, for an academic wishing to know more, a ten-page introduction to the academic taboo which surrounds the Authorship Question; indeed the point of assembling the essays is to be a corrective to the academic silence. He demonstrates that the Authorship Question has

'all the characteristics of an academic subject; all of the properties of an area of knowledge that should generate academic research, analysis and argumentation'.

In parenthesis, my gloss on Greene's *Groatsworth* (1592) differs from that of Diana Price as followed by Bill Leahy, because I do not see Shakespeare being in London till two years later; and I think Jonson's attack on the 'Poor Poet-Ape, who would aspire to be our chief' is an attack c.1612 on Fletcher rather than William Shakespeare, who is not known to have had any cultural aspirations.

Some parts of these essays, at first reading, may well seem to have been overtaken by Shapiro's *Contested Will*: subsequent readings show that even those essays from ostensibly 'orthodox' critics will have considerable value for those who can follow the recondite investigations into the interplay between Derrida and Freud. Your reviewer is not among their number.

The Oxfordian whose interests are confined more to purely biographical researches will however find much to delight and stimulate. Thus Bill Rubinstein (Professor of History at Aberystwyth University) repeats his triumph in *The Truth Will Out* (2005), and provides an unanswerable case for two propositions: first, Why there is an Authorship Problem and secondly, Why William Shakespeare of Stratford Upon Avon is not the answer to it. Nobody in anti-Stratfordian circles has written anything better since Diana Price in her *Shakespeare's Unorthodox Biography* (2001).

Of course, we Oxfordians quarrel with some of his deductions: the author's traumas, which 'orthodoxy' dates to 1601 on no evidence of any weight, he puts at the same date to comply with Neville's implication in the Essex putsch of that year and Neville's consequential incarceration in the Tower – disregarding the overwhelming evidence that Oxford's experiences lasted for a longer period c.1589/91.

Again, he relates Neville's interest in the London-Virginia Company to the authorship of *The Tempest*: I think most Oxfordians would follow the 1604 Spanish Maze hypothesis for this play, rather than any reference to the Bermuda shipwreck in 1610.

Of equal interest is Bill Rubinstein's analysis of the reasons for the 'iron wall' of hostility from the 'orthodox' academic literary establishment towards the Authorship question. 'It is un-

questionably true that most anti-Stratfordian theories were and are egregious, and (at the very least) border on the crackpot, frequently entailing secret codes embedded in Shakespeare's texts; secret, illegitimate children of Queen Elizabeth; alleged autobiographical references throughout the plays [a swipe at us Oxfordians?], and the like, put by amateur theorists. . . . However this does not explain why they [the 'orthodox'] would also dismiss out of hand academically trained, obviously sophisticated and intelligent anti-Stratfordians [just like your reviewer, of course], some of whom are university academics.' Rubinstein's fear is of being made equal on an equal playing field with us amateurs, a perceived devaluation of 'orthodox' expertise.

Bill Leahy's own essay points out that eight substantial biographies (or part-biographies) have appeared in the last seven years preceded by a great many others, and none add anything of consequence to Sir Sidney Lee's effort of 1898. To Stanley Wells, as well as to Jonathan Bate and Stephen Greenblatt, the anti-Stratfordians' ideas are 'a psychological aberration of considerable interest' and on a level with holocaust denial and 'intelligent design'. These authors with their literary intelligence are allowed to have free play with their baseless imaginative maunderings, considered infinitely more important than a modern

piece of research like that of Noemi Magri on 'Shakespeare's' knowledge of Italy' in *Great Oxford* (our collection of Oxfordian essays 2004) – quoted with approval by Bill Rubinstein (p.49)

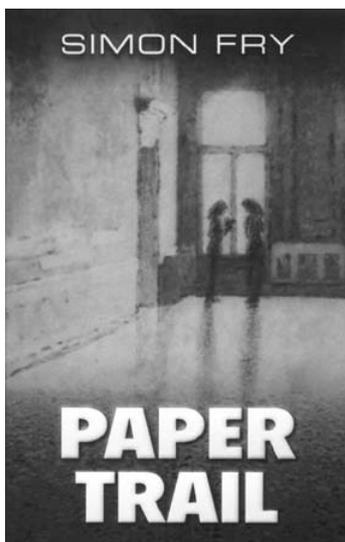
The final essay is that of (our own) Sandra Schruijer, a Dutch Professor of Psychology, whose immaculate English is of a standard to which we should all aspire. She brings her professional expertise to the problem, which is rather more than that at the command of the author of the 'psychological aberration' comment above, I suspect. One of the problems which she identifies is the lack of interest in the other side's argument. The Oxfordians are seen as conspiracy theorists, and the Stratfordians as stupid, by their opponents.

The patriotic 'group-bias' in favour of the lower middle-class Englishman over the aristocrat cosmopolitan is also an obstacle to the average English person's conception that there might be an authorship question, and this difficulty is enhanced by the mud thrown up in the strivings of the Oxfordians, Baconians, Nevillistas *et al*, on the schismatic fringes identified by Bill Rubinstein above.

Bill Leahy concludes with two interviews with Mark Rylance and Dominic Dromgoole, successive artistic directors at the Globe. To Oxfordians these are of limited interest since Rylance is a Baconian and Dromgoole a Stratfordian. Both are open-minded to a degree, and not against a level playing field. As a rockribbed Oxfordian, I am all in favour of a level playing field, but there should be some way of excluding those elements against which Bill Rubinstein inveighs, because if they are allowed to occupy too much of our space, they tar us with their deviations from sober, well evidenced analysis.

This book, then, is a valuable snapshot of the state of play in 2010: it may well represent the highest crampon up on the mountain of doubt, and from that point the climber can only make further progress upwards. An Oxfordian might hope for more dramatic developments in the light of Shapiro's concessions and manifest absurdities, but those who do not wish to hold their breath will find in this book just such a summation of the question as it stands, as we have been waiting for. Bill Leahy is to be congratulated on his own introduction and essay, and for his selection of the other contributions

R.M.



**A fast-paced Oxfordian thriller
by DVS member Simon Fry**

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or e-mail the Editor on
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