

Although consideration of the authorship question is specifically ruled out (page 642, and 732 n.1 but with a plug for the inept travesties by Messrs. Shapiro, and Wells and Edmondson), there is much to exercise the mind that is open to the questions that arise, particularly in Will Sharpe's essay titled Authorship and Attribution. "The authorship question", he writes (p.641), "though fuelled by class prejudice is nonetheless fuelled by love, ..... ." The "class prejudice" tag exists only in the minds of 'orthodox' Stratfordians, but the opinion contradicts Wells' and Edmondson's attempt to dub us "anti-Shakespeareans". Sharpe continues, ".....its accusations of fraud intended to elevate, not condemn the revered works." I know of no accusations of fraud, save the forgeries of Ireland and Collier which are equally denounced by the 'orthodox', although there are occasions when the 'orthodox' perhaps innocently truncate quotations, or less innocently transcribe e.g. "moniment" as "monument" in the First Folio introductory poems.

Sharpe makes some perceptive and courageous points: "... as a pseudo-science [attribution studies] is [sic] bedevilled by an uncomfortable fact that many practitioners seem reluctant to acknowledge. Poetry is not a naturally occurring phenomenon: it is an artificial product of deliberate and considered work, and words, as units of measurement, never occur in predictable patterned ways in poetry as nucleotides can be expected to do in a DNA strand. Poetry is at once able to be broken down into units and stubbornly resistant to non-cognitive measurement. A poetic feat seeks always to distinguish itself, to avoid repetition, to innovate. Shakespeare was a daring and experimental writer..... In metric tests of an anonymous passage it would be necessary to measure it against Shakespeare plays from, or as close as possible to, the year of its composition, if that fact could be known or at least inferred. *Edward III* appeared in 1596 so it would be no good measuring its metrics against those of Shakespeare's late plays....."(pp.646-7)

Quite right, but the analysis breaks down as 1596 ~~is not~~ can hardly be the correct date for the writing the play. I notice that the all-important work of Kevin Gilvary, *Dating Shakespeare's Plays*<sup>1</sup> is not among the books consulted or suggested for further reading. In it there is a short account of *Edward III*: in the account of the naval battle of Sluys, the Greek-messenger-type character reports not of an Armada-like series of clashes, but of a Lepanto (1572) headlong collision between the two fleets: and (not a mistake a contemporary author would make) one of the French ships is the Nonpareille in the play: fighting the Armada was the English ship Nonpareil. With its absence of Italianisms the original play is likely to date to prior to Oxford's visit to Italy in 1575-6. Throughout the canon there is ample evidence of rewriting, the substitution of better written passages or even plot developments, and here in this play there are those passages readily identifiable of precisely that process. There is absolutely no base for any theory that Oxford would condescend to collaborate with any other writer, or need to.

We can see this readily enough in *Arden of Faversham* and *Sir Thomas More*, where superior speeches are readily attributed to a more mature Shakespeare. For the latter the seminal (but again ignored) essay by Fran Gidley: Shakespeare in Composition: Evidence for Oxford's Authorship of "*The Book of Sir Thomas More*"<sup>2</sup>, is essential as it shows the evidence for Oxford as author dictating to his tribe of scribes the play. Great reliance continues to be placed by orthodox scholars on the

alleged likeness of Hand D in *More* written about 1585 with the six signatures of “William Shaksper” – in two of which “by me William” and “William “ are clearly by a more competent hand: it is necessary to be more honest about this problem.

Before collaboration studies took off that eminently sensible critic Middleton Murry<sup>3</sup> speaks of “the baffling frequency with which passages of early of Shakespeare betray a marked similarity of style, or rather the manner, of Peele or Greene or Marlowe, and yet are notably superior, in that matter, to anything we know of the author’s own. The result is that the sceptic is driven to postulate a curious miracle [we may see interpret Murry ironically] by which, as soon as Shakespeare began to tinker with their work, the writing of those contemporaries invariably underwent an improvement in its own manner of which they themselves were incapable. And that this particular kind of improvement should be due to Shakespeare’s revision is, in reality, less credible than the simple hypothesis it is intended to supersede: namely that Shakespeare is in the main himself the author of all the early work in the Folio.”

Until therefore stylometrics or their users can date with due accuracy any particular passage (be it exemplar or would-be comparable) under review for comparison, the pseudo-sciences of collaboration study and stylometrics are no use to the pseudo-science of attribution. This is to a certain extent acknowledged by Sharpe in his critique on pp.648-650, but he contends that the balance tilts in favour of these methods where more and more independent researchers reach similar conclusions with the help of computers. He does not take on board the fact that where you feed in the same defective data in regard to dating into your computer programme, the result is likely to be the same and equally worthless.

Let us enjoy the introduction to the review (p.14) of some of the plays not dealt with in depth: “The precise details of the young Shakespeare’s status as reviser, collaborator and possible purloiner will probably never be resolved. But here are some uncontested facts regarding his other plays. A tragedy about Hamlet Prince of Denmark was in the London theatrical repertoire long before the earliest record of Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*.” Yes, and who wrote that? Bate and Rasmussen virtually ignore *The Famous Victories of Henry V*, *King Leir*, *The Taming of A Shrew* and *The Troublesome Reign of King John*, save that some of them bear a “close but baffling relationship” with Shakespeare’s canonical plays. *The True Tragedy of King Richard III* is completely overlooked, along with the early Horestes. This paragraph demonstrates the difficulties for orthodox scholars, and the incompleteness of this study. All these problems and bafflements disappear overnight if once it is recognised that the writer wrote over a much longer period and had to learn and experiment his way with no exemplars to follow.

One would have hoped for a line by line dissection to illustrate where Seymour Pitcher, Eric Sams and Michael Egan went astray when they ascribed *Famous Victories*<sup>5</sup>, *Edmund Ironside*<sup>6</sup> and *Thomas Woodstock*<sup>7</sup> respectively to Shakespeare. Brief accounts of the critical disputes (but no critique) are given for the last two, but most Oxfordians will be more convinced by the books written by Sams and Egan. This view is fortified when the 1590 dates given to these plays by ‘orthodox’ scholarship are rejected in favour of much more likely earlier dates.

For better completion of the task of trying to pin works outside the canon a short recapitulation of the cases for parts of *Henry VIII*, *Pericles*, and *Two Noble Kinsmen* might have been included, especially as there is critical dispute as to how much is ‘Shakespearean’ and how much is

(subsequent) rewriting by lesser hands. Some Oxfordians consider much of *Henry VIII* rewritten by Fletcher for political reasons, *Pericles* a fragment rendered performable after Oxford's death by the inclusion of the additional scenes, and *Two Noble Kinsmen* all Fletcher's work.

So now we can turn to those plays which the editors do consider to be worthy of fuller consideration. *Sir Thomas More*, *Edward III* (why should Eric Sams have been right over this play and wrong about *Edmund Ironside*?) and *Arden of Faversham* : "We treat each play as a single work of art." This might seem to mean ( but Sharpe for one denies it) that the single work of art might have a single author, who in his maturity reworked the more mature passages to rival those in his later plays. Anyway Oxfordians have no problem about the inclusion of all three plays in toto in the canon. While *A Yorkshire Tragedy* is reviewed in the book, the editors follow earlier studies in making Middleton the author, predictably ignoring studies that ascribe it to Oxford as Shakespeare<sup>8</sup>. It is stated to be based on a domestic tragedy of 1605 to which it bears superficial resemblances, but Oxfordian scholarship in the shape of Nina Greene has effectively divorced it from the 1605 date.

The editors and Sharpe in his essay make life difficult for themselves when they date *Arden of Faversham* to about 1590: they ignore the clear connection to *Murderous Michael*, named after the faithless body servant of Arden – a shocking matter to its Courtly audience – presented at Court by the Earl of Oxford and others in 1577: thus the unevenness of the writing quality and instances of dramaturgical immaturity is explained in part by the spread of the dates and rewriting of the purple patches by its author near to its printing date of 1592.

Not much credit is given to the remaining six plays considered in depth. *The Spanish Tragedy* has a number of later additions which some scholars want to transfer from Jonson's authorship to Shakespeare's. *Thomas*, *Lord Cromwell* (certainly), *The London Prodigal* and *Mucedorus* (almost certainly) are not Shakespearean although there is a modern attempt to suggest that certain passages written in for a revival in 1610 of *Mucedorus* are the work of Shakespeare. Likewise the current fad for the suggestion that *Cardenio* or *Double Falsehood* is some sort of collaboration is hardly persuasive. Shakespeare is also suggested as the reviser of *Lochrine* on the strength of the publisher's puff.

This review of necessity contains a great number of reservations about the value of the editors' methods and evaluations. However the very detailing of the academic clashes enables the Oxfordian to identify the weaknesses of the 'orthodox' arguments more readily. As the 'orthodox' are, and have to be, wedded to the Malone dating scheme for the plays, they are bound to be the victims of their own pseudo-science of attribution and the defective application of collaboration and stylometric theories to attributions: this helps Oxfordians to avoid their problems and to present their own logical take on the problems that arise. For that reason alone we need to be very grateful to the editors. The production is logical and sumptuous and will adorn the shelves of many to whom the authorship question is resolved other than in favour of William Shaksper the ersatz gentleman from Stratford upon Avon.

By way of light relief in a rather critical review, Professor Gary Taylor in the Washington Post December 30<sup>th</sup> says: "You'll get more out of this book if you read only half of it, beginning at the back." I didn't have the courage to say so.

1. K. Gilvary (ed) : Dating Shakespeare's Plays (Parapress 2011) [including *Hamlet* pp.379ff(Dr. E.Jolly)]
2. F. Gidley : Shakespeare in Composition : Oxfordian 4
3. J. Middleton Murry : Shakespeare (Cape 1936) pp.28-9
4. W.Clemen : English Tragedy Before Shakespeare (Methuen 1967). For *Horestes* : E. Showerman : Orestes and Hamlet: Oxfordian 7
5. S. Pitcher : The Case For Shakespeare's Authorship of Famous Victories (Redman 1962)
6. E.Sams : Edmund Ironside (Wildwood House 1986)
7. M. Egan : The Tragedy of Richard II Part I (Mellen 2006)
8. Nina Green : Edward de Vere Newsletter - November 1990