

Recent Developments in the case for Oxford as Shakespeare

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If this book succeeds in its purpose, it will have no future except as an historical curiosity. (91)

*But surely, it will be argued, there must have been persons acquainted with the identity of the man behind the name Shakespeare who risked confiding their knowledge to personal letters or private papers -- why then have these not come to light? ... Speaking for myself, I can say only that I hope, not without optimism, that such documents will be turned up among the masses of Elizabethan manuscripts that have been inadequately combed by investigators knowing what to look for, if combed at all. Indeed, my guess is that an enormous opportunity beckons young scholars. (184) Charlton Ogburn, *The Mysterious William Shakespeare* (1984).*

Charlton Ogburn's first statement, given above, has not yet come true. His monumental work is still the foundation for those of us seeking to establish the identity of the author known as William Shakespeare. On the other hand, his second statement has, to some extent, come to pass. We do not yet have the long sought smoking gun, though we may within a year or so, but, in consequence of standing on Ogburn's shoulders, we and he know much more now than he knew in 1984, especially about the life story of the Earl of Oxford. And yet many of our public utterances, written and spoken, seem to show no awareness of the progress that has been made.

Ogburn discusses the problem of packaging the Oxford case in short and long magazine articles and books; there is so much to say, and a few thousand words, or a couple of hundred pages, are not enough. Eventually he decided that a long book was necessary to tell the whole story, even if its bulk deterred some readers. And so came about the 900 pages of *The Mysterious William Shakespeare*. In those pages, Ogburn gives us just about every argument that's ever been made concerning the authorship controversy, which, as far as I'm concerned, is of inestimable value. But this is not how you argue the case in a limited presentation such as an oral debate. We need to sort out the stronger points from the weaker, and then focus on the former. We must lead from strength, not from weakness. We also need to alter or discard aspects of our arguments that are wrong or simply of no value. The rest of this paper discusses improvements we need to make, the essentials of the case for Oxford as I see them, and recent and not-so-recent developments that have gone unnoticed.

Needed Improvements

1. Get rid of the notion that Shakespeare was a universal genius, which is a relic of nineteenth century bardolatry that we inherited from the Baconians. We must define what Shakespeare didn't know, just as well as what he did. Shakespeare clearly had a working knowledge of Latin, French, and Italian, though he preferred English translations to the originals in those languages. Given those tongues, it would be easy enough for him to read Spanish if he had to. Given the education that we know Shakespeare had, he was almost certainly taught the Greek alphabet and the rudiments of Greek, and the Greek alphabet alone is enough to pick out words here and there in a Greek text, as I know from my own experience. But if Shakespeare was fluent in Spanish, Greek, or any other tongue, he concealed it quite well. Shakespeare had excellent legal knowledge, a matter to which I will return, but I see no evidence that he possessed advanced knowledge of astronomy or medicine. Playing the Universal Genius gambit as a means of eliminating a man with, at best, a grammar school education is not the same thing as pursuing the truth. Moreover, the Universal Genius is no more a believable human being than the fuzzy Everyman/No-Man from Stratford. Finally, while it is true that Oxford was an above average student who maintained intellectual interests all his life, we would have a tough time trying to prove -- with evidence -- that he was a universal genius.

2. Clean up and expand Oxford's biography. The Gad's Hill episode of 1573 was no prank; the breakup of his marriage in 1576 was the Puritan Lady Burghley's response to Oxford's conversion to Catholicism; "the Lord Chamberlain with his white staff ... the people began to laugh" of 1581 is not about Oxford who was on the run or in prison concerning Anne Vavasour at that date; the man on the footcloth nag of 1581 was an opponent of the Queen's proposed French marriage, of which Oxford was a leading supporter; the 1,000 pounds per year was not secret service money; Oxford did not oppose the execution of Mary of Scotland; the 1603 letter by Captain Edward Vere to "kinde father" was to Sir William Browne, not to Oxford; etc. Oxford was a significant but minor figure at Elizabeth's court. Arguments about 'Poet-Ape' (probably Thomas Dekker) aren't worth making. On the other hand, arguments about the 'Not Without Mustard' section of Jonson's *Every Man Out* are definitely worth making. Incidentally, trying to strengthen your arguments with a lot of adjectives and adverbs is about as effective as trying to strengthen them by raising your voice --it doesn't work in serious debate. For example, a statement like, "It is absolutely and utterly inconceivable that a total tightwad like Elizabeth I would ever give anyone 1,000 pounds per year without expecting something extraordinary in return" is no good. All I need to do in response is to point out her grants to other people, and to note that she gave 200 pounds per year to Lord Henry Howard (a much lower ranking figure than Oxford) in compensation for detaining lands that he should have inherited, which she was also doing to Oxford.

3. Present the cover-up as a tacit conspiracy like the Stella Cover-up, not as The Greatest Secret Ever Kept, that is, a directed cover-up with oaths of secrecy, death threats, etc. Understand that Shakespeare wasn't deified until the eighteenth century; the seventeenth century regarded him as an excellent playwright and the equal of Ben Jonson and Beaumont and Fletcher. Oxford himself was part of the cover-up, and he didn't litter his works with secret signatures. As Joe Sobran puts it, "Oxford didn't write the plays and poems for the sole purpose of proving that he was Shakespeare".

4. Face reality on this "Prince Tudor" business, and submit it to proper historical scrutiny. Always try to make the strongest arguments you can against your own theory, or ask your friends to do so (as I was taught to do as a graduate student in economics). It's far more unpleasant to have your enemies shoot holes in you in public, than to have your friends do it in private. If you can't make or listen to the strongest arguments that can be made against your own theories, then you'd better keep them to yourself (this also applies to some Stratfordian professors).
5. Understand that Oxford's autobiography is in the *Sonnets*, not the plays. Autobiographical arguments can be made concerning *Hamlet*, *All's Well*, and the bed trick in *Measure for Measure*, but the Eva Turner Clark approach of seeing Oxford's autobiography all over the plays simply makes it easy for the other side to discredit us.
6. Prioritize the arguments for Oxford as Shakespeare and against the Stratfordian. Emphasize the strong arguments, de-emphasize the weaker ones, and get rid of the arguments of zero value. Using every argument imaginable is a poor tactic, which simply guarantees that the strong arguments will be diluted and lose impact. Furthermore, it allows the Stratfordians to limit their response to shooting down the weak arguments, and we should not aid them in their well developed technique of dodging the issue. Irvin Matus' book, *Shakespeare, In Fact*, is a complete exercise in shooting holes in all of our weak arguments and errors, while totally ducking all of the strong arguments. I've met Matus a couple of times, and I couldn't even get him to discuss the strong arguments in private. Here are some simple examples of strong, weak, and zero arguments: "EVER-LIVING POET" is a strong argument, "Shake- speare" is a weaker argument, "Shakspere" versus "Shakespeare" is a zero argument, the Droeshout engraving and the Stratford monument are weak arguments at best, while John Benson's question marks offer a very strong argument.
 - a. We have dug up many examples of usage of the term "ever- living" and none applies to a living person. Moreover, Prof. Donald Foster of Vassar has done us the enormous favor of confirming our findings in "Master W. H., R.I.P.", *PMLA*, vol. 102, no. 1 (January 1987), 46, making it impossible for Stratfordians to sneer at the fruits of amateur research.
 - b. The Stratfordians have come up with a few examples of ordinary names being hyphenated in that period, which weakens the argument that "Shake-speare" indicates recognition of a pen name. Hyphenation of real names was a rarity, and our argument is not valueless, but the few exceptions require recognition on our part and deprive the argument of much of its punch.
 - c. The spelling of family names was extremely variable in Elizabethan times. Smith, Smyth, and Smythe were all the same name, as were Moore, More, Moor, and Muir. Even if it could be determined beyond doubt that the name in question --Shakspere-- was pronounced with a short 'a' in the first syllable in sixteenth century Warwickshire, the fact remains that it was regarded as a variant of Shakespeare, as indicated by the shield and crest granted to John Shakspere by William Dethicke. This argument isn't worth the breath required to utter it.
 - d. Arguing that the Stratford monument and the Droeshout engraving are obvious frauds is also pointless, though contrasting the two different personas, the gentleman and the actor, is of value.

e. The question marks in the frontispiece in John Benson's 1640 edition of Shakespeare's poems make a very strong argument that Benson regarded the First Folio's identification of the author as a fraud. Incidentally, I once read in a Stratfordian source (the name of which I can't recall) that Benson's question marks mean nothing because question and exclamation marks were used interchangeably in those days. This argument is false, and so I may as well go over it here. They used the question mark in exactly one place where we would use an exclamation mark, namely a rhetorical statement put as a question. For example, if I say, "I worked hard under the hot sun all day; was I ever tired?", I would close with an exclamation mark because I'm not really asking a question (for another example, see S. Schoenbaum's statement beginning "What would we not give ...!", below). But Shakespeare's contemporaries would probably have used a question mark, because, after all, the statement is put in the grammatical form of a question. John Benson's words are exactly the opposite case. You can verify this old use of question marks in Percy Simpson's *Shakespearian Punctuation* (Oxford, 1911), 85-6, or by simply looking at the question and exclamation marks in the 1609 edition of the *Sonnets*. Or, see Stephen Booth's edition of the *Sonnets*, notes to numbers 95.3, 97.2-4, and 148.1-2.

Essentials

The essentials of the case for Oxford and/or against Shakspere are these six items:

1. The author's background and education as revealed by his works: Shakespeare's works were written by someone with an instinctively aristocratic outlook, who had detailed familiarity with hunting with horses, hawks, and hounds, who had traveled in France and Italy, who possessed considerable legal knowledge, who had completely assimilated the first two years of the university curriculum, and who seems to have had some military and nautical experience. These things are true of the Earl of Oxford. The state of the art Stratfordian response to this unpleasant reality is given in the Shakespeare article by John Russell Brown and T. J. B. Spencer in the current *Encyclopaedia Britannica*:

In lieu of external evidence, such extrapolations about Shakespeare's life have often been made from the internal "evidence" of his writings. But this method is unsatisfactory: one cannot conclude, for example, from his allusions to the law that Shakespeare was a lawyer; for he was clearly a writer, who without difficulty could get whatever knowledge he needed for the composition of his plays. (15th edition, 1995 printing, my emphasis)

No author who ever lived, especially a man of humble origins and educational attainments 400 years ago, ever got whatever knowledge he needed without difficulty. In other words, Shakespeare was superhuman, and the age of miracles was still alive circa A.D. 1600.

2. The obscurity of William Shakspere of Stratford: His early obscurity is understandable, but not after *Venus and Adonis* (1593) and *Lucrece* (1594). Then he becomes one of Lord Chamberlain's Men, later the King's Men, and has, according to the authorities, a stable career of over fifteen years as London's leading playwright. And yet we only know where he lived for a short part of this period because of records of tax evasion and a law suit. Ogburn is quite good on this topic. Edmund Chambers notes that Shakespeare's acting company became more prominent after James came to the throne in 1603, averaging over ten court performances annually, far

more than all the other play companies put together (I.77). Chambers also says that putting dates on Shakespeare's plays becomes more difficult after 1603 (I.85-86). Why should this be so? Why should greatly increased popularity for the acting company coincide with increased invisibility for the playwright? No one paid attention to his death; compare to Spenser (1599), Beaumont (1616), Donne (1631), Drayton (1631), Jonson (1637), and Burbage (1619) (see Ogburn 52, 112).

3. The *Sonnets*: Shakespeare's autobiographical *Sonnets* pose such problems for the Stratford theory that since around 1960 the story behind them has been declared off-limits by the orthodox authorities. When the *Sonnets* were published in 1609, the editor's dedication clearly said that the author was dead. Most of the *Sonnets* address a handsome young man, promising him immortality through verse. But the young man is never named, and the *Sonnets* seem to have been suppressed after the first edition --Why the mystery? Shakespeare in the *Sonnets* repeatedly refers to himself as old, which fits Oxford (1550-1604), but not Shakspere (1564-1616). Shakespeare says that he is lame in Sonnets 37 and 89 --Oxford was lame. Shakespeare repeatedly speaks of being involved in shame and disgrace, which makes sense coming from an aristocrat who violated the rules of his caste, but makes no sense coming from Shakspere. Shakespeare complains of poverty in several sonnets, but speaks of his jewels in 48 and of his rich clothes in 146, which makes sense coming from an earl who was relatively poor, but not from a successful man like Shakspere. The young man addressed by Shakespeare was clearly a man of rank, but is nevertheless castigated by Shakespeare at several places in the *Sonnets*.

An examination of leading editions of the *Sonnets* since 1780 provides an instructive look at the establishment's changing views. W. G. Ingram's and Theodore Redpath's edition of 1964 discusses eleven annotated *Sonnets* from Malone's edition of 1780 to Hyder Rollins' of 1944. All of these editors thought that the story behind the *Sonnets* was important and said so. But then the Penguin edition of 1961, edited by Douglas Bush and Alfred Harbage of Harvard, opined that the wise reader ought to ignore the story altogether, a view endorsed by Ingram and Redpath, both of Cambridge. W. H. Auden in the Introduction to the Signet edition of 1964 denounced anyone interested in the story behind the *Sonnets* as an invader of Shakespeare's privacy. Stephen Booth in the 1977 Yale edition sneered at the very idea that there was a story behind these poems. John Kerrigan of Cambridge in the New Penguin edition of 1986 followed the orthodox line by announcing that the "Sonnets are not autobiographical in a psychological mode" (11), whatever that means. But Kerrigan's scholarship got the better of him later in his commentary, in which he cites recent articles strengthening the argument that the 1609 Quarto prints the *Sonnets* in the right order (66, 71, 430). Moreover Kerrigan's notes to Sonnet 107 provide about the best short discussion I've seen on the date of that sonnet, concluding that it was almost certainly written on the death of Queen Elizabeth in 1604. Most recently, in the Cambridge edition of 1996, G. Blakemore Evans of Harvard ignores the scholarship of Kerrigan and others and dismisses the whole story with, "the question of the documentary nature of the *Sonnets* is largely irrelevant" (28).

We find a combination of the attitudes mentioned in the last two paragraphs in the writings of Samuel Schoenbaum. At the close of his 1970 *Shakespeare's Lives*, Schoenbaum laments:

Perhaps we should despair of ever bridging the vertiginous expanse between the sublimity of the subject and the mundane inconsequence of the documentary record. What would we not give for a single personal letter, one page of diary! (767)

And then, in some preliminary remarks on the *Sonnets* in his 1977 *William Shakespeare: A Compact Documentary Life*, Schoenbaum refers to them as:

sporadic entries, as it were, in a poet's rhyming diary (180).

The *Sonnets* could also be called letters, as most address the recipient, and so at last we seem to find a Stratfordian scholar who wants to know what Shakespeare's autobiographical poems have to say. But then we get to Schoenbaum's main section on the *Sonnets*, only to read:

All of the riddles of the *Sonnets* --date, dedication, sequence, identity of the *dramatis personae*-- elude solution, while at the same time teasing speculation. **This writer takes satisfaction in having no theories of his own to offer.** (271, my emphases)

Note the extraordinary implications of that last sentence; Shakespeare's leading biographer was actually proud of his ignorance.

4. The evidence on the dates of the plays: Most reference books say that Shakespeare's plays were written between about 1590 and 1612, and they place perhaps a dozen plays after Oxford's death in 1604. But the orthodox dating scheme is primarily the work of Edmond Malone in the late eighteenth century and Sir Edmund Chambers in the early twentieth century. Both Malone (*Shakespeare's Works*, 1821 ed., I.291) and Chambers (I.253) explicitly state that they based their dating schemes on the assumption that it had to be made to fit into the presumed working career of Shakspere of Stratford. Since Chambers published his final dating scheme in 1930, a large number of eminent Shakespeare scholars have said that Chambers' dates are too late, and that the plays were written earlier. These dissenters include Peter Alexander, Andrew Cairncross, F.P. Wilson, E.A.J. Honigmann, John Crow, William Matchett, John Russell Brown, T.J.B. Spencer, Russell Fraser, and Richard Hosley (the list could be expanded considerably). In fact, it is now completely orthodox to say that Chambers' dates are too late, and I could be criticized for attacking Chambers' obsolete scholarship. The trouble is that the establishment is unable to act on its knowledge, because to do so would wreck the Stratford theory. No play by Shakespeare can be proven to have been written after Oxford's death in 1604, including *Macbeth* and *The Tempest*, though, on the other hand, we can't prove that the late plays were written earlier than 1604. Various Stratfordians have charged that we don't offer an alternative dating scheme, to which I will make two responses. First, it is a major scholarly sin to pretend to know more than you do, as is the case with any dating scheme for the plays that assigns each to a particular year. Second, my guess is that the plays as we know them were written in their conventional order from about 1585 to 1604; in other words, subtract from three to seven years from Chambers' dates, and you'll be about right. Another thing that must be understood about the whole dating picture is that the history of the English stage before about 1590 is the Dark Ages, as noted by Chambers, F.P. Wilson, and G.E. Bentley. In other words, our ignorance of the history of the Elizabethan stage before 1590 may explain why Shakespeare and his works weren't noticed until after that date.

Edmund Chambers on the history of the English stage before 1592: "The fragmentary nature of the evidence makes a dramatic history of the period extremely difficult. The work of even the best-known writers is uncertain in extent and chronology, and much of it has come down in mutilated form. Marlowe's authorship of *Tamburlaine* is a matter of inference; it is only by an accident that we know *The Spanish Tragedy* to be Kyd's." *William Shakespeare: A Study of Facts and Problems* (Oxford 1930), 55.

F. P. Wilson: "Admittedly, few of the plays acted in the fifteen-eighties have survived. So serious are the losses that the historian of the Elizabethan drama --especially of this period, before the practice of printing plays to be read became popular -- often feels himself to be in the position of a man fitting together a jigsaw, most of the pieces of which are missing." The Clark Lectures, Trinity College Cambridge, 1951, published as *Marlowe and the Early Shakespeare* (Oxford, 1953), 106. See also Wilson, "Shakespeare's Reading", *Shakespeare Survey* 3 (Cambridge, 1950), 14-21, esp. 16.

Gerald Eades Bentley: "Perhaps I ought to explain the chronological limits which I have set [i.e., 1590-1642]. ... Before 1590, moreover, records are so scanty, and such a large proportion apply to amateur or semiprofessional theatrical activities, that conclusions about working conditions must be very shaky. One cannot even be sure that a profession of play-writing had yet developed." *The Profession of Dramatist in Shakespeare's Time 1590-1642* (Princeton, 1971), viii.

But the Stratfordian position continues to evolve. They now deny our assertion that the dates of the plays have been made to fit Will's life, but they don't face up to what Malone and Chambers say because we haven't forced them to. Also, some of them --specifically, the ones who use computers-- are trying to prove that the Malone-Chambers dates are completely in line with developments of other English playwrights. In other words, no one wrote like Shakespeare in his later plays until after 24 June 1604.

5. The oddity of contemporary comments on Shakespeare: A fair number of contemporary writers commented on Shakespeare, but only one did so in a way that implied that he actually knew the man, that one being Ben Jonson. Others spoke of him respectfully, but often strangely, in a way that would make sense if he were a nobleman who lost caste by association with the public stage. What else are we to make of: "And though the stage doth stain pure gentle blood, yet generous [i.e., aristocratic] ye are in mind and mood"? Edmund Spenser (Pleasant Willy in "Tears of the Muses" and Aetion in "Colin Clout"), Ben Jonson (revision of *Sejanus* and *Epigram* 77 "To one that desired me not to name him"), Thomas Edwards (the "center poet" in the prologue to "Cephalus and Procris"), Sir John Davies ("Orchestra"), and John Marston (a great writer "whose silent name / one letter bounds" in *Scourge of Villanie*) all mention some important writer who had to be referred to by a pseudonym or who could not be named at all. Meanwhile, Puttenham and others discuss the discretion that surrounded the writings of the aristocracy. Ben Jonson included a well known description of Shakespeare in "Timbers or Discoveries", in which he said five times that Shakespeare let his wit run away with him -- that he couldn't control it. Somebody said exactly the same thing about Oxford in 1581.

6. The discredited academic establishment: Since about 1960, the establishment has declared that looking for Shakespeare's background in his works is not allowed (see item 1, above), and the story behind the *Sonnets* is a taboo (see item 3). The conventional biographies of the Bard that keep appearing, some written by professors, are best classed as fiction (see 2). The establishment clings to a Procrustean dating scheme that everyone knows is false, because they feel they have no choice (see 4). All contemporary references to Shakespeare are twisted and contorted to fit the Stratford theory (see 5), save one, which is so damaging that it is ignored. In 1613 Francis Beaumont wrote a poem to Ben Jonson with a six and a half line evaluation of Shakespeare. Beaumont implied that Shakespeare had considerable scholarship, that is, Latin, but that the ignorant future would proclaim him to be a simple child of nature. Beaumont was, of course, completely right, with the new party line being announced in 1623 by Jonson. The 1966 *Reader's Encyclopedia of Shakespeare* makes no mention of Beaumont's verse, neither does the standard scholarly biography of the Bard, Samuel Schoenbaum's *William Shakespeare: A Documentary Life*. The 1986 Oxford *William Shakespeare: The Complete Works* omits Beaumont's lines from its section of "Commendatory Poems and Prefaces (1599- 1640)". Edmund Chambers, in his *William Shakespeare*, remains, to the best of my knowledge, the only Stratfordian authority to print Beaumont's words, which Chambers flagrantly misinterprets in his discussion of them. But perhaps the most striking example of scholarly dereliction on the part of the establishment concerns Greene's *Groatsworth*. They cannot bring themselves to admit the obvious facts that Henry Chettle must be presumed to be the author; that Chettle's apology was to one of the three playwrights, not to Shake-scene the Upstart Crow; and that, even under Stratfordian authorship assumptions, Shake-scene need not be Will Shakspere (see Ogburn, 56-64, or see my article in *The Shakespeare Newsletter*, Winter 1991). They are so vulnerable on the matter of *Groatsworth* that we are obliged to keep on hitting them.

Developments

1. Shakespeare had a University Education.

The foundation of formal education in sixteenth century England was the old medieval trivium, consisting of Latin grammar, rhetoric, and logic, which were studied in that order. The standard works on the amount of formal education found in Shakespeare's plays and poems are William Shakespeare's *Small Latine & Lesse Greeke* by Prof. T.W. Baldwin (Univ. of Illinois Press, 1944) and *Shakespeare's Use of the Arts of Language* by Prof. Sister Miriam Joseph (Columbia Univ. Press, 1947). Baldwin shows that Shakespeare had fully mastered grammar, which is to say that he knew most of the grammar school curriculum. But Baldwin did not in any way place a cap on Shakespeare's educational attainments, as by showing that he knew only grammar and not the other two subjects. In fact he states that he believes that Shakespeare knew some rhetoric and logic, but that investigating those matters was beyond the scope of his book. Sister Miriam Joseph shows that Shakespeare had fully mastered rhetoric and logic. Like Baldwin, she does not cap Shakespeare's education; nothing shows that he went no further.

Baldwin falsely asserted that university education was mostly professional (i.e., civil law, medicine, and theology) (II.662), and that therefore Shakespeare missed little by not going to a university.

Most important of all, if Shakespeare had this grammar school training, he had the only formal literary training provided by society in his day. University training was professional, with literary training only incidental and subsidiary. [Baldwin goes on to give two quotes from Roger Ascham, noting that the universities produced professionals, as if Ascham was saying that they produced nothing but professionals.] The grammar school gave the linguistic basis of grammar, rhetoric, and logic. The university perfected the logic, together with some rhetoric and made the application to the professions of physic, law, and divinity. The universities were professional schools.

Sister Miriam Joseph declined to tackle the question of how far Shakespeare's education went. Baldwin's blatant falsehood has been embraced by orthodox scholars (see, for example, Schoenbaum's *Compact Documentary Life*, 71), but the curricula of Oxford and Cambridge are well known and are easy to look up. The great majority of students at both universities were in the arts curriculum; only a minority were in professional studies (which, in any case, required a B.A. or M.A. first). Prof. Craig Thompson in *Universities in Tudor England* (1959), published for the Folger Shakespeare Library, states (p. 9): "The Elizabethan Arts course was based firmly on the old medieval trivium and quadrivium. In his first two years an undergraduate studied mostly rhetoric and Aristotelian logic and some arithmetic and music." In other words rhetoric and logic were only mastered after two years at a university. Thompson also remarks (p. 7): "Every boy who completed grammar school had worked at Latin [grammar] for seven years and for three or more had studied rhetoric." and (p. 10) "Some history and geography found their way into the B.A. course, but the main fare in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries continued to be grammar and rhetoric, logic and philosophy."

Baldwin's obiter dictum is a good example of a Stratfordian modus operandi. He is the official guru on Shakespeare's education, grammar schools, and university education, so the other scholars can hide behind his falsehoods. The same is true with Shakespeare's legal knowledge. Likewise with statistical stuff, to include not only the recent Elliott-Valenza foolishness, but also R. L. Widmann's vapid attack on Warren Austin's study of *Groatsworth* (*Shakespeare Quarterly*, xxiii (1972), 214-15; see also my article "Groatsworth and Shake-scene", *The Shakespeare Newsletter*, Winter 1995). You must always try to get behind these "experts". In the case of the statistics, I know enough to do it myself. I don't know enough about law, but Arthur Underhill gave the game away (see 3, below). As for Baldwin, it just took a bit of research, because you don't need to be an expert on the Elizabethan grammar school and university curricula.

Sister Miriam Joseph shows that Shakespeare had fully assimilated at least the first two years of the university arts curriculum, however he got it, and she offers no evidence that his education stopped there.

2. Stratford Theory at Stake in Unnoticed Debate Over *King John*.

Shakespeare's *King John* was written between 1587 (second edition of *Holinshed's Chronicles*) and 1598 (mentioned by Francis Meres); Chambers dates *King John* at 1596-97. A related play about King John, *The Troublesome Reign*, was published anonymously in 1591. From the eighteenth through the early twentieth century, it was assumed that Shakespeare regularly borrowed and fixed up other men's plays, and so *King John* was taken to be adapted from

Troublesome Reign. But then in the 1920s, Peter Alexander showed that the bad, early versions of 2 and 3 *Henry VI* were not sources for Shakespeare's plays, but rather were piracies of them; what came to be called "bad quartos". Subsequent work on other plays reversed the old belief, which went back to Tyrwhitt's discovery of and theory about Greene's *Groatsworth*, and so Shakespeare came to be seen as a victim of pirates, not a pirate himself. And Stratfordian views on *Groatsworth* changed without fanfare; Robert Greene was now seen as charging Shakespeare with presuming to compete with his betters, rather than with stealing the plays of others.

In 1954 the Arden series released its *King John*, edited by E. A. J. Honigmann, who showed that Shakespeare had done a great deal of research on that play, research that is not reflected in *Troublesome Reign*. Honigmann went on to argue that Shakespeare's play was the source for the anonymous play, hence Shakespeare's *King John* had to have been written by 1591. The next important *King John* was William Matchett's Signet edition of 1966, which offered further arguments in support of Honigmann's position on the priority of the two plays. Since then, R. L. Smallwood in the New Penguin *King John* of 1974, Kenneth Muir in *The Sources of Shakespeare's Plays* 1978, and A. R. Braunmuller in the Oxford *King John* of 1989 have argued that *Troublesome Reign* came first, while L. A. Beaurline in the Cambridge *King John* of 1990 supports Honigmann and Matchett. The most recent contribution to the debate that I've noticed is "King John and *The Troublesome Raigne*: Sources, Structure, Sequence" by Brian Boyd, *Philological Quarterly* (Winter 1995), which argues that Shakespeare's play came first. Boyd, like most of his predecessors, avoids any mention of the dating issue.

In short, for over forty years some quite eminent Stratfordian experts have been debating whether *King John* was written by 1591, with the experts evenly divided. But no one outside the debate seems to have noticed its implications, which are that if *John* must be moved back to 1591 or earlier, then about a dozen other plays must be moved back earlier still, and the Stratford theory goes up in a puff of smoke. We can continue with Honigmann's story.

In 1954 Ernest Honigmann had recently received his doctorate, having done a dissertation criticizing Edmund Chambers' dating scheme for Shakespeare's plays. Honigmann recognized the drastic implications of his research into the sources of *King John*, but he withheld comment.

Honigmann's next significant Shakespeare publication was "The Date of Hamlet", *Shakespeare Survey* (1956), 24-34, in which he toed the party line, offering up stale arguments to stick *Hamlet* at its conventional date of late 1599 to early 1600.

By 1980 Honigmann was a major Shakespeare establishment figure and so he published Shakespeare's *Impact on his Contemporaries*, in which he greatly added to the case against Chambers' dating scheme and also strengthened the case for the priority of Shakespeare's *King John* over the 1591 version. He also offered empty arguments to the effect that we could be pretty sure that Shakespeare's play was written in 1591, with the pirated play being written and published immediately after, and not in 1590, 1589, 1588, or 1587, though any of those years is just as likely as 1591. He argued that the "dozen or more" earlier plays could be crammed into a few years immediately preceding 1591. And he recognized the implied void of five years or more in Shakespeare's production of plays, so he proposed that the later plays be "thinned back" from their conventional, Chambers dates to cover the gap.

And Honigmann also told, in a very understated manner, what happened in 1954:

the relationship of the two King John plays, one by Shakespeare and the other anonymous, a tale of a tub that fascinated me from 1948 to 1954, and that I then abandoned (as Swift might have said) to divert the whales. The whales sported happily and spouted mightily, but solved no problems. Returning now to *King John* after a quarter of a century I am particularly conscious of my debt to three brilliant teachers ... I can only hope that, had they lived, they would have given their approval not only to a thesis presented in 1950 but also to its belated afterbirth. (x-xi)

In other words, Honigmann was told by his superiors to stop causing trouble, and the warning was serious enough to drive him away from his stunning academic breakthrough for twenty-five years.

The debate about which King John play came first has been going hot and heavy since 1954, and it won't go away. But those involved tiptoe around or ignore altogether the implications with regard to the orthodox dating scheme of Shakespeare's plays. Oxfordians should not be part of this conspiracy of silence. Incidentally, I have the utmost respect for those Stratfordian scholars who have argued for the priority of Shakespeare's *King John*. They are in no position to emphasize what's really at stake, but the same cannot be said of us.

3. Shakespeare and the Law; the Testimony of Arthur Underhill.

The first scholar to argue that Shakespeare had a legal background was Edmond Malone, himself a lawyer, who proposed that young Shakespeare might have been a lawyer's clerk. That idea was shot down in 1859 by Lord Chief Justice Campbell in *Shakespeare's Legal Acquirements Considered*, but Campbell maintained that Shakespeare's legal knowledge was flawless. His opinion was fully supported in 1883 by Cushman K. Davis in *The Law in Shakespeare*, which analyzes several hundred legal passages in Shakespeare's works, and includes over 600 legal terms in its index. But other lawyers can be found to argue against Shakespeare's legal knowledge, permitting Stratfordian professors to shrug off the whole matter. And how can any of us laymen be sure, especially given that lawyers are trained to argue both sides of a case? It is notorious that members of different professions, hobbies, and religions all want to argue that Shakespeare was their fellow, and so perhaps the Stratfordian bias of the lawyers who argue against Shakespeare's legal knowledge is balanced by Malone's, Campbell's, and Davis' desire to claim that "Shakespeare was just like me".

But one Stratfordian lawyer showed his hand, revealing both his motives and the emptiness of his arguments, namely Arthur Underhill, one of the Conveyancing Counsel to the High Court of Justice and author of the chapter on the law in the 1916 *Shakespeare's England*. This work, now slightly out of date, consists of thirty essays by leading authorities on various aspects of Elizabethan England and how they appear in Shakespeare's works. Underhill, who proudly records his descent from the man who sold New Place to Will Shakspere, opens his chapter:

Despite Shakespeare's frequent use of legal phrases and allusions his knowledge of law was neither profound nor accurate. (I.381)

Underhill does not try to rebut Shakespeare's legal knowledge with a direct show of counter-evidence, instead he artfully distributes three and a half objections to Shakespeare's knowledge across his chapter. Underhill's most interesting hit at the Bard's law is the one I referred to as a "half" objection.

King Lear orders law to sit with equity (III.vi.39-41), and Underhill remarks that "[b]ut for [this] passage, Shakespeare gives no hint that he knew of the existence of Courts of Equity as distinguished from Courts of Law" (I.395). We might just as well say that, but for one remark in *1 Henry IV* (I.iii.60-62), we would have no idea that Shakespeare knew that saltpeter is used in making gunpowder. But the remark is there, and so obviously Shakespeare did know that saltpeter is used in gunpowder, just as he knew about the judicial system called equity. So what's Underhill's point? Underhill won't say, but the point is that Francis Bacon was a specialist in equity who ended up achieving his goal of becoming Lord Chancellor, that is, the head of equity. In other words, Underhill is arguing the case against Francis Bacon. The three objections Underhill made to Shakespeare's law are these:

- a. *Love's Labour's* (II.i.220-21): Where Maria rejects Boyet's request for a kiss with: "My lips are no common, though several they be", Underhill natters that Shakespeare did not know the two meanings of the word "several". Any annotated edition of *Love's Labour's* will explain that Maria is playing on the two meanings. Any Shakespeare concordance, such as Alexander Schmidt's, which was available to Underhill, will show that Shakespeare, like everyone else, knew both meanings of "several".
- b. *Hamlet* (V.i.110-18): Where Hamlet in the graveyard remarks on the technicalities of buying land, including 'statutes and recognizances', Underhill sneers: "What 'statutes and recognizances' had to do with the buying of land is not evident to a lawyer, and may suggest that Shakespeare's knowledge of the law of property was neither accurate nor extensive." (I.406) Any annotated, university-level edition of *Hamlet*, such as Arden, Oxford, or Cambridge, will explain exactly what statutes and recognizances had to do with buying land. Notice how Underhill words his statement in a evasive manner, instead of simply saying that statutes and recognizances had nothing to do with real estate.
- c. *All's Well* (II.iii.58-59): When the King of France proposes to marry Helena, "a poor physician's daughter", to his ward, Count Bertram, Underhill complains about the requirement "that the spouse must be of equal rank with the ward, which Shakespeare had ignored". Underhill is really getting desperate when he brings up this nonsense. One need not even look at the footnotes in the Arden edition. Just read on a few more lines to Bertram's objection to Helena's low rank, and then note the King's answer: "I can build up [her title]". In other words, Shakespeare was perfectly well aware of the requirement.

Incidentally, every one of these four items is clearly explained by Cushman Davis, who, like Lord Campbell, found no faults in Shakespeare's legal knowledge. Underhill, with the advantage of over a century of accumulated research into Shakespeare's law, and with Campbell's and Davis' books in front of him, was unable to point out a single defect in that knowledge.

We must always be aware of the importance of knowing and using our opponent's work: what Malone and Chambers say about dates, Sister Miriam Joseph on Shakespeare's classical education, Prof. Foster on "ever-living", Honigmann and others on *King John* and other dating issues, Underhill on the law. It is difficult for Stratfordians to dismiss the testimony of experts from their own camp. Also, these and similar sources, each of which must be searched out, can give us accurate evaluations of the extent and accuracy of Shakespeare's knowledge of Latin, the law, etc. Typical Stratfordian sources tend to say that Shakespeare knew all that he needed to know about such subjects, but really didn't know very much, which tells us exactly nothing.

4. The Demolition of Shakspere's Signatures.

The 1985 Shakespeare in the *Public Records*, by David Thomas, published by the British Public Records Office includes a chapter on "Shakespeare's Will and Signatures" by Jane Cox (pp. 24-34). Miss Cox reproduces and examines five of the six supposedly authentic signatures of Will of Stratford (she omits the first signature on the will as unusable). She concludes:

It is obvious at a glance that these signatures, with the exception of the last two [on the will], are not the signatures of the same man. Almost every letter is formed in a different way in each. Literate men in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries developed personalized signatures much as people do today and it is unthinkable that Shakespeare did not. Which of the signatures reproduced here is the genuine article is anybody's guess.

We may add that it is anybody's guess whether any of the signatures is genuine. The only orthodox scholar that I know to have responded to Miss Cox's bombshell is, to his credit, Samuel Schoenbaum in his 1987 *William Shakespeare: A Compact Documentary Life* (pp. 326-7) and his 1991 edition of *Shakespeare's Lives* (p.566). Schoenbaum is cautious about accepting Miss Cox's verdict, but he does not disagree. In the two works cited and in his 1990 *Shakespeare: His Life, His Language, His Theater* (p. 213), Schoenbaum moves toward what he hopes to make the new orthodoxy -- that the three signatures on the will are authentic. But Prof. Schoenbaum has no credentials at all in this field, and is on record as sneering at amateur paleographers (*Shakespeare's Lives*, 1970 ed., 616), not to mention the fact that Miss Cox thinks that three of the witnesses "signatures" on the will are by the same hand. And, as one remembers, the will was originally drafted to be sealed, not signed. As Miss Cox says:

But if one must select one of the four signed documents as being the sole example of our greatest playwright's hand, the will has no better claim than the Requests deposition, the mortgage deed or the Guildhall conveyance. As we have seen, the legal sanctity of the signature was not firmly established.

We no longer have any certain samples of Will signing his name (though we may have one or two). Therefore the presumption of literacy provided by the signatures vanishes. The man may not have been able to write.

But the supposedly authentic handwriting of the Bard was a key part of the evidence used to make the case for him as the author of one scene in the manuscript play of *Sir Thomas More*. So an item drops out of the Shakespeare canon. Schoenbaum was not about to proclaim such a loss,

but he silently acknowledges it in the 1991 edition of *Shakespeare's Lives*. Page 341 of the 1970 edition includes this sentence, concerning the nineteenth century Shakespeare Society: "Among its notable achievements was the first publication, in Dyce's edition, of *Sir Thomas More* [which in our own century has come to earn a place in the Shakespeare canon by virtue of a single scene]." This sentence appears on p. 251 of the 1991 edition, but the bracketed passage has been deleted. Page 696 of the 1970 edition states that several scholars "pooled their expertise and critical powers to make a [persuasive] case for Shakespeare's Hand in the *Play of Sir Thomas More*." This sentence is on pages 503-4 of the 1991 edition, but the bracketed word, "persuasive", has been downgraded to "impressive".

The eighteenth and nineteenth centuries thought they had a real, flesh and blood Shakespeare. The stories about poaching, horse holding, wit combats at the Mermaid, and the merry meeting with Jonson and Drayton humanized the dry records of the Stratfordian grain hoarder, investor, tax dodger, and bringer of law suits. But these beliefs eroded under scholarship, and were finally toppled by Sir Edmund Chambers' 1930 *William Shakespeare*, which left only a bare-bones Bard or minimalist Shakespeare. But now we lose the signatures, the presumption of literacy, and a scene from *Sir Thomas More* --Will continues to play the Cheshire Cat. And the Stratfordian professors must be held to have suffered a loss of face for their incompetent handling of the supposed signatures.

It is quite understandable that the overwhelming majority of Stratfordian scholars lack the courage to acknowledge the expert testimony of Jane Cox. After all, they wouldn't want the newspapers to notice this horrible embarrassment with its implication of illiteracy. But it is truly astonishing that most Oxfordians also want to look the other way. Too many of us have gotten too comfortable slamming the six famous signatures, as if literary ability had something to do with good handwriting. Those who feel this way are no different from Stratfordians who can't let go of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth century legends about Gentle Will. We must become accustomed to adjusting our theories to new evidence, not demanding that all new finds be forced to fit old theories.