

From the Editors

Welcome to the first issue *Brief Chronicles*, a peer-reviewed interdisciplinary journal of Shakespearean authorship studies. W.H. Furness, the father of the great Shakespeare editor H.H. Furness, best expressed the position of critical skepticism that still motivates our deliberations: “I am one of the many who has never been able to bring the life of William Shakespeare within planetary space of the plays. Are there any two things in the world more incongruous?”¹

Furness was not alone in his skepticism. “Doubts about Shakespeare came early and grew rapidly,” wrote Folger Library Educational Director Richmond Crinkley in a 1985 *Shakespeare Quarterly* review of Charlton Ogburn Jr.’s *The Mysterious William Shakespeare*. “They have a simple and direct plausibility. The plausibility has been reinforced by the tone and methods by which traditional scholarship has responded to the doubts.”²

Brief Chronicles solicits articles that answer Crinkley’s 1985 call for scholarship which transcends the increasingly irrelevant traditional division between “amateur” scholarship and “expert” authority. Our contributors will actively cross-examine the critical history of Shakespearean scholarship, as well as the original texts of the discipline, to reconstruct a more plausible image of the bard and his works than that found in such recent bardographies as Stephen Greenblatt’s fanciful *Will in the World* or James Shapiro’s award-winning study of the origins of the planks used to build the Globe Theatre, *1599: A Year in the Life*. We solicit articles that shed light on the Shakespeare canon and its authorship, on theories and problems in the study of early modern authorship and literary creativity, and on related questions of early

modern literary culture, aesthetics, bibliography, psychology, law, biography, theatrical and cultural history, linguistics, and the history of ideas — for all these domains of knowledge are implicated in the search for truth about Shakespeare.

This first issue of *Brief Chronicles* illustrates the comprehensive interdisciplinary character that we envision for the journal's future. Four contributors to our first issue hold PhDs in literary studies; two are MDs with records of publication on literary and historical topics, and six are independent scholars. Contributions cover topics as divergent as an analysis of the psychology of belief in the orthodox view of Shakespeare (Waugaman), the misunderstood relevance of Francis Meres as an early witness in the authorship debate (Detobel and Ligon), why Shakespeare's last will and testament undermines the orthodox view of Shakespeare (Cutting), classical knowledge in the plays (Showerman), Hamlet's feminine side (Gilbert), and censorship in *Titus Andronicus* and its relevance to the authorship question (Delahoyde).

The issue is rounded out with reviews of three new books on the authorship question, each pursuing a different dimension of the case for Oxford's authorship: Thomas Hunter (PhD, English) reviews the revised 2009 edition of a book by a member of our editorial board, Warren Hope, *The Shakespeare Controversy*, which traces the history of the authorship question from the 18th century to the present; Austrian scholar Walter Klier, himself the author of *Das Shakespeare Komplott* (1994, 2004), reviews the latest Oxfordian book published in Germany, Kurt Kreiler's *Der Mann, der Shakespeare erfand* (*The Man who Invented Shakespeare*); Richard Waugaman contributes our third review, of Heward Wilkinson's *The Muse as Therapist: A New Poetic Paradigm for Psychotherapy*, which bypasses the increasingly irrelevant demand for proof of de Vere's authorship to explore the psychotherapeutic implications of a Shakespeare who was a real man.

We are pleased to dedicate this first issue to the memories of two recently deceased intellectual pioneers. Peter Moore (1949-2007) was an independent researcher, better known to scholars in Europe than his native United States. In addition to making regular contributions to the Shakespeare Oxford Society newsletter, Moore contributed articles to six peer-reviewed journals in Europe and the United States from 1993 to 2006, including *The English Historical Review*, *Notes and Queries* (England), *Neophilologus*, *English Studies* (Holland), *Cahiers Élisabéthains* (France) and *The*

Elizabethan Review (United States). Moore's published papers on Shakespeare are collected in *The Lame Storyteller, Poor and Despised* (2009) from Verlag Uwe Laugwitz.

Winifred L. Frazer (1916-1995), Professor emeritus of literary studies at the University of Florida at Gainesville, was – like Peter Moore – an unlikely intellectual revolutionary. Known to most of her colleagues as a loyal adherent to the traditional view of Shakespeare, Frazer's expertise in early modern literary studies, as well as the history of dramatic genres, is attested in numerous publications. Although focussing on Eugene O'Neill, Frazer also published on Faulkner, Shakespeare, and other writers. She was the author of *The Theme of Loneliness in Modern American Drama* (Univ. of Florida Press, 1960), the Twayne series biography of the arts patron Mabel Dodge Luhan (Twayne, 1984), and, with Jordan Y. Miller, *American Drama Between the Wars: A Critical History* (Twayne, 1991), as well as a regular contributor to the *Eugene O'Neill Newsletter*, the *Shakespeare-Oxford Society Newsletter*, and the orthodox *Shakespeare Newsletter*.

But, like the object of her study in the article published here for the first time, Frazer lived a double life. Throughout the 1990s she toiled in academic obscurity in a series of articles, directly or indirectly connected to authorship, culminating in her never-published, "Censorship in the Strange Case of William Shakespeare: A Body for the Canon." It would be an understatement to say that Frazer's essay, challenging the traditional view of the Bard which most of Frazer's earnest colleagues *assumed*, failed to elicit appropriate consideration. Submitted to *PMLA* in 1991, it was swiftly rejected and never appeared in print. However, it did inspire some revealing comments from anonymous peer reviewers. Retrospectively these constitute impressive testimony to the prejudicial reasoning (as well as some tiny steps toward self awareness) on which the perpetuation of the orthodox view of Shakespeare depends.

Wrote one reviewer: "That this paper should have come to me, at this time, is a sad irony. We have lately had on this campus a visit from the Earl of Burford, presenting this proposition (the Oxford case) in a less learned though more urbane manner." Accused by a friend of not listening to the Oxfordian arguments, this reader continues: "He was right; I have not listened. The arrival of this article from the heights of the MLA was a judgment." Strikingly, the reader does not offer a detailed response to Frazer's argument, but goes on from this admission to argue that her

conclusion must be wrong, because three U.S. Supreme Court Justices, and three “law Lords of the House of peers” had recently ruled in favor of the traditional view of Shakespeare. Moreover, continued the reviewer, since Oxford died in 1604 he could not have written *The Tempest*, and – he maintained – Donald Foster had proven through the use of computers that Shakespeare was an actor.

The second reader, apparently relieved that the first had so thoroughly demolished the substance of Frazer’s case by responding to points not raised in her article, presenting interpretations as if they were unambiguous facts, and relying on a highly selective use of the argument *ab autoritate*, could only “agree completely with the first reader’s evaluation of this essay....that evaluation is so comprehensive and articulate that I shall have little to add... once again, the claim for Oxford is built on a teetering structure of inferences that topples when one recalls, as the first reader does, that Oxford died in 1604 and that works attributed to him continue to appear for the following decade.”

Frazer makes the potent (and quite specific) empirical observation that, during the nineteen years between Oxford’s death and the publication of the 1623 folio, only four new plays appeared in print, even though over half of them had still not been published. This sudden cessation of publication coincident with Oxford’s death (and the arrival of James on the throne) contrasts to the steady stream of fifteen or more plays, averaging more than one per year, published over the shorter period between 1591 and Oxford’s death. But Frazer’s reviewers camouflage this provocative pattern behind evasive generalizations – implying, wholly without justification, that the existence of posthumous publication is an insuperable impediment to the theory of Oxford’s authorship. Yet the pattern is clear, as Stephen Roth observed in his 2003 *Early Modern Literary Studies* review of Lukas Erne’s *Shakespeare as Literary Dramatist*: “Erne does not provide a satisfying explanation for the sudden halt in registration of new Shakespeare plays around the time of James’ accession.”³ Erne is not alone. Leading scholars, as the reviews of Frazer’s article attest, have not explained the phenomenon in part because they typically cannot even bring themselves to admit that it exists (incidentally, the existence of this pattern was first stressed by Looney as early as 1920).⁴ And half the plays were *published for the first time* in the 1623 folio, seven years after the death of the alleged Stratford author. How does Frazer’s anonymous reviewer explain *that*?

One must wonder why orthodox Shakespeareans don't just say what they are thinking about the chronology of the plays. They mean to say – but rarely will – that “many plays were *written after* Oxford died.” Perhaps most won't say what they mean because they know in their heart of hearts that the claim is not susceptible to proof; to say it without equivocation only invites contradiction and – the thing orthodoxy fears above all else – an inquiry into the evidentiary basis for the claim. That way lies madness for believers in the traditional view of the bard.

“The objective of the members of an academic community,” wrote Ecole de Haute International Professor of the history of ideas Louis J. Halle to Charlton Ogburn Jr. in 1988, in a letter congratulating him on *The Mysterious William Shakespeare* (1984), “is to learn to say what we all say in the language in which we say it....I have known students who, in their PhD dissertations, would say what they knew to be factually false because of the saying of it would identify them with the community in which they intended to make their careers. Such behavior, in my experience, is more the rule than the exception. In fact, it would be hard to find any exception in the academic communities I have known.”

There are indeed few things in the world more incongruous than the traditional biography of Shakespeare and the literary work which that biography purports to elucidate. Thus, alone among writers, it may be said of Shakespeare that biography constitutes an impediment to criticism: the more a critic depends on it as a framing device, the less of significance he can tell us about the literary work. The flights of Borgesian fancy that Frazer documents – Shakespeare is a god, a ghost, a sacred idiot, or simply a lesson in postmodern metaphysical rhetoric – have hardly ceased since 1991. If anything, as Shakespearean orthodoxy enters the final phase of the denial process analyzed in Richard Waugaman's essay, scholars as diverse as Harold Bloom and Stephen Greenblatt only reiterate metaphysical evasions with renewed conviction. Bloom typifies the anxiety of Oxfordian influence in his formula – appearing, of all things, in a book purporting to rescue Shakespearean criticism from metaphysics – that Shakespeare is “at once no one and everyone, nothing and everything.”⁵ Right. Did we mention that land for sale in Arizona?

As those who have considered the proposition with any care understand, the opposite is true for the Oxfordian scholar: here the biography fits the wit of the plays like a Cheveril glove. Hence, another

popular gambit among apologists for Shakespearean orthodoxy, exemplified in Michael Shermer's recent *Scientific American* screed, "Shakespeare, Interrupted,"⁶ is to reduce the anti-Stratfordian argument to a matter of formal education, substituting the intimate revelations of the Oxfordian case for the straw man of a recycled "Shakespeare in Love" view of historical reality. Readers of J. Thomas Looney's classic *"Shakespeare" Identified* – the first work to place the name "Shakespeare" under postmodern quotation marks – are aware that for nearly ninety years the case has rested on a much more particular and revealing formula. It is not just that "Shakespeare" was well educated (*pace* Shermer, he was), but that his works constitute a literary *apologia* for the life of another man – Edward de Vere, 17th Earl of Oxford.

Drawing attention to alleged external contradictions in the case for Oxford's authorship, such as the Jacobean publication of many of the plays, may be an effective distraction from this disturbing reality. But in the long run, as the evidence – which now includes the *critical* evidence of the history of *ad hoc* evasions by orthodox scholars – continues to accumulate, the outcome of the case cannot reasonably be doubted. As Robert Detobel and K.C. Ligon's analysis of Francis Meres illustrates, each argument that Shakespearean orthodoxy advances as a definitive refutation of the Oxfordian case inevitably gives way to a more judicious perspective when closely considered in the light of modern reason.

In fact, the chronology of the plays, and particularly those customarily assigned late dates in the orthodox chronology, is the real "teetering structure of inferences." The Oxfordians are not obliged to prove that the plays were written before 1604. On the contrary, the burden of proof lies with those who would disqualify consideration of the case for Oxford's authorship on the basis of a *conjectural* chronology. These would do well to recall the honest commentary of the late great E.K. Chambers: "There is much of conjecture, even as regards the order, and still more as regards the ascriptions to particular years. These are *partly arranged so as to provide a fairly even flow of production* when plague and inhibitions did not interrupt it."⁷ In other words, the existing chronology is *not* independent of biographical assumptions, and those who claim such authority for it and use it as a basis to reject considering the Oxford case on its merits are being less than candid about the limits of our collective knowledge.

In retrospect, the first reviewer's reliance on Donald Foster's claims to show through "stylometric" analysis that the author of the plays was an actor

may be the unkindest cut of all. Now that Foster has not only repudiated his own PhD dissertation in the *New York Times*, but has been successfully sued in his capacity as a *Vanity Fair* essayist for ruining Steven Hatfill's career by misidentifying him as the Anthrax terrorist, Foster's methods may no longer seem quite so authoritative or attractive. Citing eighteen "discrete false statements" made in Foster's "expose" of Hatfill, an Eastern District Court complaint successfully alleged that Foster had ignored or actively suppressed contrary evidence, engaged in "circular reasoning," and published speculations "so inherently implausible that only a reckless person would put them in circulation." Foster's work betrayed a "complete inattention to even a rudimentary sense of balance or fairness"⁸ toward an innocent man.

Does anyone in 2009 continue to place confidence in Foster's flawed attempt to employ "forensic science" to "prove that Shakespeare was an actor"? And what would that mean, anyway, about who the author actually *was*? One hardly needs a computer to realize that, whoever he was, he knew the stage better than most playwrights, not to mention most academicians.

"In the progress of human knowledge," continued Halle to Ogburn, "a time does come when orthodoxy is seen to have points of implausibility. It is then that those who are not making their careers as insiders begin to be heard." We look forward in future issues of *Brief Chronicles* to continuing to publish articles and reviews that live up to the exacting standards of scholarly excellence established in this inaugural issue. The Shakespearean question is more than a real-life whodunit. It is, in fact, the pre-eminent "paradigm shift" issue in the modern humanities curriculum, because it tests the academy's ability for self-correction on a global scale in response to new evidence generated substantially by amateurs – which is to say, by those who do what they do from love, not for the purposes of professional reputation or advancement. But, as the paradigm shifts, we expect to continue publishing in the tradition of Professor Frazer – cutting-edge scholarship by the growing number of former "insiders" who are now realizing, in the words of Supreme Court Justice Stevens, that the case against the traditional view of authorship has already been proven "beyond a reasonable doubt."⁹

It remains for us to explore the full implications of this extraordinary but, to our way of thinking, entirely justified finding.

Welcome to *Brief Chronicles*.

Endnotes

- ¹ Reed, Edwin. *Noteworthy Opinions, Pro and Con: Bacon vs. Shakespere.* (Boston: Coburn Publishing, 1905), 9.
- ² “New Perspectives on Authorship,” *The Shakespeare Quarterly* 36 (1985), 518.
- ³ Roth, Steve. “Review of Lukas Erne, *Shakespeare as Literary Dramatist.*” *Early Modern Literary Studies* 9.3 / Special Issue 12 (January, 2004): 9.1-9, <http://purl.oclc.org/emls/09-3/revroth.htm>.
- ⁴ Looney, J.T. *Shakespeare Identified in Edward de Vere, 17th Earl of Oxford.* (London: Cecil Palmer, 1920), 414-431.
- ⁵ Bloom, Harold. *The Western Canon: The Books and the Schools of Ages* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994), 76.
- ⁶ Shermer, Michael, “Shakespeare Interrupted,” *Scientific American*, August 2009. Available online at <http://www.michaelshermer.com/2009/08/shakespeare-interrupted>.
- ⁷ Chambers, E.K. *William Shakespeare: A Study of Facts and Problems* (Oxford: At the University Press, 1935), I: 269.
- ⁸ A copy of the complaint is available at Ed Lake’s Anthrax Investigation website, <http://www.anthraxinvestigation.com/Hatfill-v-Foster.html>.
- ⁹ Bravin, Jess. “Justice Stevens Renders an Opinion on Who Wrote Shakespeare’s Plays: It Wasn’t the Bard of Avon, He Says: ‘Evidence Is Beyond a Reasonable Doubt,’” *Wall Street Journal*, April 18, 2009, 1. The article is available online at <http://online.wsj.com/article/SB123998633934729551.html>. For more detail on Stevens’ case for Oxford’s authorship of the canon, see Stevens, John Paul, “The Shakespeare Canon of Statutory Construction,” *University of Pennsylvania Law Review*, 140 (1992): 1373-1387.