

Clark, C. (1999). *Unexplained!* Farmington Hills, MI: Visible Ink Press.

Davies, O. (2003). The nightmare experience, sleep paralysis, and witchcraft accusations. *Folklore*, 114, 181–203.

Hufford, D. (1982). *The Terror That Comes in the Night*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.

Shakespeare's Unorthodox Biography: New Evidence of an Authorship Problem by Diana Price. Westport, CT: Greenwood, 2001. xvi + 357 pp. \$49.95 (cloth). ISBN 0-313-31202-8.

Orthodoxy at times seems quite impervious to evidence and logic. Only when a bubble finally bursts is its inherent absurdity publicly acknowledged—though usually only briefly, and the lesson is never driven home sufficiently to avoid a recurrence (Galbraith, 1990). Before such a bubble has burst, it may have prevented decipherment of the Mayan language (Coe, 1992); or insisted that Clovis culture represents the first humans in the New World (Adovasio, 2002; Dillehay, 2000); or kept reiterating that all redshifts are measures of speed and distance (Arp, 1998); or denied that anything but HIV is the cause of AIDS (Hodgkinson, 2003); and so on and so forth.

Since orthodoxy controls academe and much of the media, an alert skepticism and pursuit of any hint of unorthodoxy is in order if one is to discern topics on which the conventional wisdom is in hidebound error. One must also be ready to be laughed at and met with incredulity. So it is if one suggests that William Shakespeare of Stratford did not write the plays that have borne his name for nearly four centuries. And yet, if one asks for evidence that the Stratfordian was the author, what one gets is devious double-talk and speculation phrased as fact.

Two points of history are important:

First, in Elizabethan England, "A gentleman of rank could not publish under his own name lest he be suspected of having a profession" (p. xv). So writers of rank circulated their work privately or used pen-names. If Shakespeare was a gentleman of rank, then William Shakespeare could *not* be *his* real name. By contrast, the William Shaksper who was a play-broker, part owner of an acting company, and resident of Stratford as well as London would have been in a good position to use and appropriate work written by an anonymous high-born author.

Second, it appears that Shaksper of Stratford was not much respected (or liked) whereas Shakespeare the author was. However, Elizabethan England had official censorship and strong libel laws, and writers typically veiled criticisms in ambiguities; so the case against Shaksper is circumstantial and excruciatingly intricate. Price navigates it in great detail in this book.

The chief anti-Stratfordian points are perhaps these:

- The first attribution of authorship to Shaksper came 7 years after his death.
- Shaksper is identified by contemporary documents as a money-lender, play-broker, wheeler-dealer, social climber, and sometime actor. There

is no contemporary allusion to him as an author, and no surviving documents written by him have any literary significance. Shakspere's will mentions no books that he owned. Contemporary writers corresponded with one another and mentioned one another in their writings; Shakspere is absent from all these writings.

- Shakspere had at most a grammar-school education. Shakespeare's plays exhibit broad and deep intellectual cultivation, indicate a knowledge of several foreign languages, and make likely some experience of travel in Europe. There is no indication that Shakspere knew any languages other than English, nor that he ever left England.
- Conventional chronologies of the plays are difficult if not impossible to reconcile with Shakspere's known movements between Stratford and London.

Shakespeare's Unorthodox Biography has an appendix that compares the "literary paper trails" of 24 contemporary writers with that for Shakspere: such things as evidence of education, literary correspondence, being paid for writing, having a patron, and the like. All 10 such criteria are present for Ben Jonson, 7 for Edmund Spenser, and 4 for Christopher Marlowe; an average of just over 6 for all 24 contemporaries of Shakspere—yet *not a single one for him*.

The book also has a bibliography listing more than 20 pages of orthodox works and a couple of pages listing unorthodox ones.

Shakespeare's Unorthodox Biography makes crystal clear why William Shakspere of Stratford was not the author of Shakespeare's plays and poetry. The book presumes a certain familiarity with Shakespearean matters and the social circumstances of Elizabethan England, and may therefore not be the best introduction to the argument. In one respect, however, the book *is* a good introduction to the genre of anti-Stratfordiana: it makes no attempt to identify the real author. There are many works that do suggest who the real author was; but there are several popular candidates, and these works bear the double burden of first convincing the reader that there is doubt about the authorship and then arguing to a conclusion that is even less certain, all by means that are circumstantial. Diana Price, however, can concentrate on exposing the lack of substance behind the orthodox claims that Shakspere was Shakespeare, and that allows her to critique trenchantly the orthodox palaver. Her marshaling of the facts and tight reasoning are masterful and should convince anyone whose mind is not immovably set.

HENRY H. BAUER

Professor Emeritus of Chemistry & Science Studies

Dean Emeritus of Arts & Sciences

Virginia Polytechnic Institute & State University

hhbauer@vt.edu

www.henryhbauer.homestead.com

References

- Adovasio, J. M. (with Jake Page). (2002). *The First Americans: In Pursuit of Archaeology's Greatest Mystery*. New York: Random House.
- Arp, H. (1998). *Seeing Red: Redshifts, Cosmology and Academic Science*. Montreal, Ontario, Canada: Apeiron.
- Coe, M. D. (1992). *Breaking the Maya Code*. New York: Thames and Hudson.
- Dillehay, T. D. (2000). *The Settlement of the Americas: A New Prehistory*. New York: Basic Books.
- Galbraith, J. K. (1990). *A Short History of Financial Euphoria*. Whittle Books (Penguin).
- Hodgkinson, N. (2003). AIDS: Scientific or viral catastrophe? *Journal of Scientific Exploration*, 17, 87–120.

Alias Shakespeare: Solving the Greatest Literary Mystery of All Time by Joseph Sobran. New York: Free Press, 1997. 311 pp. cloth (n.p.—out-of-print). ISBN 0-684-82658-5.

Diana Price, in *Shakespeare's Unorthodox Biography: New Evidence of an Authorship Problem*, does not attempt to identify the real author of the Shakespearean opus. Joseph Sobran makes the case for the Earl of Oxford.

Sobran's book is lighter reading than Price's; one might say that he illustrates where Price demonstrates; or at any rate, he does not delve as deeply and intricately as she does. Nevertheless, Sobran does convincingly show that what little is known about William Shakspere of Stratford makes it very surprising that he could have written those plays, let alone the poems. On the other hand, much is known about the Edward de Vere, Earl of Oxford, and there would be nothing surprising in his having written the whole opus.

To his contemporaries, in the mid-1590s, "William Shakespeare" was known and renowned first of all for his long poems; Chapter 9 makes an excellent case that Oxford was the author. Moreover the nature and content of the Sonnets—first published in 1609—virtually exclude Shakspere.

The poems are ignored in the eulogy to the author in the first published collection of Shakespeare's plays, the 1623 Folio. Shakspere died in 1616, Oxford in 1604. In Chapter 6, "1604: The Critical Year", Sobran shows that these dates make it quite plausible that Oxford was the author. There are hints soon after 1604 that Shakespeare was dead; and Sobran offers evidence too that some of the plays pre-dated 1590, too early for the Stratford man to have composed them.

Chapter 7 draws plausible inferences between Shakespeare and Oxford's known connections and associations; and Chapter 8 is full of striking parallels between known details of Oxford's life—his travels and intellectual interests—and innumerable details of the plays. I was particularly struck that even mainstream scholars regard as the source for Polonius, in *Hamlet*, Queen Elizabeth's powerful Lord Treasurer, Lord Burghley—one of whose wards was Edward de Vere.

Sobran's credibility is enhanced by the fact that he had accepted the main-