

EDITORIAL

Although this issue of the *JSE*, as usual, contains a diverse cocktail of interesting papers, two of those papers are sufficiently out of the ordinary to deserve a few comments. In this issue, we fearlessly address—for the second time in the *JSE*'s history—one of the thorniest and most interesting topics in English literature—namely, the debate over Shakespeare authorship. As some current SSE members are undoubtedly aware, many have challenged the orthodox view that the works of Shakespeare were written by the person traditionally identified as the author—that is, William Shaxpere of Stratford-upon-Avon. SSE stalwart (and my editorial predecessor) Peter Sturrock tackled the topic in the *JSE* in 2008 (Sturrock 2008), and then several years later followed that up with a book on the subject (Sturrock 2013). What Sturrock did brilliantly was to demonstrate how one can invoke Bayesian probability theory to challenge the orthodoxy in a compelling way.

For this issue, we reprint that paper and combine it with a penetrating new work on the subject by David Roper. Roper approaches the matter from a different angle than that adopted by Sturrock. He draws on the science of cryptography to argue that the true author of the Shakespeare works was Edward de Vere, the 17th Earl of Oxford. (This is also the conclusion emerging most naturally from Sturrock's book.) Roper argues that Sixteenth-Century techniques of using codes and ciphers were both common and quite well-developed, and that these permitted concealing secret messages within apparently innocent passages of prose or poetry. Moreover, Roper marshals a great deal of historical evidence for the claim that de Vere and others had good reason to conceal de Vere's authorship of the works attributed to Shaxpere. So I hope our readers will enjoy this excursion into what should be largely unfamiliar territory for most of them. I know I learned a great deal from these papers, and I'm pleased that the *JSE* can make a scientific contribution to this venerable debate. As I see it, the papers by Sturrock and Roper together constitute a fascinating and impressive full frontal assault on the orthodox view.

Although most *JSE* readers will not have immersed themselves in the grubby particulars of the Shakespeare authorship debate, perhaps some have seen the 2011 dramatic feature film *Anonymous*, which presented a sporadically factual story portraying de Vere as the author of Shakespeare's works. (The film's reason for de Vere's anonymity is not the one proposed by Roper.) And if those readers are Internet nerds like your loyal Editor,

they may have seen the review by the late and lamented Roger Ebert, who objected to the film's premise, which he argued was "profoundly mistaken" (<http://www.rogerebert.com/reviews/anonymous-2011>).

Ebert cited what he considered to be two compelling objections to the film's portrayal of de Vere as the author of Shakespeare's works. He wrote, "In a *New York Times* article, the Shakespeare scholar James Shapiro has cited a few technicalities: (a) de Vere writes and stars in 'A Midsummer Night's Dream' when he was 9 years old, and (b) 'he died in 1604, before 10 or so of Shakespeare's plays were written'."

However, as you might have guessed, the matter seems to be rather more complex than this. In fact, I consulted this issue's two experts for their responses. Sturrock noted, "For many plays, we know when they were printed, and sometimes when they were first performed, but that does not tell us for sure when they were written. We know the latest that plays could have been written, but not the earliest" (personal communication September 30, 2017). And Roper wrote,

De Vere was born in 1550. At the age of 9, he was still living with his parents at Castle Hedingham in Essex. Shaxpere was born in 1564. The film "Anonymous" has a number of inaccuracies, including the one you refer to. "A Midsummer Night's Dream" was written in the mid-1590s; it is thought, for a court wedding; but there is no certainty of which wedding. De Vere's supporters believe it was a wedding present for his eldest daughter, who married the Earl of Derby (himself a poet and playwright). In the Christmas festivities of 1604, six months after de Vere's death, King James I asked for a number of "Shakespeare's" plays to be performed; one of which was the first public performance of "Midsummer Night's Dream" (1 January 1605). Yet, for the next 12 years, while Shaxpere was still alive, the King ignored him, preferring to ask Ben Jonson for new plays and masques.

There is [also] no firm evidence concerning the date when even one of Shakespeare's plays was written. Shaxpere as "Shakespeare" is first heard of in 1592 ("Venus and Adonis"). It is not until 1598 that Francis Meres acknowledges to the public that 12 previously anonymous plays were by Shakespeare. 6 years later, in 1604—the year de Vere died—Shaxpere retired from the stage, with at least 36 plays and 154 sonnets to his credit, and returned to Stratford-upon-Avon. James Shapiro (as others also do) spreads the plays across the time-line of Shaxpere's life, in order to account for this huge output. De Vere's supporters do the same, but they commence after his return from France and Italy in 1576, having studied continental plays. Hence, in 1577, "The Historie of Error" was performed at the Inns of Court; this is thought to be an early version of "A Comedy of Errors" (personal communication October 1, 2017).

So I hope by now that readers are sufficiently intrigued to dig into Sturrock's and Roper's papers. I'll just add that, while immersing myself in the historical minutiae of the issues, I was often reminded of the remark usually attributed (some say wrongly) to Herodotus: "Most things do not happen at the right time and the rest do not happen at all. The conscientious historian will correct these defects."

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Since this is the holiday season and an appropriate time for reflecting on the year that's coming to a close, I'd like once again to acknowledge and thank my dedicated and hardworking—in fact, overworked—team of Associate Editors and the many reviewers on whom we all rely in vetting papers for inclusion in the *JSE*. As I've noted before, producing this *Journal* poses a distinctive challenge. Because the *JSE* deals with topics either shunned altogether or dealt with shabbily by more mainstream publications, the community of qualified readers for high-level peer review is quite small. Ideally, I'd prefer to have a larger team of Associate Editors, in order to lighten the editorial load for those who—perhaps inscrutably—continue to volunteer large chunks of time to shepherding submissions through our system. However, adding members to that team inevitably subtracts members from the small pool of qualified referees. So I'm deeply grateful to my largely behind-the-scenes Associate Editors, who realize the need to maintain the high standard of scientific and scholarly excellence that's characterized the *JSE* since its inception, who recognize that there are only so many people on whom the *JSE* can rely, and who accordingly and generously donate their valuable time. I'm equally grateful to our many referees, many of whom we call upon over and over, simply because they have expertise in the relevant areas of research, and because the number of people who have both that expertise and the relevant degree of open-mindedness about new ideas remains too small for us to look elsewhere.

I must also express my deep appreciation for the breathtaking efficiency, technical panache, and thorough understanding of the publishing business of our Managing Editor, Kathleen Erickson. Kathleen does it all, and she does it brilliantly. I'm sure *JSE*'s Associate Editors and referees agree with me on this. We benefit, time and again, from Kathleen's assistance, patience, and good nature. In fact, I've never met anyone who can issue a reminder with such a winning combination of grace and coercion.

— STEPHEN E. BRAUDE

References Cited

- Sturrock, P. A. (2008). Shakespeare: The Authorship Question, A Bayesian Approach. *Journal of Scientific Exploration*, 22(4):529–537.
- Sturrock, P. A. (2013). *AKA Shakespeare: A Scientific Approach to the Authorship Question*. Palo Alto: Exoscience.