

Review of *Homeless Shakespeare, His Fabricated Life From Cradle to Grave* by E. M. Dutton, e-book, copyright 2011 by E. M. Dutton, Internet Archive, [https://ia800303.us.archive.org/10/items/HomelessShakespeareHisFabricatedLifeFromCradleToGrave\\_991/Homeless\\_Shakespeare\\_upload.pdf](https://ia800303.us.archive.org/10/items/HomelessShakespeareHisFabricatedLifeFromCradleToGrave_991/Homeless_Shakespeare_upload.pdf); "epdf," <https://epdf.tips/homeless-shakespeare-his-fabricated-life-from-cradle-to-grave.html>. 237 pp.

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April 30, 2019

In *Homeless Shakespeare*, E. M. Dutton lays bare the thin veneer of "must have been's" and "probably's" that dot-and-dash the landscape of Shakespeare's biography, a Morse Code for "There's so much we don't know." Using the "editorial we" throughout, Dutton presents information in a well-organized fashion, beginning in early chapters with an in-depth look at Shakespeare's early biographers, Nicholas Rowe (1674-1718), Edmund Malone (1741-1812), and Sir Sydney (Sidney) Lee (1859-1926), and their sources. Dutton writes well and persuasively in demonstrating the book's main premise: the biography of Shakespeare is based on very few actual facts, but embellished with much myth.

I learned of this book through a site I frequent, Francis Bacon's New Advancement of Learning, [www.sirbacon.org/](http://www.sirbacon.org/). The focus of my recent book, *Francis Bacon's Hidden Hand in Shakespeare's 'The Merchant of Venice': A Study of Law, Rhetoric, and Authorship* (New York: Algora, 2018), was to explore the significance of the old Italian jurist, Bellario, in *The Merchant of Venice*. I did not attempt the task Dutton has taken on, which requires a book of its own, or books.

For reasons explained, Dutton does not address the question: "If Shaxpere didn't write it, who did?" Nor did Diana Price's, *Shakespeare's Unorthodox Biography, New Evidence of an Authorship Problem* ((first published by Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2001, revised edition, 2012, [shakespeare-authorship.com](http://shakespeare-authorship.com)). Price's book was the "first anti-Stratfordian work to be accepted in an academic series by a mainstream publisher" (Price to Wes Stephenson, interview for "Frontline," Dec. 2, 2009). Other writers challenging the Stratfordian status quo include Barry R. Clark (2019) and Rosalind Barber (2009), both of whom are included in William Leahy's anthology (2018), Warren Hope and Kim Holston (2009), and E. M. Dutton, the author reviewed today. It should be noted, however, that not all good evidence on the Shakespeare-authorship question is new. Dutton does not ignore older sources, many of which are collected/excerpted at [www.sirbacon.org](http://www.sirbacon.org).

In *Homeless Shakespeare*, Dutton opines that any attempt to pin down Shakespeare authorship to any one candidate would be an act of "pure guesswork," based on the evidence available. Dutton's point is well taken; however, perhaps there is a *degree* of certainty that may be attained, in the minds of independent thinkers, at least, since truth does not necessarily reside in the hands of experts or a majority. In a court of civil law, a preponderance of evidence, just a feather's weight to tip the scales, is in many cases all that is required to prove a case. There is still resistance to the idea that anyone besides William Shaxpere of Stratford wrote the

plays/poems we attribute to “William Shakespeare,” although pseudonyms were in common usage, and collaboration among playwrights on some plays is now conceded by Shakespeare scholars such as Jonathan Bate and Brian Vickers.

I learned some historical facts from this book pertaining to my personal interest in Francis Bacon. For example, readers who have looked into the oddities of the “Droeshout” portrait of “Shakespeare” may be interested to learn that the doublet worn in the “Droushout” is quite similar to one worn by Francis Bacon in a painting (p. 83, fig. 13). I had known of a different painting in which Nathaniel Bacon, a relative of Francis’s, is wearing a similar doublet, but not this one. In another vein, Francis Bacon and his mother were not actually buried at St. Michael’s, as had been supposed. Dutton verified this latter fact with the Commissioner of St. Michael’s Parish, St. Albans, that (p. 107). *Homeless Shakespeare* discusses the “Dr. Hayward” matter in which Bacon was involved (p. 123), in all making ten references to Francis Bacon, with two to the “Earl of Oxford” (Edward de Vere) and one to Christopher Marlowe, for those counting.

In discussing the sparsity of documentation of the life of “Shakespeare,” Dutton reveals that the Stratford marriage registry is all written in the same hand, all forty years of it, from 1558-1600 (p. 101). Dutton argues, plausibly, that it is more likely a copy than the original. This factor bears on its credibility. Two of Shakespeare’s early biographers, Halliwell-Phillips and Malone ignored it, Dutton writes. When too many things are overlooked or ignored, a pattern emerges that ought to trigger a heightened duty to investigate, by those tasked with discerning the truth. At least, it would in a court of law.

As Dutton writes at the beginning of chapter one, “William Shakespeare’s principal and first biographers are the instigators of what we know today in regards to the Bard’s life. The problem with these biographies is twofold. The first, they connect Shakespeare with Stratford in a speculative manner, with no logical consequence; and second, should Shakespeare be the Stratford actor, biographers never once give a direct reference that the man himself stated he was the author of the Shakespearean poems, sonnets, and plays. But to understand this better, an investigation begins with these instigators: Who they were, what was their motive for fabricating such misconceptions to the public, and most importantly, why these myths have not been debunked until now” (p. 9).

Dutton discusses how Shakespeare’s early biographers had never gone to Stratford themselves to make a personal investigation, but, rather, relied on reports from others who had. Shakespeare scholar Charlotte Stopes had been frustrated to find that the records in the Stratford Registry were still incomplete from 1569-1585, as late as 1922 (p. 211). The April 23 birthdate assigned to William Shaxpere/Shaxberd is arbitrary. As Dutton shows, the verified facts are few.

The education of Shakespeare is an important point which Dutton treats, as does Price, for the works we call “Shakespeare” simply could not have been written by someone who was not highly educated. Price seems willing to concede the traditional view of incomplete grammar

school education resulting in basic literacy for Shaxpere as “more likely than not,” since he “must have” been able to read his parts as an actor and to negotiate business deals (Price, p. 243). This common assumption goes too far, in my opinion. It reasons backwards from sparse evidence instead of making inferences from known facts. Judging from the “six signatures,” I do doubt whether Shaxpere could read. Someone could have helped him learn his parts orally, and a lawyer could have helped with negotiation and the writing up of contracts.

Dutton reminds us that “It can hardly be clouded over...” that there were three statutory requirements to be admitted as a student of the Stratford grammar school: to be a resident of the town, have reached the age of seven, and be able to read and write in both English and Latin (p. 30). The last requirement would most likely have proven an insurmountable hurdle for young William, Dutton observes, assuming it was enforced. There is no record that a private tutor was ever hired to teach him; nor, for that matter, is there any record that Shaxpere ever attended the Stratford grammar school at all. Dutton discusses efforts to graft onto Shakespeare’s biography evidence that he had somehow obtained better than a grammar school education, since even a very good grammar school education would not account for the depths of learning he displays in the plays and sonnets (p. 209).

Both Price and Dutton discuss the “six signatures” claimed as proof of Shaxpere’s handwriting. In this day of easy photocopying, Dutton reminds us that ink would fade, and so, signatures were copied, in order to preserve them. One of these six signatures was copied in 1776 by biographer George Steevens who was known to be a forger. Yet Shakespeare’s biographer, Sir Sydney (Sidney) Lee, relied upon it as genuine (Incidentally, Dutton’s spelling of “Sydney Lee,” is the spelling given at the UK National Archives website).

Both authors discuss the relevant evidence, including that pertaining to the *First Folio*, the famous document forgeries, John Shaxpere’s coat of arms, and the 1592 *A Groatsworth of Wit* pamphlet (attributed by some, but not all, to Robert Greene (London, 1592); see, e.g., Price, pp. 28-30, 49, 50, 100). However, their presentations are distinctive and individualistic. Neither author refers to the work of the other.

In her 2009 interview, Price had told Stephenson that, while her father was an Oxfordian, she was not, although she felt the Oxfordians wished to woo her to their side. One point Price made which struck me as fodder for the Oxfordians was her observation that Shakespeare was described in 1609 as “our ever-living poet.” She argues that that phrase “ever-living” is only used for someone who has already died. I disagree. Surely the phrase is ambiguous (For the record, not only does Dutton not address “ever-living,” but the word “ambiguity” does not appear in *Homeless Shakespeare* at all). In 1609, Edward de Vere, the 17<sup>th</sup> Earl of Oxford, had been dead for five years, but William Shaxpere (1554-1616), Francis Bacon (1561-1626), and other candidates were still alive in 1609. One of the main criticisms of the “Oxford theory of authorship” is that Edward de Vere lived and died “too early” to have written all the plays of Shakespeare.

A major Stratfordian response to the “Anti-Strats” is, of course, Stanley Wells and Paul Edmonson, eds., *Shakespeare Beyond Doubt* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013) with a rejoinder by self-proclaimed “Oxfordian activists” John Shahan and Alexander Waugh, eds., *Shakespeare Beyond Doubt? Exposing an Industry in Denial* (CreateSpace, 2016).

In a recent review of Price’s book, Shakespeare scholar Michael L. Hays remained unconvinced by arguments, made by Dutton as well, pertaining to Shaxpere’s lack of a record of educational attainment and life experiences not commensurate with his writing works of genius. Absence of evidence is not evidence of absence, he argues (Michael L. Hays, review, “Shakespeare’s Unorthodox Biography: The Epitome of Anti-Stratfordian Scholarship,” Feb. 19, 2018, <https://voegelinview.com/7770-2/>; see also Hays, “The Shakespeare Authorship Question: E Pluribus Unum,” Feb. 19, 2018, <https://voegelinview.com>). True. Yet, surely Hays, who comes across as a stickler for scholarly standards, would agree that material which does not meet the standards for evidence (and is thus non-evidence) ought not be elevated to the status of evidence. The question then becomes: what standards are being applied?

For Hays, direct evidence dating from Shaxpere’s own lifetime is not required, and the following indirect evidence is sufficient: that “Shakespeare” is mentioned as the author of plays by contemporaries; chiefly, in *A Groatworth of Wit*; and, that his name appears in entries to the Stationer’s Register, on the title pages of plays, and, in the First Folio, in Heminges and Condell’s letter and Ben Jonson’s poems (Hays, “Shakespeare’s Unorthodox Biography”). Hays was not persuaded by Price’s arguments. There is room for difference of opinion, of course, but Dutton argues cogently, supported by the opinions of other reputable scholars, such as the highly respected Shakespeare scholar Felix Schelling (1858-1945), University of Pennsylvania English professor (and a Stratfordian). Dutton provides the quotation to his reasoning as to why Jonson wrote the letter attributed to Heminges and Condell (Dutton, p. 148; see Price, pp. 179-181).

One question Hays found worth pondering is why “an accomplished playwright recognized as one in his own time and who addressed immortality of art in his sonnets was, unlike Jonson, so little concerned with his plays that he did not arrange with his colleagues their publication in his lifetime” (Hays, “Shakespeare’s Unorthodox Biography...”). This point had been expressed previously by Dr. Samuel Johnson. Dutton provides the quotation (Dutton, p. 208; see also Price, pp. 140, 179).

### **Technicalities**

A few minor suggestions to consider for any future reprinting: on page two, Dutton gives a poem, “The Idol” by Dr. Holmes. I am not familiar with “Dr. Holmes.” Also, at the beginning of chapter three, before the subhead “I,” Dutton provides an article/excerpt by James Spedding, “Reviews and Discussions Literary...” (1879), on the Sir Thomas More manuscript discovered in 1867. For clarity, this material might be set off with italics or indentation. Dutton does not italicize book titles in footnotes, but is consistent in that style.

It is always an author's judgment call as to how many footnotes to provide. The footnotes Dutton provides are of a reasonable number, without detracting from the text, and often refer to primary sources. My own tendency is to footnote heavily, a contrast to Dutton's more streamlined style. Thus, I might have preferred a few more footnotes. In one instance, I had a question: Dutton stated that *The Merchant of Venice* was first performed in 1598 (p. 157). However, my understanding was that, in 1598, it was first entered in the Stationer's Register and Francis Meres mentioned it in *Palladis Tamia*, but that the first recorded performance was in 1605 ("Treasures in Full, Shakespeare in Quarto, The Merchant of Venice." <https://www.bl.uk/treasures/shakespeare/merchant.html>).

However, Dutton provides three good sources as authority for the proposition that *The Merchant of Venice* was published in 1619, countering my statement in *Francis Bacon's Hidden Hand* that it was published in 1600, based on sources I thought were accurate (Dutton, p. 124). I stand corrected. Historical accuracy seems to require a willingness to adjust course, like a sailor does when navigating (an idea to which Bacon's ship metaphors must be credited).

Also, it is my understanding that Bacon's legal editor, Robert Ellis, considered the text *Use of the Law* to be spurious as to Bacon, although perhaps based on one of his commonplace books (Spedding edition; Dutton, p. 37). Dutton might want to simply mention this in a footnote.

*Homeless Shakespeare* provides a table of contents, abundant relevant illustrations, an index, and a bibliography. Dutton's epilogue collecting quotations from famous literary "doubters" makes an eloquent conclusion. The bibliography is in two lists, one long list, followed by a shorter one. The purpose for two lists was unclear to me. There are four appendices, one on Thomas Vautrollier, a printer, whose name I had not heard before.

Caution: to my knowledge, a book on Amazon, "*Homeless Shakespeare* by E.M. Dutton" with a publication date of 1901 does not exist. To my knowledge, *Homeless Shakespeare* by E. M. Dutton (Internet Archive, 2012, author's copyright 2011) does not have a presence on Amazon.

## **Conclusion**

I found *Homeless Shakespeare* to be an impressive work of scholarship, well worth the reader's time, for those interested in this fascinating literary question of Shakespeare authorship. I learned much from it, and am glad to have had the opportunity to review it.