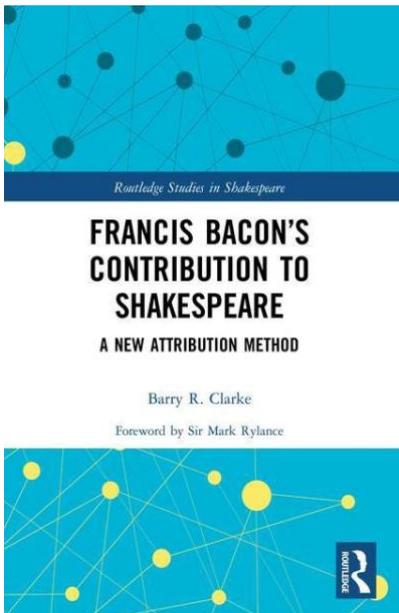


Francis Bacon's Contribution to Shakespeare

by Barry R. Clarke

Reviewed by Eddi Jolly



In early February *The Sunday Times* magazine ran a two-page article by Mark Rylance on the authorship question. It mentioned ‘authorship sceptics’, the difficulties he’s sometimes faced as one who isn’t wholly convinced by the man from Stratford and recommended that readers looked at the Declaration of Reasonable Doubt. The article also introduced a new book, Barry Clarke’s, on his corpus linguistics analysis.

A week later, Alan Nelson weighed in, in *Letters*. Nelson commented that the ‘Baconian horse [was] so dead that it has not stirred back into life for a century’ and

referred to ‘conspiracy theorists’.

Barry Clarke carried out his PhD research at Brunel University at the same time as DVS President Kevin Gilvary and I did. All three of us took very different approaches. Clarke’s included searching for uncommon words and phrases (his Rare Collocation Profile, RCP) in the Shakespeare canon and looking for matches in contemporary writing, using the body of Early English Books Online (EEBO). This approach has some similarities with the computer analyses of orthodox scholars.

Clarke's comparison suggests the rare collocations show Strachey's *True Reportory* was a source for *The Tempest*, 'beyond reasonable doubt. This RCP analysis is extensive and detailed, though one must note that EEBO is not complete, and Clarke is responsible for choosing the phrase to be researched.

Clarke also looks more widely at the evidence for Shakespeare of Stratford's authorship. His conclusions tend towards using his analysis to show Bacon did contribute to the plays, and a return to the 'many hands hypothesis.' The Saturday *Daily Telegraph* reviewer wasn't convinced, though he gave praise to, for instance, Clarke's attention to the *Parnassus* plays.

For me, Clarke's PhD was interesting in its focus. It took a measured, evidenced approach. At the very least, the PhD and the book raise awkward questions. And how interesting that the picture *The Times* and *The Telegraph* use is neither the Chandos nor the *First Folio* portrait.

The scope of Clarke's book is wider than his PhD. Readers may find his arguments around the authorship and the analyses useful to complement their own studies. It does show the authorship question is alive and kicking!

“Elizabethan Treasures: Miniatures by Hilliard and Oliver”, National Portrait Gallery, London (21February – 19 May 2019)

Reviewed by James Alexander

I am no Art Historian, but I know what I like. And I really like Elizabethan miniatures. There is something so fresh and immediate about most of the portraits in this excellent NPG exhibit, a renaissance truthfulness that doesn't reappear in British art for two or three centuries, if ever. An honesty reminiscent of Holbein's drawings and paintings from a slightly earlier period.

First impressions matter, too. Wandering through the exhibition, one is inevitably drawn to the small case of three intriguing miniatures labelled “Symbols and Secrets”. In it is Hilliard's well known “Unknown Young Man against a Background of Flames” (Exhibit 27, c.1600). The portrait also graces many of the posters for the exhibition. It is even more stunning in person as the flames actually do seem to flicker around the “young man” as he poses in little but his



Source: V&A Museum

undershirt, provocatively open low down his chest. He is clearly

burning with passion, despite his cool, direct gaze, so what's the secret? The symbolism arises from the medallion held between his thumb and forefinger, which hangs from a chain around his neck, assumed to be yet another miniature hidden inside the closed case—a secret lover that sets him on fire?

You could be forgiven for thinking the young man was a poet or an actor, whose picture was painted for an adoring fan, or in more modern times, for PR purposes. His passion is further indicated by holding her (or his) image close to his heart. There is a similar picture by Oliver, the c.1610 “A Man Consumed by Flames” shown in Catherine MacLeod’s excellent catalogue accompanying the exhibition (Fig. 34, p.95). Numerous attempts have been made to identify him, too, all equally failing.



Source: Portland Collection

In the middle of the cabinet is Hilliard’s “Unknown Man Clasping a Hand from a Cloud” (Exhibit 28, 1588).^{*} A colleague of mine is convinced, on what seems to be good evidence, that this is a portrait of the playwright John Lyly. The independently refereed paper supporting this attribution is due out soon.

The final picture is the most compelling—Hilliard’s “Unknown Man” (Exhibit 29, c.1616) has a big impact from its tiny “canvas”. The man’s head seems to float atop a wide, flat collar, the style of which will instantly bring to

mind for Shakespeareans the Droeshout engraving of “Shakespeare” on the First Folio. In 3-D, the string descending from the centre of the collar (or shirt) looks so stiff as to be a stick holding up what appears like



Adding to the symbology of the “mask” miniature is the black string wrapped around the man’s wrist with a ring attached to it. Such strings and rings suggest a romantic attachment with another.

Whose is the hand holding the stick of the mask, as it seems disembodied from the male figure. The hand is described in the catalogue as “blue-veined”. Does this mean blue-blooded? Perhaps. Is it a woman’s hand? Possibly. I tried in vain to compare it with other hands in other miniatures, but there are few. (The most memorable portrait featuring a hand is the centre one, mentioned above, coming from the sky or cloud). There are a range of views on whether this hand is a woman’s, possibly even Queen Elizabeth’s—but no consensus.

There are a host of possibilities. I would like to think it is a woman’s hand, possibly Mary Sidney Herbert, Countess of Pembroke’s hand, holding a picture of the young man from Stratford who was perhaps the front for the author of the canon, so the motto would mean that he (Shakespeare) ‘shone for me’ as I could not be seen as the author of the poems, sonnets and plays.

Or, it could be Mary Sidney Herbert still holding the candle, to mix metaphors slightly, for her adored elder brother, Philip Sidney. But then there is the statement around the rim about the “Vere Effigies” which seems overly obvious. Is it referring to Edward de Vere? But it doesn’t resemble other known portraits of De Vere. And who would have produced the miniature in 1616 when De Vere was dead and gone? The word “Quadregessimo” also appears on the rim before the date 1616. The catalogue says that this could mean the 40th day of 1616. In Florio’s Italian-English dictionary Quadregesimo (one “s”) is said to be the “fortieth number”; “Quadregesima” (one “s” and ending in “a”) is said to be the time of Lent. This would be, usually, in April, the month of De

Vere's birth. But 40 days from the New Year, March 25th in 1616, brings us to the early days of May. Nevertheless, both four and 40 are numbers associated with De Vere. The catalogue entry does state that the portrait was long thought to be Henry Carey, the 2nd Earl of Monmouth, who was 20 in 1616. However, it also says that it is not very like known portraits of Carey. The mystery continues.

The provenance of the picture is very strong. But it is not often displayed as it is part of the Portland Collection based at Welbeck House in Nottinghamshire, well away from London – and actually closed at the moment pending security upgrades after the theft of the Portland tiara. The picture descended through the Dukes of Portland from the mid-18th Century, but a large chunk of the collections had been brought into the Portland family via the wife of the 2nd Duke, Margaret Cavendish-Bentinck.



Margaret was the heir of the 2nd Earl of Oxford (new creation), Edward Harley. Both he and his father, Robert Harley, were great collectors in their own right, but Edward had also married into wealth, power, and stuff through his spouse, Lady Henrietta Cavendish-Holles. In turn, their daughter and heir, Margaret, married into the Portland family who thus gained Welbeck and the collections (does this include the famous Welbeck portrait of Edward de Vere?).

Margaret, heir of 2nd Earl Oxford

If the ownership story is secure, it is admittedly somewhat hard to believe that it is a Hilliard picture given that it is dated 1616, long after Hilliard had painted most of his masterpieces. He died just a few years later, in 1619.

The other standouts in the exhibit, for our purposes anyway, are two cases in the “Love, Landscape and Melancholy” section, each with one similar picture by each of the two principal artists. Four separate young men are shown in a variety of contemplative poses, two upright, two recumbent. Neither of the first two men have been satisfactorily identified. Are they courtiers? Are they poets? Actors? They are certainly very well-dressed.

“Young Man among Roses” (Exhibit 46, Hilliard, c.1587) is perhaps the most famous (often speculated to be the ill-fated Earl of Essex). It is paired in the cabinet with “Young Man Seated under a Tree” (Exhibit 65, Oliver, 1590-5). One could examine at these two men for a long time, wondering what melancholic meanderings possessed their thoughts— certainly it behoved an Elizabethan poet to be melancholy— but also feel soothed by their beautiful bucolic and curated surroundings. The second pair are “Henry Percy, 9th Earl of Northumberland” (Exhibit 66, Hilliard, 1590-3) and “Sir Edward Herbert, later 1st Baron Herbert of Cherbury” (Exhibit 67, Oliver 1610-14). These recumbent nobles are shown against wooded backdrops replete with symbols and allegorical references. Even while their settings and poses cannot be fully explained, they are still calm, thoughtful pictures that invite rumination.

Despite the many gorgeous delights on view, I keep coming back to the “mask” – can the sitter be “solved”? The exhibition lasts until mid-May. Well worth one, if not many, visits. And if you can’t get there, at least buy the catalogue to ponder the bigger questions.

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