

## **Book Review:**

### ***Sir Henry Neville was Shakespeare: The Evidence***

(John Casson & William D. Rubinstein (2016, Amberley Publishing))

by Neal R. Platt, New York

This book is a pleasure to read. Its organization is as helpful as any non-fiction book that comes to mind, and its insights are shared in a clear narrative manner that remains uniformly engaging throughout.

The authors of this extraordinary new book have picked up the threads of research laid down ten years ago by Brenda James and Professor Rubinstein. They have profited by research done since then, and have discovered a mountain of primary evidence to support their thesis that Sir Henry Neville wrote the poems and plays traditionally attributed to William Shakspere of Stratford. As a lawyer of many years' experience, it has often fallen to me to evaluate the quality and effectiveness of evidence and argument. In my view, this book is an astoundingly strong brief in support of its titular thesis.

If there were a civil action adjudicating the Shakespeare authorship issue, and counsel for Plaintiff Neville were to present an affirmative case consisting of the proof and logical analysis presented by these authors, counsel for Defendant Shakspere of Stratford would be sorely tempted to concede. As that might appear less than zealous, however, counsel for Shakspere would likely seek a continuance providing time to build a case of equivalent weight in support of the Stratfordian's candidacy.

It's highly unlikely that a continuance of any duration would prove sufficient to the task, however, for, compared to the Neville edifice constructed in this book brick by brick, the items of evidence currently known to favor Shakspere's candidacy threaten to waft away on the slightest breeze, like so many dandelion seeds. The same may be said of the evidence favoring the Earl of Oxford, or indeed any of the other half-dozen authorship candidates whose names have been bandied about over the years.

For more than a century, the Shakespeare authorship question has too often been relegated to the status of an amusing but insoluble puzzle amounting to no more than a gentlemanly pastime, but to Casson and Rubinstein, it's a struggle between fact and supposition, and with this book they've delivered a knockdown. These

authors proceed precisely as the critical reader would like, by presenting the “hardest” evidence first — and there’s an abundance.

We proceed first into the life of Sir Henry Neville, every point of which precisely matches the requirements of the person who wrote Shakespeare’s plays. (Sir Henry was related to nearly every major figure in the War of the Roses immortalized by the history plays). We travel with the young Sir Henry through all those Continental cities where the earliest plays are set: fair Verona, Padua, Venice, Florence. (No evidence has come forth that Shakspere of Stratford ever had a passport or traveled outside England.)

We then move into Sir Henry’s library, which some may be surprised to learn survives substantially intact, where we find source books (some published in Greek, some Latin, French, or Spanish) for virtually every play attributed to Shakespeare. And we see, by numerous photographic insets, Sir Henry’s marginal notes, written in as many languages as the books are published, precisely matching nuances that turn up in the plays themselves. The authors even provide several instances of Sir Henry using a word only once in correspondence, where the same word was used only once in the entire Shakespeare canon (“hapax legomena”) — and where such item of correspondence and such play were written at the same time!

The authors also show how Sir Henry’s handwriting and idiosyncratic spelling match Hand D on the playscript of “Sir Thomas More,” believed by oral tradition to be the only extant “foul paper” bearing an actual sample of the bard’s hand.

The quality and quantity of evidence presented in this book are overwhelming. Upon publication, it immediately becomes the most thorough, objective, and persuasive collection of evidence in support of any authorship candidate to date. Anyone wishing to continue blithely espousing the virtues of another candidate had better put this brief continuance to good use to counter this work with a work of equivalent merit. Airy dismissal will no longer serve.

[For the sake of full disclosure, the reviewer’s brief monograph devoted to the suggestion of the name Neville in Sonnet 121 has been quoted in *Understanding the Invisible Shakespeare* by Brenda James, the decipherer of the Dedication Code found in the first edition of Shakespeare’s sonnets.]