

Review of Barry R. Clarke, *Francis Bacon's Contribution to Shakespeare: A New Attribution Method* (Routledge: New York and London, 2019). 310 pp. Hardcover \$ 140 (ISBN: 978-0-367-13782-3), ebk (ISBN: 978-0-429-02854-0); pbk \$ 33.95 (ISBN: 978-0-367-22544-5).

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By Christina G. Waldman

I was excited for Barry R. Clarke's new book to come out last February. It is a major milestone for a work on Bacon-Shakespeare authorship to be published by a respected academic publisher of Shakespeare studies. Shakespeare actor and director Mark Rylance, a self-described "devotee of Francis Bacon," wrote the foreword to Clarke's book. Both Clarke and Rylance urge tolerance and open-mindedness among Shakespeare authorship researchers.

Clarke's book sets forth his new "Rare Collocation Profiling" (RCP) method for studying Shakespeare texts. It is based on his 2014 thesis for his Ph.D. in Shakespeare Studies from Brunel University (Barry R. Clarke, "A Linguistic Analysis of Francis Bacon's Contribution to Three Shakespeare Plays: *The Comedy of Errors*, *Love's Labour's Lost*, and *The Tempest*," www.Clarkeispuzzled.com), but with much new material. Clarke, who holds a masters degree in physics, is also the published author of a text on quantum physics, as well as published puzzles and puzzle books. He brings to the "Shakespeare Authorship Question" the perspective of a scientist concerned that evidence meet scientific standards. He urges that raw, empirical data be subjected to replicable, pass-fail testing before being accepted as "fact" (pp. 2–3, 243). Clarke uses "William Shaxpere" to refer to the actor from Stratford and "Shakespeare" to refer to the "author of the plays," for the most part without confusion, although he is abandoning the single-author paradigm. However, the word "author" can be used broadly to refer to one who has the ultimate authority over a literary endeavor, who has writers and editors who work under him.

Clarke argues that, since studies of "stylistic-phrase matching" show that there was not one sole author of the Shakespeare works, but several, the First Folio (1623)—which proclaims that William Shakspere *as* William Shakespeare is the sole author—must be untrustworthy, even fraudulent. This idea does not sound as heretical in today's academic climate as it did in the past. In fact, it was not that long ago that anyone who challenged the official, "orthodox" theory risked being called "crazy," though "conspiracy theorist" seems to be the new epithet (see, e.g., Jennifer Reid's interview of Jonathan Bate, "The Shakespeare Authorship Question," Shakespeare Birthplace Trust (2019), <https://www.shakespeare.org.uk/explore-shakespeare/shakespedia/william-shakespeare/shakespeare-authorship-question/>.) Peter Dawkins, founder of the Francis Bacon Research Trust, <https://fbrt.org.uk/>, has long been saying the Shakespeare plays were written by a group of writers under Bacon's direction; i.e.,

his “good pens” (Dawkins, “The Shakespeare Team,” *The Shakespeare Enigma* (London: Polair Publishing, 2004), pp. 288-316; see Clarke, p. 55, “team of scribes”). Russian Shakespeare scholar Ilya Gililov, too, believed Bacon played an editorial role (*The Shakespeare Game: The Mystery of the Great Phoenix* (New York: Algora Publishing, 2003). Although not a Baconian, “Samuel Crowell” (pseudonym) opens his book, *William Fortyhands: Disintegration and Reinvention of the Shakespeare Canon* (Charleston WV: Nine-Banded Books, 2016) with three of Bacon’s “Aphorisms” (1620).

Clarke is cautious not to make statements beyond what he believes the evidence will bear. Recognizing there is a margin of error with his RCP method, he presents his “Summary of RCP Conclusions” thus far for the five plays he has studied, finding Bacon’s “appearance” most strongly in “... *The Tempest*, followed by *Love’s Labour’s Lost*, and *Twelfth Night*, while his detectable influence on *Gesta Grayorum* is almost beyond doubt” (p. 236). For Clarke, based on “stylistic analysis,” collaborative Shakespeare authorship is a given; single-author theories are no longer tenable.

In his biographical chapter, “Bacon’s Dramatic Entrance” (ch. 5), Clarke focuses on Bacon’s significant, but little-known, dramatic activities and achievements. For example, he presents evidence that Bacon was a “producer of masques” (p. 61, 65-67). For the most part, he does not challenge the “standard” biography of Bacon as it has evolved (see, e.g., pp. 52–58, 64, 67, 71). Nieves Matthews spent ten years researching/writing a book seeking to rehabilitate Bacon’s much-maligned reputation, dating back to Thomas Babington Macauley’s factually inaccurate biography (Nieves Matthews, *Francis Bacon: The History of a Character Assassination* by Nieves Matthews (New Haven: Yale, 1996), pp. 19–24, 27–28, 33, 41, 44–9) ; see also Francis Bacon, *The History of the Reign of King Henry VII*, ed. by Brian Vickers (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), pp. xi–xii). Clarke does not cite Matthews; rather, he cites Lisa Jardine and Alan Stewart, *Hostage to Fortune: The Troubled Life of Francis Bacon* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1999) which was adversely reviewed by Mather Walker in “Hostage to Fortune ...,” <http://www.sirbacon.org/jardine.htm>). To my knowledge, he does not address whether Bacon was the unacknowledged son of Queen Elizabeth. To be sure, this is a controversial topic, but one which does, arguably, bear on authorship (See, e.g., Alfred Dodd, *Francis Bacon’s Personal Life Story*, vol. 1 (London: Rider & Co., 1949), vol. 2 (London: Century Hutchinson, Ltd., 1986), <http://www.sirbacon.org/links/dodd.html>; Amelia Deventer von Kunow, *Francis Bacon: Last of the Tudors*, trans. by Williard Parker, <http://www.sirbacon.org/vonkunow.html>).

Bacon and Shakespeare bibliographies tend to be long, and Clarke’s are no exception. He provides extensive notes and bibliographical references at the ends of chapters. In the first line of his acknowledgments, he credits (late) British barrister N. B. (Nigel) Cockburn’s scholarly 740-page book, *The Bacon Shakespeare Question: The Baconian Theory Made Sane* (1998) with

stimulating his interest in Bacon-Shakespeare studies. He mentions him again in connection with *Love's Labour's Lost* (ch. 9, p. 142). It should be noted that William D. Rubinstein has singled out Cockburn's book and Dawkins' *The Shakespeare Enigma* as "highly intelligent Baconian work" (William D. Rubinstein, notes to ch. 4, "The Shakespeare Authorship Question," *Shadow Pasts: Amateur Historians and History's Mysteries* (London: Routledge, 2014), p. 180). Rights to Cockburn's book are now held by The Francis Bacon Society whom Clarke thanks for its support during his thesis preparation (For Mather Walker's book review of N.B. Cockburn's *The Bacon Shakespeare Question*, see <http://www.sirbacon.org/mcockburnreview.htm>; for the table of contents, see <http://www.sirbacon.org/cockburn.htm>; for other references to "Cockburn" at www.SirBacon.org, search the site).

In Part I of *Francis Bacon's Contribution*, Clarke briefly explains his method (set forth more fully in sec. 14.2, pp. 228-231) and "sets the stage," if you will, for which a number of seventeenth century dramatists were writing. He provides a chapter on the biography—such few facts as are known—of William Shakspeare. In separate chapters, he explains why the First Folio (1623) and "Greene's Groatsworth of Wit" are unreliable as evidence of authorship. In his chapter on Bacon's biography, he highlights Bacon's significant dramatic accomplishments. In Part II, "Bacon's Influence on Selected Plays," Clarke applies his "Rare Collocation Profiling" (RCP) method to *The Comedy of Errors*, *Love's Labour's Lost*, *Twelfth Night*, and *The Tempest*.

In order to understand Clarke's book fully, one must understand his new RCP method which he discusses in Part III, attempting to distinguish it from other stylometric methods (pp. 209, 214-217). He claims his method is more "forensic" (see, e.g., p. 231), a word relating to evidence used in a court of law. By this, I assume he is claiming superior reliability for it.

For many, including myself, Clarke's RCP method may be new territory. I had to look up "collocation," "locution," and "stylometry" (see pp. 4-5). The *Cambridge Advanced Learner's Dictionary & Thesaurus* (2019) defines "collocation" as "a word or phrase that is often used with another word or phrase, in a way that sounds correct to people who have spoken the language all their lives, but might not be expected from the meaning; the combination itself, such as a "hard frost,"; or, the regular use of some words and phrases with others, especially in a way that is difficult to guess."

<https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/collocation>. A "locution" might, then, be defined simply as "a word or phrase."

<https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/locution>. As for "stylometry," the *Cambridge* dictionary cited above has no entry, but the *Merriam-Webster Unabridged Dictionary* (2019) defines it as "the study of the chronology and development of an author's work based especially on the recurrence of particular turns of expression or trends of thought."

<https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/stylometry>.

Through a meticulous search of texts of prose, poetry, and plays in Chadwyk-Healey's Early English Books Online (EEBO) database, Clarke has identified rare short phrases (collocations) which occur in more than one literary source. These, he suggests, can be evidence of either borrowing or contribution between/among authors, depending on the extent of the occurrence. A match with a rare phrase would be more probative than a match with a more common phrase, he argues. One caveat: if a writer has produced no work that is in the data base, his work cannot be studied by this method. Since, aside from the plays and poems attributed to "William Shakespeare," there are no writings *known* to be by "William Shakspere" of Stratford, Shakspere will never have a match with this method. *What!* He also suggests that, if the hand of another writer is sufficiently detected within a portion of a Shakespeare text, then Shakspere's authorship of that section would be eliminated.

For example: in a poem called *A Funerall Elegye* (1612), Clarke finds these locutions: "pattern out," "secured fools," "sick desires," "servile breath," and "noble in the mind" which also appear in some *earlier* works attributed to Shakespeare (Table 4.1, p. 41). Thus, Clarke concludes "that the *Elegye* borrowed from the Shakespeare canon" (p. 41). Next, Clarke provides a list of other rare locutions from that same poem which he has found in a *later* work "by John Ford" (Table 4.2, p. 41). Clarke thus concludes with "reasonable confidence" that John Ford is the author of this poem. Gilles Monsarrat and Brian Vickers had come to this conclusion separately in 2002, but without access to the EEBO (Gilles D. Monsarrat, "A Funeral Elegy: Ford, W.S., and Shakespeare," *Review of English Studies* 53 (2002): 186-2-3; Brian Vickers, *Counterfeiting Shakespeare* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002). Previously, William Shakspere/Shakespeare had been given sole credit for *A Funerall Elegye* (4.1, p. 41; 14.5, pp. 235-356). Of note, John Ford is also credited with writing a play published in 1634, *Perkin Warbeck*, based on Bacon's account of the Perkin Warbeck affair in his *The History of the Reign of King Henry VII* (See *Perkin Warbeck*, Elizabethandrama.org, <http://www.elizabethandrama.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/Perkin-Warbeck-Annotated.pdf>). Bacon's historical narrative comes to life with speeches he invented for Perkin Warbeck and the ambassadors (Vickers, *The History of the Reign of King Henry VII*, pp. xx, 125-8, 129-32; 73-8, 78-80).

British journalist Tim Smith-Laing has challenged Clarke's method, based, as I understand it, on what seemed to him to be the inadequacy of, or inequity in the use of, the EEBO database. In Bacon's case, Clarke had supplemented searches in the EEBO, which did not contain all of Bacon's many writings, with Google searches (pp. 140, 234). ("Why is Mark Rylance Convinced That Francis Bacon Wrote Shakespeare's Plays? Tim Smith-Laing Reviews 'Francis Bacon's Contribution to Shakespeare,' by Barry R Clarke," *The Telegraph*, 9 February 2019, <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/books/what-to-read/mark-rylance-convinced-francis-bacon-wrote-shakespeares-plays/>). Clarke responded in "Comments" to the article, stating that Smith-

Laing failed to fully understand the RCP method. He explained why including the number of texts for one author over another did not skew the results (p. 233). However, he admits the method, at this time, is not without its limitations (see p. 229).

I think RCP could be one among several tools in a Shakespeare authorship sleuth's arsenal. Absolute certainty as to Shakespeare authorship may never be attainable, but an acceptable degree of certainty might be. Personally, I do not find a name on a title page to be conclusive, particularly where, due to censorship, a deliberate subterfuge may have been at play. Bacon was not the only one in the Shakespeare era who wrote under pseudonyms. Nor do I trust arbitrary dating; Clarke recognizes this danger as well (p. 230). If underlying assumptions turn out to be false, then all that is logically built upon them crumbles.

In his eloquent "Epilogue," Clarke writes,

The main aim of the present work is to challenge the 'thinking in a vacuum' that has hitherto paralyzed debates between competing single-author theorists, and instead bring facts to the discussion based on a new method of textual analysis in order to move the investigation forward The greatest impediment to progress is an attitude that has corrupted all ages of human investigation, that is, the dogmatic insistence that all evidence must be rejected that is inconsistent with one's own views, that Nature must conform to one's will

We are all so much in the debt of Francis Bacon who warned of those "four idols" that hinder our judgment and perception. None of us are immune from their influence. My background is in law and the humanities. I confess, I would not want all of literary criticism to be reduced to quantitative studies. That being said, we also know that scientific experimenters might have to put up with being misunderstood by those whose minds are unreceptive to new methods (suggested by Francis Bacon's "chalk-marking of the mind" analogy in his '*New Organum*,' *The Works of Francis Bacon*, ed. by James Spedding, Robert Ellis, and D.D. Heath, vol. 4 (London: Longmans, 1857-1874), pp. 53, 371, HathiTrust, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/uc1.31175002901968>. They should not despair, but persist.

Clarke does not make extravagant claims for his findings; quite to the contrary. It is refreshing to find Routledge, a respected academic publisher, publishing a book on "Bacon's contribution to Shakespeare." May more such books follow!

Christina G. Waldman is the author of *Francis Bacon's Hidden Hand in Shakespeare's 'The Merchant of Venice': A Study of Law, Rhetoric and Authorship* (New York: Algora, 2018).

