

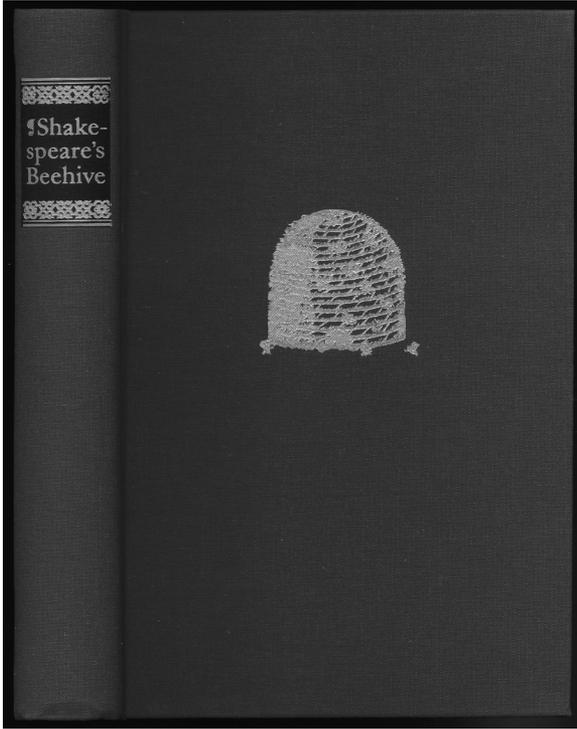
An Elizabethan Dictionary plus Fifty WWII Documents

WILLIAM BUTTS

KOPPELMAN, George, and WECHSLER, Daniel. *Shakespeare's Beehive: An Annotated Elizabethan Dictionary Comes to Light*. New York: Axletree Books, 2014. Small 4to. Clothbound. xii, 339pp. Illustrations. **\$75.00.**

RENDELL, Kenneth W. *Politics, War, and Personality: Fifty Iconic World War II Documents That Changed the World*. Atlanta: Whitman Publishing, 2013. Wide small 4to. Hardbound, dust jacket. viii, 120pp. Extensive illustrations. **\$29.95.**

For a number of years I penned an autograph question-and-answer column called "Sign Here" for *The Antique Trader Monthly*, the largest publication of its kind in the antiques world. Some readers owned real treasures. More often readers wrote in about questionable items and I explained why their family heirloom wasn't what they thought it was. Reproductions, outright forgeries, proxy signatures, Autopen, preprinted, you name it—every form of non-authentic reared its head, and frequently. What surprised me is how often people believe their possession is authentic for one simple, basic reason: Because they own it. People desperately want to believe their stuff is genuine, often despite overwhelming evidence to the contrary. Rational, intelligent people can lose the ability to think objectively and critically when the item under scrutiny is theirs. I call this phenomenon



the b.i.o.i. fallacy—*because I own it*, though I'm sure psychiatrists explain it differently. It's closely akin to the b.i.s.s. fallacy (*because I say so*), in which someone proclaims a document authentic but is unable or unwilling to produce evidence explaining the all-important why.

George Koppelman and Daniel Wechsler definitely do *not* fall into the b.i.o.i. or b.i.s.s. fallacies in their intriguing new book, *Shakespeare's Beehive: An Annotated Elizabethan Dictionary Comes to Light*. Yet one's mind continues to wander back to the cold fact that the authors co-own the item in question—a 16th century dictionary they believe was owned by William Shakespeare and bears his markings and margin comments.

Huh— what!? Shakespeare—as in *The Bard*? In case the buzz has somehow escaped you, these two New York antiquarian booksellers purchased several years ago a 1580 copy of John Barret's *Alvearie, or Quadruple Dictionarie*—good, standard antiquar-

ian fare—for \$4,300 on eBay from a seller in Canada. It bore no ownership signatures, but their routine research on a new acquisition quickly took on another dimension as they reached this flabbergasting conclusion. *Shakespeare's Beehive* is the result of Koppelman and Wechsler's years of study and analysis.

For those not into all things Shakespearian, some background: Only a few unquestioned Shakespeare signatures survive and a few words in his hand, all thoroughly documented and all in public institutions in England. No manuscripts survive, no letters, no books from his library—which lends fuel to the Shakespeare-never-existed crackpot theorists, alas. For any supposed Shakespeare autograph item to get the authenticity thumb's-up from the Shakespeare scholarly community, the folks at Washington, DC's Folger Shakespeare Library, the antiquarian book and autograph world and anyone else interested in chiming in—this is what it would take for this item to sell for a kingdom—the case would have to be airtight and incontrovertible. Shakespeare's is the Holy Grail of autographs, and were an unquestionably authentic Shakespeare handwriting example of any sort to come on the market, the sky would be the limit.

Shakespeare's Beehive opens with loads of preliminary material setting the stage. The study of Shakespearian and Elizabethan script is such a specialized, rarified pursuit that Koppelman and Wechsler rightfully feel the need to give a mini-crash course on the subject. They make a persuasive case that the English Secretary hand that the few known Shakespeare examples are penned in does not rule out the possibility that he also wrote in the more modern and legible Italic hand used in their book. They also devote pages to dictionaries of Shakespeare's time and the relative importance of Baret's *Alvearie, or Quadruple Dictionarie*. They go out on a long and wobbly limb to theorize that if "we pause to examine the problem [of Shakespeare's ownership] purely as a numbers game—the odds are long, but hardly unfathomable." Hmmm....

The number of copies printed is uncertain, as for most books from this period, but it's a safe guess that in the range of 750 copies of the 1580 edition were printed. Mathematically, the chances of a copy being Shakespeare's, assuming the same likelihood for survival for each copy, is one in whatever number was printed. Between

the copies in special collections around the world, the frequency of copies appearing at auction, and the unknown number of copies in private hands, we can roughly guess that fifteen percent have survived. Let's imagine that one hundred copies have survived. Since we have no prior knowledge of whether Shakespeare's copy was one of those survivors, the odds are still one in whatever the number of copies that were printed. In some ways, the survival of Shakespeare's copy was becoming, especially in consideration of what we had uncovered in the annotated texts of this Baret, a relative long shot, but not an impossibly far-fetched notion.

It's an interesting line of reasoning, granted, though I suspect a mathematician or statistician might easily poke it full of holes. If only objective, independent evidence survived that Shakespeare owned a copy of Baret's *Alvearie*—outside the author's conjectures based on internal clues—the argument that the odds to his copy surviving are 750-to-1, 500-to-1, 1000-to-1 or one on however many copies were printed might approach believability.

And this is the rub (and a huge rub it is) of *Shakespeare's Beehive*: Not enough Shakespeare handwriting examples survive to determine authorship of these margin notes and other markings based solely on the writing itself, a fact of which Koppelman and Wechsler are painfully aware. "Given the absence of annotated books from Shakespeare's library," they acknowledge, "we concede only that we are without a means for proper comparison." For this reason, their case has some mighty tall hurdles to clear. "The main burden of our study will consist of examining a portion of the annotator's notes in combination with Baret's text, alongside selections from the works of Shakespeare." The authors certainly have to make skeptical readers aware that they know full well how staggeringly unbelievable is their case. "For two booksellers in Manhattan to purchase, out of the blue, a heavily annotated book from the *library of all libraries*, on eBay... it's understandable that no one would give that a chance." They continue,

How could a book extensively written in by Shakespeare realistically survive entirely unnoticed to the present day? All along, we concluded this to be an enormous psychological barrier to overcome, particularly in light of the fact that the discovery was being

claimed, not by a world's authority on Shakespeare with proximity to Stratford or the great libraries in England, but by a couple of rare booksellers in New York, who stumbled upon the book in question by making a purchase through the world's largest online auction site. Let us be the first to declare: the idea that we could be right is beyond ridiculous, it is almost unfathomable.

As an antiquarian bookseller myself, I wholeheartedly endorse their answer:

Seeing as how the antiquarian bookseller's job entails improving upon preexisting descriptions—and trying to find compelling storylines in the material offered for sale... in many respects, a rare bookseller is best positioned to take over and make the case for a lost book such as this one, even more so than a scholar. The drive to find new angles on incoming material fuels the imagination of the rare bookseller, and may account for why antiquarian booksellers routinely make discoveries with old books that had previously been overlooked. The fact that these discoveries are seldom newsworthy in a mainstream sense does not discredit the idea that the ferreting of old books to this day routinely brings attention to books that for centuries have been ignored.

The caveat being that the bookseller's fuel consist of a good mixture of imagination *and* sound reasoning and scholarship, that is! But any experienced bookseller will testify to the truth of their sentiment.

Before delving into the painstaking, detailed comparison of some of this book's annotations and markings against Shakespeare's works, the authors discuss the three types of markings found in their *Alvearie*. There are words and phrases penned in the margins and text columns ("Spoken Annotations," they term these), slashes alongside head words and tiny circles alongside subsidiary definitions, and underlinings (these last types called "Mute Annotations"). Their intensive study of these markings drew out "an intoxicating pool of linguistic echoes to consider" which they narrowed down to "only three possibilities: the annotator was familiar with the works, the annotator got lucky, or the annotator was Shakespeare."

Time and again Koppelman and Wechsler prove masterful

at answering objections before they can be raised, like any experienced debaters. They note, for instance, “One always has to worry that what looks like an individual use might in fact be an idiom or at least a common phraseology, and we do not deny that this will often bear out over the course of studying other writers of the period with frequent parallel combinations. But it is the constant proliferation in Shakespeare of examples from Baret—examples simple and complex, commonplace and obscure—that should have scholars willing to champion the claim... that makes the case for authorship so intriguing.”

To characterize and grossly oversimplify the approximately two hundred pages that follow, the authors analyze a representative sampling of the large mass of various markings, often involving unusual pairings of words, and find multiple and distinctive use of these idiosyncratic “word clusters” in Shakespeare’s works. “On their own, annotations such as these and the verbal parallels in Shakespeare may be written off as trivial,” they note, “but the sheer mass of them is to be reckoned with, especially if the end result for Shakespeare is considerably greater than for other premodern authors.” Whether you buy into their argument or not, I found it extraordinary and provocative how intricately and complex are the connections the authors expose between the markings in their *Alvearie* and Shakespeare’s texts. They even find a “heaping embarrassment of riches that are the echoes from the annotated text in Baret into the sonnets.”

Given the shopping list of hypotheticals and what-if’s this 1580 dictionary required to help the reader suspend disbelief, Koppelman and Wechsler have done an admirable job of making a believable case for Shakespeare as owner and annotator of this volume—as strong a case as could be done given the dearth of authentic handwriting exemplars. Scholars are sure to sniff that they are enthusiastic but amateurish in their approach and will disagree with their interpretations. But *Shakespeare’s Beehive* is a thoughtful, intelligent attempt to make sense of the seemingly impossible. It’s also a handsome and well-made volume, and if the illustrations seem sparse you can always pull up every single page of this copy of Baret’s *Alvearie* on the authors’ website.

As an experienced dealer in historical documents and autographs myself, do I accept Koppelman and Wechsler’s argument? As a dealer, I need to *know with certainty*, not *feel with belief*, that ev-

ery item I offer for sale is authentic. If I had a superb letter from some historical figure of whom no known documents survive, I could only offer it “as is,” with conditions: *It may be in the hand of... It was likely penned by... It appears to have been written by...* that sort of thing. Short of a cache of unquestionable Shakespeare documents being discovered after four centuries, we can never know with 100% certainty that Koppelman and Wechsler’s copy of Baret’s *Alvearie* belonged to William Shakespeare—but they make an interesting case for it that is well worth considering.

World War II

In 2009 Massachusetts dealer Ken Rendell impressed this reviewer mightily with his *World War II: Saving the Reality—A Collector’s Vault*, a lavish oversize pictorial survey of his astonishing World War Two collection, as rich in three-dimensional artifacts of every description as in documents—and subject of the Museum of World War II he founded in a Boston suburb that houses it. Then last year he again impressed with a handsome pictorial tour of another of his collections—*The Great American West: Pursuing the American Dream*, once more as abundant in objects as in paper.

Well, I’m pleased to report that Ken has done it again, this time with a sequel to his over-the-top WW2 tome—a tough act to follow. *Politics, War, and Personality: Fifty Iconic World War II Documents That Changed the World* is a slim oversize volume that matches his *Great American West* volume—quite different from the bulky, slipcased, facsimile-laden *Saving the Reality* volume.

Politics, War, and Personality opens memorably with a foreword by John S.D. Eisenhower, only son of the Allied supreme commander and himself a brigadier general and military historian—who died last December at age 91 just after this book’s release. How fitting to hear this participant (who recalls “In the summer of 1938, my father and I... indulged in a long, sobering discussion of the notorious Munich Agreement, which had just been signed”) noting that “this book has... restored much of my perspective....”

Most collectors would give an eyetooth to have one or two of these documents adorning their collection. For one collector to offer up these examples from a collection that contains thousands more reinforces what the previous WW2 volume al-

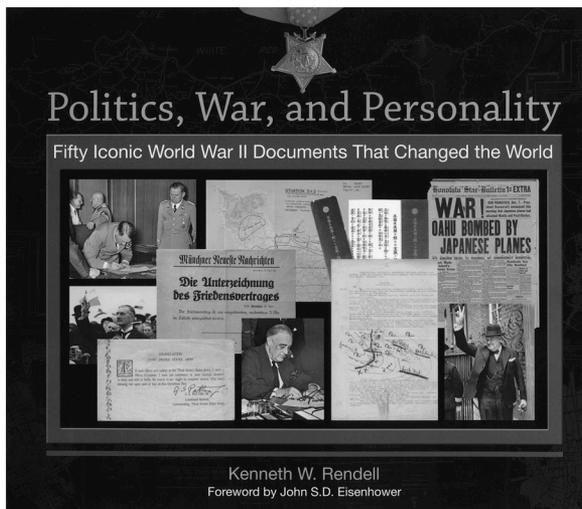
ready brought home—that Rendell’s is without doubt the finest World War Two collection in public or private hands. Although he doesn’t write about the process of building the collection, Rendell began as a dealer in the 1960s when interest in that not-distant conflict was nearly non-existent compared to the mania it’s become today. I’m sure he’s been building wisely and aggressively over the past half century—it shows!

Even though Rendell’s WW2 collection is as broad as they come, housing weapons, textiles and every type of object imaginable, he is a historical document dealer and remains at heart a paper guy. It shows in his introduction, as when he remarks:

Handwriting says a great deal about people, but it also signifies much about the circumstances when it was written. Franklin Roosevelt’s bold OK and FDR on his June 18, 1940, message (number 11), compared to his signature five years later (number 42), show the ravages of the war on him. Adolf Hitler’s signature when making his proposal that England and Germany Collaborate on the “reestablishment of a natural European balance of power” shows all the confidence of someone making such a proposal (number 5). The day after the sudden death of one of his top officials, Hitler’s signature is very cramped (number 22). Paul von Hindenburg’s order (number 6) dissolving the Reichstag is signed with all the importance of this document.

These fifty documents are arranged chronologically, each reproduced in fine color. Rendell’s brief explanatory text (and partial transcript or translations) accompany every document, placing each in historical context and bringing out the significance—quite useful for the less-obvious documents and for those who aren’t WW2 buffs. Relevant photographs also accompany each document and help bring them to life. I’m frozen like a deer in the headlights faced with choosing Rendell rarities, so let me just touch upon the first, the last and I’ll eenie-meenie-miney-moe my way through a few.

The first is a cheapo printed broadside (would that Rendell gave the dimensions of each document) issued by a Munich newspaper on 28 June 1919 announcing the signing of the Versailles Peace Treaty. Printed in large Gothic typeface on thin yellow stock, this flier would be unremarkable but for the lower



right corner—where a young, bitter Adolf Hitler penned a vitriolic statement about this vindictive treaty, closing with “The Jews must therefore leave Germany.” This exceptionally early writing, notes Rendell, “may be his earliest known attack on the Jews.” To my surprise, this choice relic hasn’t been in Rendell’s collection for decades, but rather “was recently discovered folded up and saved by Hitler in a file cabinet in his Munich apartment. In his will, Hitler left the contents of his apartment to his housekeeper....” Talk about spine chilling!

The last is the only of these 50 documents to bear no accompanying text, strangely—whether by error or design I don’t know. Titled “A Proclamation,” this decorative broadside is printed in two columns with rubricated initial capital letters and contains President Harry Truman’s May 8, 1945 text announcing the end of the war. It begins, “The Allied Armies, through sacrifice and devotion and with God’s help, have wrung from Germany a final and unconditional surrender,” then continues for several moving paragraphs before he signs it at the conclusion. How many of these may have been signed, or is this beautiful production a one-up? Some background on this particular commemorative text would be welcome.

Eeenie: “Japan’s Declaration of War Against the United States,” this document (printed? hand calligraphed? Hard to

tell with Japanese characters) “was read on Japanese radio” on December 7, 1942. But is this some kind of official copy, signed by Hirohito perhaps? Or a mass-produced souvenir copy made for patriotic Japanese to purchase? This is one instance in which a lack of details really hinders appreciation of the item.

Meenie: One of General Patton’s top commanders penciled this “First Draft” letter on Patton’s behalf to Axis powers in Palermo, Sicily, demanding in no uncertain terms their immediate surrender—the failure to do so being “the destruction of Palermo, the useless loss of life, and the imposition of hardship and suffering upon many innocent persons.” That it’s written on cheap lined paper, replete with crossouts and insertions, only makes it more real and immediate.

Miney: Possibly the only signed photograph of Oscar Schindler in existence, this small, informal head-and-shoulders snapshot of a grinning Schindler is handsomely inscribed by him on the verso to the Jewish woman who designed the gold ring given to him by the Jewish workers whose lives he saved.

And lastly, moe: A simple plain sheet on which are penned the signatures of all 20 Nuremberg war criminals. “It was expressly against the rules for the American guards at Nurnberg to collect autographs,” which surprised me since I’ve handled several similar items over the years, “but it was a common pursuit.”

My shotgun approach fails to capture the meatiness of *Politics, War, and Personality*, which showcases many outstanding content letters and documents. There’s a typed draft of the Munich Agreement (complete with Chamberlain and Hitler’s margin comments), Bernard Montgomery’s famed letter to his troops before the Battle of El Alamein, two intimate and revealing letters from General Eisenhower to Mamie, the U.S. armistice agreement with Italy, Hitler’s orders for the final defense of Berlin...

Rendell’s *Politics, War, and Personality* is a must-have accompaniment to his earlier *World War II: Saving the Reality*, but also a must-have by itself for anyone with an interest in World War Two documents in general. Advanced and novice collectors alike should be inspired by the broad range of documents depicted and the keen mind that elaborates their meaning.