



Beyond Reasonable Doubt: New Evidence and Arguments since The “Declaration of Reasonable Doubt”

Part 1: Additional reasons to doubt Shakspeare wrote the works.

It has now been nine years since we first issued the [Declaration of Reasonable Doubt About the Identity of William Shakespeare](#) in April of 2007, and then held a [signing ceremony](#) in the U.K. on September 8, 2007. A great deal has happened in those nine years, and we have learned many things that we did not know then. We have paid close attention to comments on the Declaration and have carefully considered criticisms of it. But most of what we have learned has not only confirmed our original doubts but led us to conclude that it is virtually certain that Mr. Shakspeare of Stratford was not the author of the works of William Shakespeare. This sequel presents new evidence and arguments that have come to light since the Declaration was issued. The most significant, newsworthy items are bolded, but each of the seventeen points presented is important.

But first we would like to clarify a couple of things. April 23, 2016, is the 400th Anniversary of the death of William “Shakspeare” of Stratford, referred to as “the Stratford man” in authorship circles to distinguish him from the writer “Shakespeare,” who we believe was some other person who used the name as a pseudonym. The two names were not spelled the same way, and were probably not pronounced the same way, as will be explained in point #17 below. For now, we just want to clarify that when we use the spelling “Shakespeare” we mean the author, whoever he was, and when we spell the name “Shakspeare” we mean the Stratford man. Whether they are one and the same is what the controversy is all about. Some such convention is needed to be able to distinguish between the two and refer to them separately. This is the convention that we use here.

We want everyone to understand that in questioning the identity of the author “Shakespeare,” we doubters mean no disrespect for Shakspeare of Stratford or for anyone who genuinely believes that he was the author. Some of his backers say that doubters bear a personal animosity toward him due to his humble beginnings. They claim that doubters are motivated by snobbery, denying that such a man could become a great writer. There is no truth to this. It is not true of us, and it is not true of any leading authorship doubter we know of. We have asked those who make such claims to give an example, but they have been unable to provide any. What doubters say is that no evidence proves Mr. Shakspeare did write the works of William Shakespeare, and what is known about his life (quite a lot, actually) seems inconsistent with him having been the author. We focus on evidence and the evidence does not support him, as seen in the Declaration and in this sequel. We would ask that those who disagree with us also focus on evidence and refrain from all personal attacks.

1. In the Declaration we mention that many people think Mr. Shakspeare *claimed* to have written the works, but that no such record exists. We should add that no family member or descendant ever said he did, either.

2. We mention that “almost uniquely among Elizabethan poets, Shakespeare remained silent following the death of Queen Elizabeth I.” We should add that equally strange for a Jacobean poet is the author’s silence following the death of Prince Henry, the hugely popular son of King James, and heir to the throne, in 1612. It makes no sense that the retired “lead dramatist of the King’s Men” would have been silent at such a time.

3. We mention that “Several people who knew the man ... seem not to have associated him with the author, including his son-in-law, Dr. John Hall, poet Michael Drayton, and prominent historian William Camden.” Since then, an [article](#) appeared that identifies ten such people. If *any* of them had said that Shakspeare was a writer, there would be no issue. Nothing shows that *anyone* ever thought he was a poet during his lifetime.

4. We mention that “contrary to the traditional view that the author [was] a prominent public figure, there is no record that he ever addressed the public directly, either in person or in writing...” We would add that we don’t know any role he ever played in any play, and there is no record of anyone commenting on his acting.

The only record of him acting in specific plays is the two cast lists in Ben Jonson's *Works* (1616), referring to two of Jonson's plays enacted 11 and 18 years earlier. No one said they saw him act during his lifetime. Claims that he was a highly visible public figure, and everyone thought he was the author, are totally false.

5. We mention that "the only writings ... in his own hand are six shaky, inconsistent signatures," and that *if* these are his "they reveal that [he] experienced difficulty signing his name." We should add that no two are spelled the same way, and the then custodian of wills at the Public Records Office [wrote](#) that "It is obvious at a glance that these signatures, with the exception of the last two... aren't the signatures of the same man. Almost every letter is formed [differently] in each. Literate men in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries developed personalized signatures much as people do today and it is unthinkable that Shakespeare did not." A study found that his signatures compare badly with those of most actors and known writers of the period. His signatures are in a "secretary hand," not the italic hand used by virtually all educated people at the time. For the most recent, updated version of this study, see Chapter 2 in the book [Shakespeare Beyond Doubt?: Exposing an Industry in Denial](#) (Shahan & Waugh eds. 2013), written in response to [Shakespeare Beyond Doubt: Evidence, Argument, Controversy](#) (Edmondson & Wells eds. 2013). The latter book was sponsored by the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust in Stratford-upon-Avon as part of its Authorship Campaign. Note that the only difference in the main titles of the books is the "?" at the end of the main title of the doubter book.

6. Orthodox scholars have long claimed that the additions known as "Hand D" in the manuscript of the play *Sir Thomas More* are in the hand of Shakspeare, based on comparisons of Hand D to his accepted signatures. This never made sense, given the small sample, very poor handwriting and great variation in the signatures; but they've held to it for nearly a century because nothing else from his lifetime shows that he was a writer. Now, a definitive article published in a mainstream academic journal concludes that "The handwriting case for Shakespeare as [Hand] D cannot be made on the available evidence: the control sample is inadequate in quantity and quality; signatures and dramatic compositions are in different classes..., and the time between the penning of D and the signatures render comparisons less useful (348)." Shakspeare is unique among major writers of the period in leaving no literary paper trail. ("[Hand D and Shakespeare's Unorthodox Literary Paper Trail](#)," Diana Price, *Journal of Early Modern Studies*, 2016.)

7. If the author Shakespeare had been born in Stratford-upon-Avon and lived there until his early twenties, he would have had a distinct Warwickshire accent and dialect; yet both are entirely absent from the works. They make no use of the language, history, or geography of Warwickshire, and Stratford is not mentioned. Claims to the contrary in "60 Minutes with Shakespeare" (published online by the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust, Sept. 1, 2011), and in [Shakespeare Beyond Doubt](#) (Edmondson & Wells, Ch. 11), have been refuted. One refutation is in our rebuttal to "60 Minutes with Shakespeare" (Q7) in [Exposing an Industry in Denial](#) (published online Nov. 21, 2011), republished in [Shakespeare Beyond Doubt?](#) (Shahan & Waugh, 164-66). For a definitive refutation in a mainstream academic journal, see "[Shakespeare and Warwickshire Dialect](#)," by Dr. Rosalind Barber, in the *Journal of Early Modern Studies* (2016). Professor Barber concludes (115) that "not a single claim that Shakespeare used Warwickshire, Midlands or Cotswold dialect can be upheld."

8. Shakspeare is said to have been a full-time actor, appearing in several different plays a week, outdoors in English weather and on annual extended tours all over England. He was a theater shareholder, responsible for the business. He maintained two households three days apart, commuting over poor Elizabethan roads. Yet he also supposedly wrote thirty-seven plays over twenty years, nearly all requiring extensive research, often in foreign languages, using three hundred books that have been identified – many rare and expensive. It is not possible. There is no other example of a dramatist doing so many different things at the same time.

9. Shakspeare had a difficult time getting his application for a coat of arms approved. This makes no sense if he was the popular poet of *Venus & Adonis* (1593) and *The Rape of Lucrece* (1594) and had a noble patron. His fellow Warwickshire poet Michael Drayton encountered no difficulty. Where was Shakspeare's patron?

10. The way the Shakespeare phenomenon developed over time is strange if Mr. Shakspeare was the author. The name "Shakespeare" first appeared beneath the dedication (not on the title page) of the narrative poem

Venus & Adonis (1593), and then beneath the dedication (not on the title page) of the poem *Lucrece* (1594). Both poems were very popular. In the next four years, six Shakespeare plays were published anonymously. Then *Palladis Tamia* (1598) identified Shakespeare as a dramatist for the first time and listed twelve plays that he had written. These events suggest a hidden author. Most plays *were* published anonymously, but the plays of such a popular poet-dramatist would only have appeared anonymously if he was remaining hidden. The orthodox explanation that the only name that sold plays was that of the acting company is not credible. The name “Shakespeare” proved so effective at selling plays that it was later put on plays he did not write.

11. In the folio of his collected *Works* (1616), Ben Jonson uses the spelling format Capital-hyphen-Capital for the names of the following four comic characters: Brane-Worm, Shoo-Maker, La-Foole and Love-Wit. He also includes epigrams to “Court-Parrat” and “Poet-Ape,” and atop a cast list the name “Shake-Speare.” The name “Shakespeare” is atop another cast list, as if to contrast it with the odd “Shake-Speare” spelling. The first six are transparently invented names, which seems to imply that “Shake-Speare” is also invented. Stratfordian academics have never been able to explain why the author’s name was frequently hyphenated. Many think the hyphenated name suggests it was a pseudonym, as Jonson’s spelling pattern also suggests.

12. In 1624, the second edition of Thomas Vicars’ manual of rhetoric gave a list of excellent English poets: Geoffrey Chaucer, Edmund Spenser, Michael Drayton and George Wither, omitting William Shakespeare! Surely he knew about Shakespeare in 1624, after the First Folio. In a third edition (1628), Vicars corrected the omission with this sentence inserted after the list: “To these I believe should be added that famous poet who takes his name from ‘shaking’ and ‘spear’...” Here’s a reference to Shakespeare that implies the name is a made-up, or pen name. Vicars probably knew that the First Folio’s attribution was incorrect and did not want to acquiesce in, and reinforce, the misattribution to Mr. Shakspeare. So he kept Shakespeare off the list in his 1624 publication the following year. By the time of the third edition (1628), he had figured out a way to include Shakespeare while hinting that it was a pen name, but without assuming the risk of openly saying so. (Schurink, Fred “An unnoticed early reference to Shakespeare” *Notes and Queries*, March 2006, 72-74) (Donald F. Nelson, “Schurink’s Discovery of a Century,” *SO Newsletter*, V. 44, No.1, Spring 2008, 10-11)

13. In the Declaration we ask why so many of the plays are set in Italy (ten, plus four in ancient Rome) and how he became “so familiar with all things Italian that even obscure details in [the ten plays] are accurate?” Stratfordians dispute that the plays show accurate knowledge of Italy, since Mr. Shakspeare was never there. Now we know that the details in the Italian plays are almost always correct, contrary to Stratfordian claims. In 2011, Harper Collins published *The Shakespeare Guide to Italy: Retracing the Bard’s Unknown Travels*, in which Richard Paul Roe provides evidence that the locations of nearly every scene in all ten Italian plays can be identified from local topography and architecture. In 2013, a book chapter on “[Keeping Shakespeare out of Italy](#)” gives a scathing critique of orthodox scholarship, finding it to be incorrect more often than not. And in 2014, the book *Such Fruits Out of Italy: The Italian Renaissance in Shakespeare’s Plays and Poems* – the collected articles of Italian scholar Noemi Magri – demonstrated that Shakespeare’s many allusions to Italian language, art, and social customs were entirely accurate. These books confirm that Shakespeare had extensive knowledge of Italy that is reflected in the plays and in the poems *Venus and Adonis* and *Lucrece*.

14. The Declaration includes a full paragraph on Shakspeare’s detailed will, first noting that it “contains no clearly Shakespearean turn of phrase and mentions no books, plays, poems, or literary effects of any kind.” Stratfordians pretend the only oddity is a lack of books and say they were in a separate inventory, now lost. This won’t work. Then as now, testators made specific bequests of highly valued possessions. The absence of books suggests that they were not important to this man. This is odd in light of the number and the rarity of some of the books used as sources in certain plays. Many were expensive, leather or velvet-bound books. It is unlikely that such prized items would have been relegated to an inventory, something usually prepared by one’s neighbors. If so, they would have been listed with livestock, crops, and mundane household items. Why did Mr. Shakspeare leave no book (or anything at all) to a fellow writer, or to his alleged noble patron?

The lack of books becomes a red herring when used to distract attention from other problems with the will. Stratfordians should stop pretending it is the only anomaly and that everything else is as one would expect. Nothing could be further from the truth. The will mentions no bookcases, shelves, chests or other furniture

for holding or storing books, nor any desk or writing materials. It mentions no musical instruments, despite the author's knowledge and love of music, and no art, tapestries, maps, or intellectual property of any kind! He mentions no theatrical attire or memorabilia, and leaves nothing for the education of his heirs, or for the Stratford Grammar School where he is said to have received the brilliant education that set him on his path. Nothing suggests a philanthropic spirit—no bequests to schools, colleges, almshouses, hospitals, churches, or public projects (just a tersely-worded ten pounds to the poor of Stratford, fulfilling a customary duty for charitable deeds), despite the fact that he died wealthy. Nothing about it suggests the mind of Shakespeare. Even the preamble is just stock language. Many people wrote their own preambles. Why not Shakespeare? See Chapter 5 in [Shakespeare Beyond Doubt?](#) (Shahan & Waugh, eds.)

15. The Declaration includes the amazing fact that “when Shakspeare died in 1616, no one seemed to notice! Not so much as a letter refers to the author's passing.” If he had been the author, then surely he would have been memorialized by his literary peers. Even the actors he remembered in his will had no known reaction. One would expect to have seen this great writer interred with honors in Westminster Abbey in 1616, as the much less significant writer Francis Beaumont was the month before, and as Ben Jonson would be in 1637. Instead, he is said to have been buried in the church in Stratford beneath a stone slab that has no name on it. One would expect to have seen new editions of his poems and plays. It did not happen. Elegies should have appeared by his fellow writers and others wanting to express their sense of bereavement. There were none. When Jonson died, there was an outpouring of elegies, thirty-three of which were selected and published.

The idea that Shakespeare collaborated with others is seen as evidence that other writers knew who he was, and presumably would have said something if he wasn't who he was alleged to be – Shakspeare of Stratford. One problem with this idea is that nothing shows anyone ever suggested he was the author in the first place until more than seven years after he died. One doesn't bother to expose as false what no one thinks anyway. But the much bigger problem is the silence of Shakespeare's collaborators at the time when Shakspeare died. If his peers knew who he was, as they surely did, their silence says they knew the author didn't die in 1616.

The late Donald P. Hayes, Professor of Sociology at Cornell University, and a top social network theorist, saw the silence of Mr. Shakspeare's peers when he died as the single most serious threat to Stratfordianism. He wrote that “unless a new, well-documented... plausible explanation can be developed for this silence... the odds that the Stratford man ... [was] William Shakespeare have fallen to the level of the improbable.” In fact, it should not take a sociology professor to point out that something is very wrong with this picture. Common sense should tell us that the lack of tributes makes no sense at all if Shakspeare were Shakespeare. Hayes' quoted article is set forth in Appendix C of [Shakespeare Beyond Doubt?](#) (Shahan & Waugh, eds.).

16. In 1635, Cuthbert Burbage, brother of famous actor Richard Burbage, petitioned Philip Herbert, Earl of Pembroke and Montgomery, in a legal case. The Burbages were the founder-investors in the Globe Theatre, and Shakspeare had been a shareholder. Cuthbert Burbage clearly knew the role that Shakspeare played in the company. In his petition, Burbage names the investors in the Globe Theatre. He mentions “Shakspeare,” and “Shakespeare,” as one of several “deserving men” and among several “men players.” From these terms, it does not sound like Burbage thought of this “Shakspeare” as the famous playwright William Shakespeare, but rather as just another member of the acting company.

By 1635, after the publication of the first two folios, the name “Shakespeare” was well known, and it would always have been spelled that way in print. Further, the man to whom Cuthbert was writing – Philip Herbert – was a dedicatee, with his brother William, of those two published folios! If Cuthbert Burbage knew that the “deserving man” and “man player” was also their playwright, he would have (1) spelled his name “Shakespeare,” and (2) mentioned that this Shakespeare was the poet-dramatist immortalized in the folios. This would have greatly strengthened his petition. The fact that he didn't do so suggests that he knew his fellow actor-shareholder was not the dramatist William Shakespeare.

Significantly, when [Shakespeare Beyond Doubt](#) (Edmondson & Wells) appeared in 2013, in Chapter 7 Professor Stanley Wells claimed to have included “all” references to Shakespeare from 1593 to 1642. In fact, Wells failed to mention either the 1635 petition or Thomas Vicars' manual of rhetoric with its

reference to “That famous poet who has his name from ‘shaking’ and ‘spear’,” discussed in 12 above. This could hardly have been accidental. Here we have strong evidence that Mr. Shakspeare wasn’t the author, and a Stratfordian authority omits it from a chapter in which he said he included everything!

17. The Declaration states that “It is not certain from the title pages that the name printed on them ... refers to Mr. Shakspeare.” Shakspeare *never* spelled his name the way that it appeared on the title pages, and even if it were spelled the same, it would not prove he was the author. The spelling on the works is very consistent – “Shakespeare,” or “Shake-speare,” over 95% of the time, and invariably with the medial “e” after the “k.” Shakspeare never once used that spelling. Nor does it appear in any of twenty-six entries in Stratford parish records relating to him and his family, from the birth of a sister in 1558 to the burial of a grandson in 1617. So there is a clear, consistent, highly statistically significant difference between those two sets of spellings.

The lack of a medial “e” in “Shakspeare” means the first syllable would be pronounced like “shack” today. This is a convention among doubters, although we cannot be certain how Shakspeare pronounced his name. To doubters, the two spellings suggest different pronunciations and different names. Stratfordians disagree. They claim they are variant spellings of the same name, and always change “Shakspeare” and its variants to “Shakespeare,” thereby airbrushing the name “Shakspeare” out of existence, even though that is the spelling he actually used. This was a clever trick, allowing them to say “Of course Shakespeare wrote Shakespeare.” Until about 1916, even the orthodox used “Shakspeare;” and would say that “Shakspeare wrote Shakespeare;” but it seemed odd that he would have used a pen name so close to his own name, so they made it one name.

To bolster their claim, Stratfordians cite a [statistical analysis](#); the analysis, however, is badly flawed, as seen in the article [“Was ‘Shakspeare’ also a Spelling of ‘Shakespeare’? Strat Stats Fail to Prove it.”](#) Spellings weren’t yet standardized, so names could be spelled various ways, even by the same person. The study counted all cases of the name from 1564 to 1616, categorizing them as either “literary,” or “non-literary,” based on their context. It found a larger number of “Shakespeare” than “Shakspeare” spellings in non-literary contexts, meaning it was more often spelled “Shakespeare” than ‘Shakspeare’ when referring to the Stratford man. So the study concluded that they are variants of the same name.

But the methodology has two flaws: (1) multiple instances of a spelling in a document are all counted. For example, each of seventeen “Shakespeare” variants in a 1605 legal record by a clerk in Stratford is counted and given the same weight as the weight given to each of Shakspeare’s six extant signatures; and (2) the “Shakespeare” spelling was well known to literate people after the name surfaced in 1593, increasing the odds that those spelling the name as they wanted would spell it like the author’s name. The analysis doesn’t control for time, context, or evidentiary value, as any properly-conducted study would do. Stratfordians accuse skeptics of violating standards, but here *they* are violating standards.

The fact remains that Shakspeare himself never used the name Shakespeare, nor does it appear in the Stratford parish register. Stratfordians devalue the register, noting that a clerk copied it in 1600 and may have altered spellings; but other variant spellings were retained and “Shakespeare” is not there. The instances with the most evidentiary value are Shakspeare’s six signatures, the three appearances of the name in the body of his will, the one on his monument, and twenty-six in the parish register – thirty-six total occurrences which undoubtedly refer to Mr. Shakspeare, or to close family members. In every case the name is spelled “Shakspeare” or a close variant. In none is it spelled “Shakespeare.”

Among the *most* probative are the last two of the twenty-six names in the register, for the christening and burial of Shakspeare’s first-born grandson, in November, 1616, and then May, 1617, respectively. The first son of Judith and Thomas Quiney was named after his grandfather, who had recently died. In the christening record the child’s first name is “Shaksper.” In the burial record it is “Shakspeare.” Neither is among the earlier recopied names, so it is not a transcription error. It also makes no sense to think a scribe misspelled it twice, in 1616 and 1617, when the “Shakespeare” spelling was famous. The names are similar, not the same: two different spellings; two different names; two different men.

So clearly and strongly does this example refute the claim that Shakspere's name was "Shakespeare" that the Stratfordian who did the statistical analysis later falsified the spelling of Shakspere Quiney's name in [Shakespeare Beyond Doubt](#) (ch. 11, 125), claiming it was "Shakespeare," in quotation marks. When a man resorts to falsifying evidence, it is a good indication that even he knows he has it wrong. Stratfordians should stop changing the name "Shakspere" to "Shakespeare" without telling readers. For more on the name issue, see [The Man Who Was Never Shakespeare](#), by Professor A. J. Pointon.

The points presented so far show that "reasonable doubt" about the author's identity is an understatement. Next, we come to the two main reasons why most Shakespeare professors think Shakspere *was* the author: the front matter to the First Folio, and the monument to which it refers, for the first time ever, in Stratford. The Folio and monument have been called the twin pillars of Stratfordian orthodoxy, and for good reason. Without them, it is hard to imagine anyone would ever have thought of him as the author in the first place.

Even Professor Stanley Wells, former chairman and now honorary president of the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust in Stratford, now acknowledges that nothing from Mr. Shakspere's lifetime suggests a writing career, making him the only alleged writer of the period for whom all evidence that he was a writer is posthumous; and this despite having supposedly been the most prolific of them all, and by far the most researched of all. Yet Wells says that the posthumous evidence of the First Folio and Stratford monument is incontrovertible. In the Declaration, we admit that they "seem to amount to a *prima facie* case for Mr. Shakspere," but then explain how each of them is "problematic." As it turns out, they are even more problematic than we knew. To learn why, read "[Part 2: Major Discoveries: First Folio and Stratford Monument](#)," also on this website.