



## THE SHAKESPEARE AUTHORSHIP COALITION

Dedicated to legitimizing the Shakespeare authorship issue by increasing awareness of reasonable doubt about the identity of William Shakespeare [DoubtAboutWill.org](http://DoubtAboutWill.org)

# Exposing an Industry in Denial:

Authorship doubters respond to “60 Minutes with Shakespeare,”  
Issued by the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust on September 1, 2011

Organized and edited by John M. Shahan, Chairman and CEO  
Shakespeare Authorship Coalition, Claremont, California

With a foreword by actor and author Michael York

Date of publication: November 21, 2011

### Organizations endorsing the SBT “60 Minutes” rebuttals

#### Neutral about the true identity of the author

Shakespeare Authorship Coalition  
[doubtaboutwill.org](http://doubtaboutwill.org)

Shakespeare Authorship Research Center  
[www.authorshipstudies.org](http://www.authorshipstudies.org)

Shakespeare Authorship Roundtable  
[www.shakespeareauthorship.org](http://www.shakespeareauthorship.org)

Shakespearean Authorship Trust (U.K.)  
[www.shakespeareanauthorshiptrust.org.uk](http://www.shakespeareanauthorshiptrust.org.uk)

#### Organizations favoring specific candidates

Francis Bacon Research Trust  
[www.fbrt.org.uk](http://www.fbrt.org.uk)

De Vere Society of Great Britain  
[www.deveresociety.co.uk](http://www.deveresociety.co.uk)

International Marlowe-Shakespeare Society  
[www.marloweshakespeare.org](http://www.marloweshakespeare.org)

Mary Sidney Society  
[www.MarySidneySociety.org](http://www.MarySidneySociety.org)

Neue Shake-speare Gesellschaft (Germany)  
[shake-speare-today.de](http://shake-speare-today.de)

Shakespeare Fellowship  
[www.shakespearefellowship.org](http://www.shakespearefellowship.org)

Shakespeare Oxford Society  
[www.shakespeare-oxford.com](http://www.shakespeare-oxford.com)

Sir Henry Neville as Shakespeare  
[www.henryneville.com](http://www.henryneville.com)

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## Foreword

Who would have thought, after all the public controversy over *Anonymous*, when filmmaker Roland Emmerich and his company have already moved on to other projects, it would turn out that the real action in the Shakespeare authorship controversy lay elsewhere all along?

Nearly two full months before the release of *Anonymous*, the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust (SBT), feeling threatened, launched a pre-emptive strike against the film—“60 Minutes with Shakespeare”—a website featuring 60 Shakespeare scholars, theatre professionals and others, each giving a 60-second reply to one of 60 questions. It clearly put the film on the defensive, suppressing attendance despite favourable reviews for the overall quality of the production, its impressive cast, and for several outstanding performances, most notably by Rhys Ifans.

Little did the SBT know that another adversary—one which may prove to have been far more formidable all along—would seize the opportunity to involve over a dozen organizations and nearly forty scholars, many of them with credentials just as impressive as those representing the SBT, in a collaborative effort to write strong rebuttals to each of the SBT “60 Minutes.” The document they have produced, “Exposing An Industry in Denial: Authorship Doubters Respond To ‘60 Minutes with Shakespeare,’” is masterly in its presentation of evidence and well-reasoned arguments, often showing the SBT responders to be ignorant or incompetent.

But perhaps most impressive is the speed with which the document was written—less than three months from the time the SBT launched its campaign to the document’s release date. Surely the SBT never dreamed that all of these authorship organizations, notorious for their factions and inter-organizational competition over which alternative authorship candidate is best, would come together so quickly to write such an impressive document on short notice.

They should not have been surprised. The Shakespeare Authorship Coalition (SAC), founded in 2006 in Claremont, California, had already proved itself to be a formidable opponent with its [\*Declaration of Reasonable Doubt About the Identity of William Shakespeare\*](#), launched on April 14, 2007, with same-day [signing ceremonies](#) at the Geffen Playhouse in Los Angeles, and at Concordia University in Portland, Oregon. Five months later, my fellow actors and SAC patrons, Derek Jacobi and Mark Rylance, launched the *Declaration* in the U.K., with another [signing ceremony](#) at the Chichester Festival Theatre in Chichester, West Sussex.

Since then, over [2,200](#) people have signed the *Declaration*—over 800 with advanced degrees, nearly 400 current or former college faculty members (including many leaders in their fields), two U.S. Supreme Court Justices, and numerous Shakespearean actors. If it had done nothing else, the SAC had already demolished the false stereotype of who we authorship doubters are. *Declaration* signatories, as a group, are impressive people; and I am proud to be one of them.

But ominously (for the SBT), the SAC and its founder, John M. Shahan, Chairman and CEO of the Coalition, principal author of the [\*Declaration of Reasonable Doubt\*](#), and the organizer and chief editor of the “60 Minutes” rebuttal project, have now demonstrated staying power. Unlike most authorship organizations, the SAC focuses on just one objective—“legitimizing” the authorship issue by increasing awareness of “reasonable doubt” about the identity of the author, and doing it by April 23, 2016, the 400th anniversary of the death of Mr. Shakspere. Based on this document, John Shahan and the SAC may very well achieve their objective.

— Michael York, M.A. (Oxon), O.B.E, Los Angeles, California, November 12, 2011

## I. Introduction

On September 1, 2011, the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust (SBT) in Stratford-upon-Avon announced “a campaign to debunk the ‘conspiracy theories’ surrounding the authorship of Shakespeare’s works” ahead of Roland Emmerich’s film, *Anonymus*, scheduled for release on October 28, 2011. The SBT campaign features a new audio website, *60 Minutes with Shakespeare*, showcasing “60 actors, writers and scholars,” each addressing one of “60 questions in 60 seconds each.”

The purpose of the site is not to inform but to create the impression that there is a consensus about the identity of the author William Shakespeare and persuade the public not to take the issue seriously. If the SBT had wanted to inform people, they could have posted the full text. Instead, most people are likely to read it for the first time on our websites, with our rebuttals.

Despite the superficial appearance of diversity, their group is actually very homogeneous. Twenty-five (42%) hold academic positions in English literature or Shakespeare studies. Twenty (33%) are board members or employees of the SBT or the Shakespeare Institute. Interestingly, at least four SBT trustees are not listed as such in their 60 Minutes profiles—Margaret Drabble, Life Trustee; Carol Rutter, University of Warwick Trustee to the SBT; René Weis, University of London Trustee to the SBT; and Michael Wood, Life Trustee.

Another ten are actors and/or theatre professionals. There is no historian except SBT Life Trustee Michael Wood; no social or behavioural scientist; no expert in creativity or genius. Oh yes, and film director Roland Emmerich, who has made a major movie about the issue. Despite such isolated exceptions, it seems clear that this is the response of a single industry.

Dr. Paul Edmondson, Head of Learning and Research at the SBT, said that the new website “offers perspectives from 60 different voices, including Roland Emmerich’s,” so people can listen and make their own minds up. It’s curious that Edmondson seems to think Emmerich’s lone voice among sixty would be enough for people to “listen and make their own minds up.” They also did not give him an opportunity to read a prepared statement, as all the others had.

The Shakespeare Authorship Coalition (SAC) quickly began a collaborative effort to write a single definitive rebuttal to “60 Minutes.” This report, titled “Exposing an Industry in Denial” (“Exposing”) presents the 60 rebuttals (actually 61), resulting from this collaborative effort.

The Coalition, and our fellow authorship organizations named on the title page of this report, welcome the chance to respond to the SBT “60 Minutes.” Rarely do we have the opportunity, since most orthodox Shakespeare scholars ignore all of our evidence and refuse to debate us. Indeed, the question is often treated as a taboo subject in academic forums and publications, even though the Stratfordian case is weak, and doubters include many very credible people.

### WHO ARE DOUBTERS? WHO ARE STRATFORDIANS?

Shakespeare authorship doubters are those people who believe there is “reasonable doubt” about the traditional attribution of the plays and poems to the businessman from Stratford. Stratfordians are those who accept, or favour, the traditional attribution. Otherwise, there is little difference between the two groups in the value we place on the author and his works. We all hold the author in the highest regard, but we disagree about who he was.

In the following pages we offer our rebuttals to each of the 60 questions asked and answered by the SBT responders, presumably each carefully selected to achieve their project’s purpose. Given the breadth and

diversity of our coalition, with a dozen major authorship organizations, and scholars with varying views, we've reached a remarkable degree of unity in our response. Not every organization and not every rebutter agrees with every one of our 60 responses, but that is to be expected. Orthodox scholars, all of whom agree that the Stratford man was the author, differ greatly on specific issues, as seen in their various forums.

Since some of the SBT questions and answers target three specific alternative candidates—Sir Francis Bacon, Christopher Marlowe and Edward de Vere, 17<sup>th</sup> Earl of Oxford—those rebuttals are written by their supporters and should be seen as representing their views only.

## BIRTHPLACE TRUST QUESTIONS AND REPLIES

We are not impressed with the SBT replies to its 60 questions. If the purpose was to present incontrovertible evidence that Mr. Shakspere of Stratford was the author of the Shakespeare canon, they have not succeeded. For anyone who is familiar with the evidence, their replies often reveal ignorance of important facts. Perhaps this is a result of their having suppressed most dissent, inadvertently isolating themselves. We can only speculate, but the problem of Stratfordian ignorance of the evidence is real, as should be clear from many of our rebuttals.

But ignorance of relevant historical facts is not the only problem. There are also examples of generalizing from a single observation. How many people now would take seriously a survey based on a sample of one? The SBT generalizes from individuals selected to be mouthpieces. They often call attention to isolated examples, suggesting they are representative of doubters. For people who say that they are scholars, while we are not, they often don't act like scholars.

Also, rather than focusing on evidence, the SBT makes extensive use of *ad hominem* attacks. This should be a warning sign—if the evidence were as strong as they claim, there would be no need to question the character, rationality, even the sanity of their opponents; but they do. There's an adage among lawyers that says, "If the facts are on your side, you argue the facts; if the law is on your side, argue the law; and if neither is on your side, attack your opponent." Judging by how much the SBT is attacking us, they must not have much else going for them.

In addition to our 61 rebuttals, in Appendix A, we ask and answer "Five key questions that the SBT did not ask and cannot answer" and in Appendix B we address "Six myths about the works, doubters and Will Shakspere." The SBT questions all further their aims, not ours. We believe it is only fair that we have a chance to raise and address a few issues of our own. But it is up to each reader to decide if we have made any worthwhile points in this document.

## CHALLENGE TO THE SHAKESPEARE BIRTHPLACE TRUST

We doubters have written a single definitive document stating our position. Why don't they? Ours is titled [\*Declaration of Reasonable Doubt About the Identity of William Shakespeare\*](#). The *Declaration of Reasonable Doubt*, issued in 2007, has been signed by over 2,200 people – over 800 with advanced degrees, and nearly 400 current or former college faculty members. They include former Supreme Court justices John Paul Stevens and Sandra Day O'Connor, actors Sir Derek Jacobi, Mark Rylance, Michael York and Jeremy Irons, and other notables.

The *Declaration* lists twenty prominent "doubters of the past," including writers Mark Twain, Walt Whitman, Henry James and John Galsworthy; actors Charlie Chaplin, Sir John Gielgud, and Orson Welles; U.S. Supreme Court Justices Harry A. Blackmun and Lewis F. Powell, Jr.; Ambassador Paul H. Nitze; plus Sigmund Freud, William Y. Elliott and Mortimer J. Adler.

So impressive is the list of doubters that we have been accused of arguing from authority. This is not true. It is needed to overcome a false stereotype that doubters are all irrational. Before anyone could take the issue seriously, we first had to challenge the false stereotype. But once we gained peoples' attention, we had to deliver; and the *Declaration* clearly does. It is a high-minded, well-thought-out document, focusing just on the major evidence and arguments—no obfuscations, no personal attacks on anyone. Why can't the SBT do this?

We've put our challenge to the SBT into a petition, the "Shakespeare Authorship Petition." The petition can be read and signed online: [www.petitiononline.com/sacpeti/petition.html](http://www.petitiononline.com/sacpeti/petition.html). Here is the text, minus a brief explanation of why it is needed that also appears on the site:

"We, the undersigned, hereby request that the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust in Stratford-upon-Avon write a single definitive declaration of the reasons why they claim that there is no room for doubt about the identity of the author of the plays and poems of William Shakespeare, and post it along with the names of those who have endorsed it. Yes, there is a case to be made for the traditional attribution to William of Stratford; but what about all of the anomalies that do not fit, and which have led so many highly credible people to express doubt? With all of the questions raised, the issue calls for a definitive treatment."

### "SHAKESPEARE" VS. "SHAKSPERE"

There is a consistent, possibly significant difference between the spellings of the two names: "Shakspere" (or close variants) on all eight official church records, from baptism through the death of the Stratford man, and "Shakespeare" (or often "Shake-speare"), with just two minor exceptions, as the name of the author appearing on the plays and poems published in London. So it appears these are two different names, suggesting the possibility of two different people.

Note that all of the SBT responders always use "Shakespeare" to refer to both the author, whoever he was, and the Stratford man; as if there is no doubt they are one and the same. They just assume what they are trying to prove, as if these professors did not know better. They pretend there is no difference between the name of the author and of Will "Shakspere" of Stratford. Until early in the last century it was common for orthodox scholars to spell the name as it appears on his baptismal record, on his monument, and in his will. But then they abandoned the original spelling because it suggests there may have been two different men.

Regardless of whether there is any real difference between the two names, some convention is required to distinguish them. The convention we use is that "Shakespeare" always refers to the author, regardless of who he really was. "Shakspere," always refers to the Stratford man. Whether the Stratford man and the author are one and the same is what this debate is about.

Most doubters think the name "Shakespeare" was a pseudonym used by the real author to conceal his identity. Many, though not all, believe that Shakspere, evidently an actor and theatre entrepreneur in London, may have acted as some sort of "front" for the real author, making it possible later to continue the myth that Shakspere had been the author all along.

Be alert to these differences when reading the SBT responders, who make no distinctions.

## II. Rebuttals to “60 Minutes with Shakespeare”

The “60 Minutes” audio recordings are available at <http://60-minutes.bloggingshakespeare.com/conference/>

### QUESTION I: HOW WOULD SHAKESPEARE HAVE HAD ACCESS TO BOOKS GROWING UP IN STRATFORD-UPON-AVON?

[Sylvia Morris, independent Shakespeare researcher, formerly Head of Shakespeare Centre Library and Archive, replies for the SBT]

Well, religious books like the prayer book and Bible would have been kept at the church he attended every week, and at Stratford’s grammar school he would have been taught from books including William Lilly’s *Latin Grammar* and Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*.

Some people owned their own books. The vicar who baptised Shakespeare left a Latin-English dictionary specially for the use of the school children. The curate in a neighbouring village left one hundred and sixty-eight books on subjects including stories and hobbies as well as religion, and a man from Anne Hathaway’s village, Shottery, owned law books.

Even in the unlikely setting of the isolated Cumbrian village of Troutbeck is a yeoman’s farmhouse still containing books dating from Shakespeare’s lifetime. Nobody knows how they got there, but it’s thought they came from local markets, so books were probably also bought and sold at Stratford’s fairs and markets.

Books were a source of entertainment and instruction not just for the rich.

### DOUBTER RESPONSE:

The issue is not what books might have been in Stratford-upon-Avon, but whether contemporaneous evidence documents Shakspeare’s aptitude for reading and writing in English and foreign languages, and the wide-ranging knowledge found in the author’s works. After forty years as a librarian, I am acquainted with many of the sources used in this author’s published works and have helped researchers to use rare and modern editions of them, or even to expand that list. It is a phenomenally long bibliography.

The author must have spent significant time reading and learning in his early life to have written with the profound understanding demonstrated in these works. Scholars have searched in vain for documents, not only from those first 28 “lost years,” but also through 1616, for traces of Mr. Shakspeare’s writing and reading. There are no letters by him; documents concerning him are about taxes, business transactions and his will.

Yet his works employ sources written in Latin, Greek, French, Spanish, and Italian not yet translated into English at the time. This man evidently relished words. He must have had access to books at some university, or at private libraries, to have gained knowledge of classical literature, history, philosophy, law, astronomy, mathematics, court protocol in France and Italy, as well as in England, and his familiarity with aristocratic pastimes.

From the years he travelled between London and Stratford, presumably writing poetry and plays, there should be definitive evidence. Other English authors of the period have left paper trails. Neither the idea of “genius,” nor speculation about talk in some tavern, dispels my reasonable doubts about the orthodox biography of this man from Stratford.

— Virginia J. Renner, retired head of the Reader Services Department, Huntington Library; signer of the [Declaration of Reasonable Doubt](#), with ten former colleagues



## QUESTION 2: DID SHAKESPEARE ATTEND THE KING EDWARD VI GRAMMAR SCHOOL IN STRATFORD-UPON-AVON?

[Lois Potter, former Ned B. Allen Professor of English at the University of Delaware, replies for the SBT]

The school's records for that period haven't survived, but he must have been there. His father was an alderman and he could have had a free education and the plays show that he knew the basic text books. For instance, in *Much Ado About Nothing*, Benedick has the rather odd line—"What, interjections? Well, then, some be of laughing, as Ha ha he he". That comes from the section on interjections in William Lily's grammar book, which every teacher in the country was supposed to use. Students also had to memorise a lot of proverbs and short sayings. So Leontes in *The Winter's Tale* tells his son, "We must be neat." His son is seven, and he would have just begun learning very short Latin phrases like "Mundus esto", which means "Be neat". In *The Merry Wives of Windsor* a schoolboy named William is asked questions about grammar. He doesn't do very well, but his mother is pleased anyway.

### DOUBTER RESPONSE:

It's impossible to know now whether he attended the "King's New School" in Stratford, or how long he was actually there if he did. All of the records are lost. He probably did attend for a time—at least long enough to learn to read; but judging from his six extant signatures (if they are all his), he didn't stay long enough to develop good writing skills. At the end of his life, his detailed will, drawn up by law clerks, gives no hint of a writer. This is consistent with the strange absence of manuscripts, or even a letter, in his hand.

As for references to William Lily's *Latin Grammar* in the works, that hardly narrows down the field of possible authors. The law required that this work be used by beginners, and every child who got an education studied the same grammar school curriculum, including members of the upper nobility, and even the royal family of whose education we have detailed records. The main difference is that aristocrats had the best tutors, and lots of special attention. Such advantages were unavailable to others, although they could get a good education. Marlowe did well enough in grammar school that he won a scholarship to Cambridge. Why did Shakespeare not win a scholarship? Why was his alleged talent not recognized?

As an example of an alternative explanation of the references to Lily's *A Short Introduction of Grammar*: William Lily (or Lyly) was the grandfather of the novelist and playwright John Lyly who was the 17<sup>th</sup> Earl of Oxford's secretary, collaborator and steward. John Lyly, Anthony Munday and others in Oxford's retinue, were all grammar school boys. Oxford himself was the patron of a grammar school in Earls Colne, which he oversaw. The Lyly references hardly point only to Shakespeare and the Stratford Grammar School. (See *The Oxfordian* 11: 113-136)

— Robin Fox, Ph.D., D.Sc., University Professor of Social Theory, and Research Professor of Anthropology (founder of the Department of Anthropology in 1967), Rutgers University; Former Director of Research, H. F. Guggenheim Foundation

## QUESTION 3: IS THERE ANYTHING IN THE WORKS WHICH REQUIRE THEIR AUTHOR TO HAVE BEEN EDUCATED AT A UNIVERSITY?

[Carol Rutter, SBT Representative Trustee from the University of Warwick, Professor of Shakespeare and Performance Studies at the University of Warwick and a National Teaching Fellow, replies for the SBT]

Certainly not. In the early 1590s there was a clutch of university-educated playwrights who were hopping mad

that a new generation of writers, equipped with only their grammar school training, reading Ovid, Virgil and Cicero, were supplying the players with brilliant scripts for the stage. Shakespeare was one of these smart grammar school lads. Ben Jonson was another. And Dekker, Heywood, Webster.

None of the big books that informed Shakespeare's mind and writing was even on the university syllabus: Holinshed's *Chronicles*, Plutarch's *Lives*, Montaigne's *Essays*, Ovid's *Metamorphoses*.

What students on the university arts course studied was Latin, Greek, rhetoric, and overwhelmingly logic, for careers in the church, civil service, Inns of Court. You can see in Shakespeare what kind of men the university fashioned: tedious logic-choppers like Polonius, dubious schoolmasters like Lucentio in the *Shrew*, and caviar-to-the-general playwrights like Hamlet in *The Mousetrap*.

If you want to know what kind of playwright Shakespeare was have a look at Peter Quince in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.

#### DOUBTER RESPONSE:

The works may not "require" that the author received a university education, but they clearly suggest that he spent some time at Cambridge or at least had connections there. Yes, he mocked pedants, but clearly respected university men like Hamlet and Horatio.

*Titus Andronicus*, *2 Henry IV* and *Timon of Athens* all contain specific, identifiable college jargon—clearly the strange idiomatic language unique to Cambridge University. Frederick Boas, remarking on *Timon of Athens* in his *Shakespeare and the Universities*, wrote that "The misanthropist talks as if he had graduated on the banks of the Cam."

*Love's Labour's Lost* features an extended reference to a real debate that was conducted by university dons mostly at St. John's College, Cambridge. Holofernes rebukes Don Armado for his pronunciation of English in some detail. His argument accurately reflects the terms of the erudite "pronunciation debate" among Sir Thomas Smith, Sir John Speke, William Cecil (Lord Burghley), Arthur Golding and others. (*The Oxfordian* 12: 56:64) It's difficult to imagine how the Stratford man could have learned of this debate without any connection to Cambridge.

Also suggesting a Cambridge connection, a book published by Cambridge University authorities in 1595, entitled *Polimanteia*, and written by William Clerke, a reputable Cambridge scholar, specifically lists "Shakespeare" as an alumnus of the University.

— Robin Fox, Ph.D., D.Sc., University Professor of Social Theory, and Research Professor of Anthropology (founder of the Department of Anthropology in 1967), Rutgers University; Former Senior Overseas Scholar, St. John's College, Cambridge.

#### QUESTION 4: DO THE PLAYS REFLECT THE EDUCATION THE BOYS IN THE STRATFORD GRAMMAR SCHOOL RECEIVED?

[Perry Mills, Assistant Headmaster and Director of Specialism at King Edward VI Grammar School, Stratford-upon-Avon, replies for the SBT]

Of course! Lessons at the "Kynges New Scole" provided all the Latin (and "less Greek") he needed to know. He was not just taught to read Latin but to write and speak it. A popular exercise was ethopoeia, or Impersonation—where the student was expected to express himself in the style and voice of someone else, often a woman such as Ariadne or Hecuba; a useful skill for the trainee playwright, no doubt.

And Shakespeare's men habitually remember Ovid's *Metamorphoses* and *Heroides*, two central texts on the Elizabethan set-book list, along with the standard textbook Lyly's *Latin Grammar*.

Perhaps the pupils did not always show the "consistent application" demanded by us teachers. Witness the scene in *Merry Wives* when young Will (nota bene!) is instructed in basic vocabulary by the Welsh pedagogue and windbag Sir Hugh Evans—or should that be Thomas Jenkins, Master from 1575–1579?

#### DOUBTER RESPONSE:

As we've already pointed out, there was nothing unique about "the education the boys in the Stratford grammar school received," such that the works point only to that school. In fact, we don't know for sure what was taught there, and just assume the curriculum was the same as at other grammar schools. If Mills' examples come from other schools, why assume that the author Shakespeare, whoever he was, must have attended the Stratford grammar school, and not some other grammar school, such as the one where Mills found his examples? It could have been any grammar school, or anyone tutored in the grammar school curriculum.

The scene in *Merry Wives* where Hugh Evans instructs young Will in basic vocabulary could easily have been written by someone tutored in the lesson, and who was familiar with grammar school boys and teachers. The humour of the scene comes as much from Evans' Welsh accent as from the Latin. Stratford schoolmaster Thomas Jenkins was an Oxford-educated born Londoner, and could not have been a model for Evans. There is, however, another likely model for Hugh Evans: The theatre troupe known as Oxford's Men included a well-known Welshman named Henry Evans, who trained boy players.

And since the boy is called "Will," and was not good in basic Latin, he could be seen as a reference to a certain newcomer from Stratford, trying to make it big in the London theatre world. The scene is included for laughs, and has nothing to do with the plot. Was "Will" the author's depiction of his own front man, and his academic prowess?

— Robin Fox, Ph.D., D.Sc., University Professor of Social Theory, and Research Professor of Anthropology (founder of the Department of Anthropology in 1967), Rutgers University; Former Director of Research, H. F. Guggenheim Foundation

#### QUESTION 5: ARE CHARGES OF ILLITERACY AGAINST MEMBERS OF SHAKESPEARE'S FAMILY RELEVANT TO HIS OWN IDENTIFICATION AS A WRITER?

[Elizabeth Woledge, Outreach and Informal Learning Development Manager at The Shakespeare Birthplace Trust, replies for the SBT]

Literacy—the ability to read and write—is nothing more than a function of education; it tells us nothing about the person's intelligence, imagination or creativity. [Being illiterate] tells us only that no one taught that person to make or recognise a symbolic mark to represent a word. Shakespeare's father and mother may not have been able to sign their names, but they were perfectly intelligent individuals, John handling local affairs and Mary being the executor of her father's will. It is probable that both parents could read, although they were not skilled in pen craft. Reading and writing were taught as separate skills in Renaissance England, not linked as they are for us today.

But literate or not, Shakespeare's parents were perfectly capable of producing and raising a son who became one of the most gifted writers ever—writing is far more than pen craft alone, and literacy is no determinant of intelligence or creativity. Many of us can write, though few of us have yet written anything approaching

Shakespeare's brilliance. Incidentally, there are surviving signatures of Shakespeare's daughter and granddaughter; by that time pen craft was a far more universally taught skill.

#### DOUBTER RESPONSE:

We agree with Elizabeth Woledge that being illiterate tells us nothing about a person's "intelligence," but that's not the question. The question is not about "intelligence," but, rather, about whether growing up in an illiterate family is relevant to identification as a "writer." The answer is yes, of course it is relevant. Is it more likely that a great writer will come from an illiterate family, or from a highly literate one? As we mention under [Key Question 3 in Appendix A](#), one of the characteristics that typifies literary geniuses is having "enriched home environments during childhood." This is an established fact.

Doubters make no claim that a man from humble origins cannot become a great writer. As stated in our [Declaration](#), "Scholars know nothing about how [the author] acquired the breadth and depth of knowledge found in the works. This is not to say that a commoner, even in the rigid, hierarchical social structure of Elizabethan England, could not have managed to do it somehow; but how could it have happened without leaving a single trace?" That is the issue: it would have been a remarkable achievement, and it should have been much commented upon at the time, leaving a trail of evidence. It is one thing to claim it "could have happened," but quite another to find evidence of it, and still another to assert that there is no room to doubt that it did happen.

There is also the matter of particularity. Samuel Clemens (Mark Twain) rose from humble origins to become a great writer, but he wouldn't have written the works of Shakespeare. That's how the controversy began: with a perceived disconnect between "the sublimity of the subject and the mundane inconsequence of the documentary record" for the supposed author, as Sam Schoenbaum put it. Or, as Ralph Waldo Emerson said, "Other admirable men had led lives in some sort of keeping with their thought, but this man in wide contrast."

We agree that there's no reason to think Mr. Shakspeare's genetic inheritance from his parents would have precluded him from become an outstanding writer, given the right circumstances. Certainly his parents' lack of writing ability doesn't mean this. Where we disagree is in the critical importance of environment to the development of creative genius—especially artistic-literary-poetic genius (see [Appendix A, Question 3](#)). There is no evidence that Shakspeare grew up in an environment conducive to literary genius.

— John M. Shahan, Chairman and CEO, Shakespeare Authorship Coalition

#### QUESTION 6: DID ANY OF SHAKESPEARE'S BOYHOOD CONTEMPORARIES ACHIEVE INTELLECTUAL AND PROFESSIONAL DISTINCTION?

*[Nick Walton, Executive Secretary to The International Shakespeare Association, and Shakespeare Courses Development Manager at The Shakespeare Birthplace Trust, replies for the SBT]*

One of Shakespeare's boyhood contemporaries, called Richard Field, who grew up on Bridge Street just a stone's throw away from Henley Street, achieved intellectual and professional distinction as a prominent London publisher. Richard oversaw the printing of the first full edition of Edmund Spenser's *The Faerie Queene*, and in 1598 he published an edition of Sir Philip Sidney's *Arcadia*. He also published works such as *Orlando Furioso* and *Pandosto*, which served as primary sources for Shakespeare's *Much Ado About Nothing* and *The Winter's Tale*, respectively.

Shakespeare himself chose Richard's shop in Blackfriars as the printing house for his first two printed works, *Venus and Adonis* and *The Rape of Lucrece*. By the early 1590s, Richard was beginning to make a name for

himself in London. Having served an apprenticeship to the esteemed French printer Thomas Vautrollier, Richard acquired a reputation for printing sophisticated books, including language instruction manuals for English speakers trying to learn French.

#### **DOUBTER RESPONSE:**

Whether the Stratford man's boyhood contemporaries achieved intellectual or professional distinction has no bearing on whether he wrote the works of Shakespeare. This depends entirely on independent evidence. Adolf Hitler and philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein were in the same elementary school class in Linz, Austria; this does not mean that Wittgenstein (who was Jewish, and taught at Cambridge) is likely to have been a Nazi, or that Hitler is likely to have been a philosopher. It is difficult to see the point of this question, except to show that Stratford residents weren't all semi-literate yokels, and it was not anomalous for the author Shakespeare to have been born there.

Richard Field was indeed a prominent publisher in London, but his prominence today consists in having published Shakespeare's first two poems. It is not hard to place this fact in the context of someone else having written Shakespeare's works—if Shakspeare was "fronting" for the real author, he may have suggested using Field as his publisher. Or, if the real author had already settled on Field, but needed a front man, Field may have suggested his fellow townsman, the actor. There is no documentary evidence for Walton's claim that "Shakespeare himself chose [Field's print shop]." Field published none of Shakespeare's quartos, had no role in the First Folio, and wasn't mentioned in Shakspeare's will. Isn't it strange that Shakspeare didn't remember the man, right in his own town, who published the poems that first made him famous, launching his career?

Claims that Shakespeare used the books in Field's office as the basis for his plays are sheer supposition, and highly implausible. Field was running a business, not a library.

— *William D. Rubinstein, Professor of History, University of Wales, Aberystwyth, U.K.*

#### **QUESTION 7: ARE THERE ANY CLEAR LINKS TO BE MADE BETWEEN SHAKESPEARE'S PLAYS AND THE AREA AROUND STRATFORD-UPON-AVON?**

*[David Kathman, independent scholar and co-founder of the Shakespeare Authorship web page, replies for the SBT]*

Shakespeare wrote his plays primarily for a London audience, but they still contain plenty of signs that the author came from the area around Stratford-upon-Avon. For one thing, they're peppered with dialect words from Warwickshire and the West Midlands, such as "wappered", meaning tired, and "geck", meaning fool. But there are also many specific references to people and places from the area around Stratford, as in *Henry the Fourth Part Two*, where Silence calls Falstaff "Goodman Puff of Barson", referring to a Warwickshire village. The induction to *The Taming of the Shrew* is full of such allusions, including Barton-on-the-Heath, where Shakespeare's aunt and uncle lived, and "Marian Hacket, the fat alewife of Wincot", referring to a village four miles from Stratford where a real Hacket family lived in the 1590s. These references are consistent with the frequent rural imagery in the plays, reflecting Shakespeare's lifelong fondness for the area where he grew up.

#### **DOUBTER RESPONSE:**

##### **Shakespeare's alleged Warwickshire Dialect**

David Kathman is wrong; the plays are not "peppered" with Warwickshire dialect words. In point of fact, Warwickshire and West Midlands references and dialect words form a distinct minority among the places and

people Shakespeare refers to and in the speech forms he uses. The overwhelming majority of settings are royal courts, castles, noble houses and associated forests and parkland, primarily in England, France and Italy. There are more references to St. Albans in Hertfordshire than to the Stratford area. The same could be said of many parts of England. Stratford is way down on the list.

Despite the fact that in 1900 Appleton Morgan was surprised to find not a single Warwickshire word in *Venus and Adonis*, the view that Shakespeare was Shakespeare continues to be reinforced by false claims of dialect words typical of Warwickshire. This apparently goes back to C.T. Onions, who in 1911 mistakenly claimed to have identified 24 Warwickshire words in the plays.

“Mobled,” for example (referring to Priam’s distraught queen in *Hamlet*), which Onions said was a Warwickshire word meaning “muffled,” is actually a Herefordshire term for “disarrayed.” “Ballow” and “batler” were misreadings, while other instances he cited turned out not to be specific to Warwickshire at all. The archaic “tarre,” found in *King John*, meaning “to urge on,” was used in both London and Warwickshire. Tellingly, Onions’ list was not included in the 1986 revised edition of his book.

In 1938, Fripp argued that the First Folio’s “kisse” and “sonne” were unique Warwickshire spellings; in fact, these forms were found throughout Elizabethan England. Similarly “Cotsall,” incorrectly identified as a local version of “Cotswold,” was in fact a Staffordshire word, “Codsall,” still locally pronounced “Cotsall.”

Kokeritz acknowledged in 1953 that the accent implicit in Shakespeare’s works is inconsistent with Warwickshire. Brook confirmed this when he observed that the playwright’s colloquialisms mainly reflected usages in the southwest and London.

Yorkshire, East Anglia, Scotland and Ireland also contributed substantially to Shakespeare’s vocabulary. The modern linguist David Crystal notes that “original pronunciation” performances of *Romeo and Juliet* and *Troilus and Cressida* at The Globe bear no traces of the Warwickshire accent. As A.J. Pointon remarks, “Of all the regions of Britain, Warwickshire... had the least influence on Shakespeare’s language.”

Despite this evidence, the error persists. The Oxford Companion to Shakespeare notes: “It is somewhat strange that Shakespeare did not ... exploit his Warwickshire accent, since he was happy enough to represent, in phonetic spelling, the non-standard English of French and Welsh speakers, and the national dialects of Scotland and Ireland.”

## References

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J. Appleton Morgan, *A Study of the Warwickshire Dialect* (Shakespeare Press 1900)  
C.T. Onions, *A Shakespeare Glossary* (OUP 1911 rev. ed. Eagleson 1986)  
A.J. Pointon, *The Man Who Was Never Shakespeare* (Parapress 2011)

## Induction to Taming of the Shrew

Here again Kathman is wrong: The “Wincot” near Stratford was a farm, not a village. It had no “alehouse”—no place for “Marian Hacket, the fat alewife of Wincot” to live. Sly likely refers to the village of Wilnecote, still pronounced “Wincot,” 30 miles from Stratford. It had five ale-houses and more Hacketts than anywhere else in the region.

Furthermore, what about the main character in that scene, Christopher Sly? He says that he is “by education

a Cardmaker, by transmutation a Beare-heard, and now by present profession a Tinker.” Cards were used for combing wool; bearherds looked after the bears used for public displays; and Tinkers included itinerant performers. What an unlikely series of occupations! Yet we know of someone whose father (John), dealt in wool, and who apparently later worked for a man who ran a bear-baiting arena (Philip Henslowe), and who became an actor—one William Shakspere. Could it be that Christopher Sly represents the Stratford man? Why would Shakspere portray himself as a drunken tinker who woke up one day to find himself treated as someone he wasn’t?

— Michael Egan, Ph.D., Editor, *The Oxfordian*; Author, *The Tragedy of Richard II, Part One: A Newly Authenticated Play by William Shakespeare* (Edwin Mellen Press, 2006)

## QUESTION 8: DO SHAKESPEARE’S WORKS REFLECT ASPECTS OF LIFE IN STRATFORD-UPON-AVON DURING HIS TIME?

[Michael Wood, SBT Life Trustee, broadcaster, writer and historian, and author of *In Search of Shakespeare, replies for the SBT*]

In the end the Shakespeare authorship question all boils down to a simple matter of judging historical sources. To deny Shakespeare’s authorship is to deny the primary sources, above all his will.

But the plays themselves also tell us about their author. They show that he was a grammar school boy from the Stratford area. They have local dialect words, and spellings; they show specialist knowledge of wool dealing and gloving, the two trades his father did in Stratford. (Think of Feste’s joke in *Twelfth Night* about chevril, the soft kidskin used in glove making). The plays show an intimate knowledge of people and places around Stratford, like the Hackets of Wilmcote (his mother’s village) in *Taming of the Shrew*, or real life Cotswold wool-men like George Vizer and Clement Perkes in *Henry IV*.

So you can see from the plays themselves that the author came from the Stratford region, as all Shakespeare’s contemporaries of course knew. And they knew it because it was true.

### DOUBTER RESPONSE:

As “primary sources” go, the Stratford man’s will is actually the one document that’s most damaging to claims that he was the author of the Shakespeare canon. It contains no reference to any Shakespeare play or poem, nor to writing, nor writers, of any kind. Nor does it contain any reference to books or bookshelves, papers, manuscripts, letters, or any intellectual property—things any professional writer would mention in his will.

The plays do not reveal “a grammar school boy from the Stratford area.” They show us that he was a highly-educated, well-read, well-travelled intellectual, familiar with the latest thinking in the fields of astronomy, philosophy and medicine, and with the political issues of the time. He was also competent in Greek and Latin, and fluent in French and Italian. In other words, a Renaissance man, not a “grammar school boy.”

The most striking “specialist knowledge” in the plays is not of wool dealing and gloving, but of the sea and seamanship, ancient and modern warfare and the law. Nothing shows that Shakspere had any knowledge of these subjects, nor any opportunity to acquire it. As for “intimate knowledge of people and places,” the town of Windsor is mentioned two dozen times in four different plays. Maybe “Shakespeare” was a Berkshire boy.

And let’s not forget that the town of Stratford-upon-Avon itself is never mentioned. There is not the slightest bit of evidence that Shakespeare’s contemporaries “knew he came from Stratford.” They did not know it, of

course, because it wasn't true. No one, during his lifetime, connected Mr. Shakspere of Stratford with the Shakespeare canon.

— Ramon Jiménez, *Author of two books about the Roman Republic, plus numerous authorship-related articles in The Oxfordian and SO Newsletter*

## QUESTION 9: WHEN DID SHAKESPEARE FIRST APPEAR ON THE LITERARY SCENE?

[Andrew Dickson, *Guardian theatre editor, author of The Rough Guide to Shakespeare, and contributor to The New Cambridge Companion to Shakespeare, replies for the SBT*]

The earliest surviving reference to Shakespeare as a writer comes from one of his rivals, playwright Robert Greene. In a pamphlet from 1592, called *Greene's Groatsworth of Wit*, Greene sneers at a rival author who is "in his own conceit the only Shakes-scene in a country". Although Greene doesn't deign to name Shakespeare directly, "Shake-scene" is quite obviously a pun on his name.

The interesting thing, I think, is that *Greene's Groatsworth of Wit* appears to be the remnant of some long-lost literary feud—Greene goes on, without, it has to be said, much evidence, to accuse Shakespeare of plagiarism.

Did Shakespeare borrow from Greene's work? Well, perhaps—but, more likely, Greene was simply annoyed that a young "upstart" from the sticks was writing plays every bit as good as his.

In any case, it's because of Greene that we can be confident that Shakespeare was on the scene from the early 1590s, and he was doing well enough to have acquired some bitter literary enemies.

### DOUBTER RESPONSE:

Although orthodox Shakespeare scholars now generally accept the identification of the "upstart crow" in *Groatsworth* with Shakespeare of Stratford, both orthodox and non-orthodox scholars have questioned this identification. Among the alternatives proposed are actors Edward Alleyn, Will Kemp and Ben Jonson. Also, there has been much discussion of whether *Groatsworth* was, in fact, a forgery by Henry Chettle, the publisher who claimed that he found *Groatsworth* with Greene's papers after he died.

Seldom mentioned is that the source of the identification of the "upstart crow" with William Shakespeare in *Groatsworth* is in the second of three parts of the pamphlet. But if we accept the identification of the crow with Stratford's Mr. Shakspere in the second part of *Groatsworth*, what do the first and third parts tell us? In Part One we find a "gentleman" whose character must also be a representative of the "upstart crow;" and in Part Three an "Aesope ant" also representing the "crow." This gives us a clearer picture of the "upstart crow." The portrait is one of a miserly, plagiarizing pretender—hardly a flattering picture of the person thought to have been the young Shakespeare.

Another piece of the puzzle is Henry Chettle's response published in a work called *Kind-Heart's Dream*, responding to "one or two" writers "offensively taken" by *Groatsworth*. These are presumed to be Christopher Marlowe, accused of atheism, and Thomas Nashe. The latter, upset that he was accused of writing *Groatsworth*, wrote a scathing complaint in an epistle attached to his *Pierce Pennilesse* with charges of forgery. Chettle apologized to one writer (Nashe) but not the other (Marlowe), saying he did not know either. Modern Shakespeare biographers, in a transparent effort to enhance Shakespeare's standing, continue to claim that the apology was to Shakespeare when the text clearly does not have that implication. Noted Shakespeare scholar Prof. Lukas Erne correctly points that out:



“The cumulative effect of the evidence against Shakespeare [as recipient of the Chettle apology] is such that it partakes of mythology, rather than biography, to keep drawing inferences about Shakespeare’s early years in London from Chettle’s apology.”\*

\*Erne, Lukas. “Biography and Mythology: Rereading Chettle’s Alleged Apology to Shakespeare.” *English Studies*, No. 5, pp. 430-440 (see page 440), 1998.

— Frank Davis, M.D., Past President, Shakespeare Oxford Society

## QUESTION 10: DO WRITERS OF SHAKESPEARE’S TIME IDENTIFY HIM AS AN AUTHOR OF SPECIFIC WORKS?

[Charles Whitworth, Professor of English at the University of Montpellier, founding director of the IRCL (a CNRS-affiliated centre for Early Modern research), replies for the SBT]

There are many references to Shakespeare as the author of specific works. For example, in 1598 Francis Meres lists a dozen plays by name, attributing them to Shakespeare, and praising the ‘mellifluous and honey-tongued’ poet for his *Venus and Adonis*, *Lucrece*, and sonnets. In the same year the poet Richard Barnfield praises Shakespeare for those same narrative poems. At around the same time, John Weever, in a sonnet addressed to Shakespeare, mentions the poems and both ‘Romeo’ and ‘Richard’; and the scholar Gabriel Harvey cites ‘Shakespeare’s *Venus and Adonis* ... *Lucrece*, and his tragedy of *Hamlet Prince of Denmark*’. But the earliest specific allusion occurs in a 1592 pamphlet by the writer Robert Greene, who warns fellow dramatists about the ‘upstart crow’ who ‘with his tiger’s heart wrapped in a player’s hide’ imagines himself ‘the only Shake-scene in a country’. The parody of a line from Act I of *Henry VI, Part 3*, and the pun on Shakespeare’s name, linking him to the theatre, make the attribution unmistakable.

### DOUBTER RESPONSE:

No one disputes that there are contemporary references to a writer named “Shakespeare.” Not one of them, however, establishes his real identity, just as a reference to “Mark Twain” does not prove the existence of a real person by that name, and a reference to the Oscar-winning writer “Robert Rich” (one of the blacklisted screenwriter Dalton Trumbo’s fronts in the 1950s) does not prove that “Rich” was the true writer.

It is not at all surprising that Meres, Barnfield and Harvey refer to “Shakespeare” as the author of the two long narrative poems, *Venus and Adonis* and *The Rape of Lucrece* (1593, 1594), the first works to appear with the name “William Shakespeare” on them. It proves nothing, except that they accepted the two printed attributions at face value. Interestingly, however, the name was under the dedications, and not on the title pages.

Six of the plays were then published anonymously, until Meres, in 1598, said that this “Shakespeare” was also a great playwright, naming twelve of his plays. Nobody up to then had associated the name Shakespeare with anything but the two narrative poems. The poems were very popular; why publish six of his plays without his name on them? The way these events unfolded is strange, and suggests people did not know the author.

So while some contemporary writers name “Shakespeare,” whoever he was, as the author of specific works; they do not specifically identify him as the Stratford man. Orthodox scholars simply assume that every reference to “Shakespeare” is a reference to Mr. Shakspeare, but not a single reference during his lifetime specifically identifies him as such. The name could just as easily have been a pseudonym, and/or the name of a front man. Not until the First Folio was published in 1623, seven years after he died, did anyone claim that the Stratford man had been the author, and even then by no means unambiguously.

Charles Whitworth claims that Robert Greene's parody of a line from Act I of *Henry VI, Part 3*, plus the "Shake-scene" pun on the actor's name "make the attribution unmistakable." It may well be a reference to Shakspeare, but this doesn't necessarily mean he wrote the play. To the contrary, Greene suggests the actor wasn't an author, but was pretending to be.

— Patrick Buckridge, Ph.D., Professor of English, Griffith University, Australia

## QUESTION II: DO WRITERS OF SHAKESPEARE'S TIME DISPRAISE HIS WORK?

[Emma Smith, Fellow and Tutor in English at Hertford College, Oxford, replies for the SBT]

Do contemporary writers dispraise Shakespeare? Not much. There's that early reference, perhaps by Robert Greene, describing Shakespeare as 'an upstart Crow beautified with our feathers,' but by quoting Shakespeare this becomes an anxious compliment to the newcomer's ability.

From some writers he gets faint praise: fellow playwright John Webster, writing in 1612, admires 'the right happy and copious industry of Master Shakespeare, Master Dekker, and Master Heywood'.

The most explicit criticism of Shakespeare comes from his rival Ben Jonson. Jonson is scornful of Shakespeare's error in giving Bohemia a seacoast in *The Winter's Tale*, and laughs at a line from *Julius Caesar*—that remark seems to have stung, since the text of the play doesn't include the offending line. He wishes, in contrast to the claim that Shakespeare never blotted a line, that he 'had blotted a thousand'. But in the end, Jonson notes that there 'was ever more in him to be praised than to be pardoned'.

### DOUBTER RESPONSE:

We agree that writers of Shakespeare's time rarely "dispraise" his work, but so what? The truth is that most of his fellow writers seldom said anything at all about his works. He appears to have been a relatively shadowy figure throughout his career as a writer. He wrote no commendatory verse to anyone, and nobody wrote any to him, until 1623. In an age known for its lavish dedications, nobody dedicated anything to Shakespeare.

There's little doubt that "Shake-scene" and the "upstart Crow" refer to Mr. Shakspeare. Stratfordians usually assume Greene was attacking him for plagiarising his own works and works of other "University Wits." But as Andrew Dickson mentions in his reply to [Question 9](#), there is little evidence for this. Further, in this context "beautified with our feathers" (in the absence of any evidence of plagiarism) is more likely to mean that he was profiting from their plays, which he bought and brokered to the acting companies, probably taking a commission for himself that writers and actors considered excessive.

Emma Smith mentions Ben Jonson's criticisms, but omits that they are all posthumous and impersonal, as though Jonson never actually knew this writer named Shakespeare. Jonson first mentions Shakespeare in his own collected *Works* in 1616, the same year Shakspeare died. Jonson lists him as an actor in two of his own plays, from years earlier. That's all; nothing on the passing of his friend and fellow writer, William Shakespeare. It's not as if Jonson didn't have time to reflect on the matter; Shakspeare died in April, and Jonson's *Works* were published over six months later—sometime in November.

Jonson was a great master of ambiguity, as several of his biographers have pointed out. Some say his praise of Shakespeare in the First Folio subtly suggests two different men. Then there's Jonson's epigram entitled *On Poet-Ape*, often thought to be Shakspeare, also from 1616:

"He takes up all, makes each man's wit his own.  
And told of this, he slights it. Tut, such crimes

The sluggish, gaping auditor devours;  
He marks not whose 'twas first, and after-times  
May judge it to be his as well as ours."

As indeed they have! Jonson was right.

— Patrick Buckridge, Ph.D., Professor of English, Griffith University, Australia

## QUESTION 12: WERE SHAKESPEARE'S PLAYS PUBLISHED UNDER HIS OWN NAME IN HIS LIFETIME?

[Laurie Maguire, Professor of English at Oxford University, and a Tutorial fellow of Magdalen College, replies for the SBT]

There's nothing unusual about an Elizabethan play reaching print without its author's name. The important name on the title page was the theatre company's, so Shakespeare's plays were first published in editions that identified the playing company but did not name the author. *Titus Andronicus* in 1594, *Richard II*, *Richard III*, and *Romeo and Juliet* in 1597—none of them said they were written by Shakespeare. But then a change crept in. When *Richard II* and *Richard III* were reprinted in 1598, their title pages advertised Shakespeare as the author. This change was not consistent. In Shakespeare's lifetime there were 39 editions of 16 of his plays: only 66 per cent of these editions say "Written by William Shakespeare," or "Newly corrected," or "Newly augmented by William Shakespeare".

### DOUBTER RESPONSE:

Plays were published under the name "Shakespeare" while Mr. Shakspeare was alive, but none under "Shakspeare," the family name of the Stratford man. In any other field that would be taken as evidence that Shakspeare did not write the plays, not that he did. Nor was the name on the works ever "William Shakespeare 'of Stratford-upon-Avon.'"

Anonymous publication was the norm for authors of plays throughout the entire period. Roughly 80% of plays were published anonymously; it could be risky to publish things. There were no freedoms of speech, assembly, religion, or of the press as we know them. Writers and theatre companies could, and occasionally did, run afoul of the authorities. It should not be surprising that some writers might have published under pseudonyms.

What's odd about Shakespeare is the on-off pattern of publication of works over time: first the two narrative poems, *Venus and Adonis* and *The Rape of Lucrece* (1593, 1594), both very popular; then nothing in this popular poet's name until 1598, when twelve of his plays are named at once, and he is thus identified as a playwright for the first time; then a flood of quartos with his name on them over a span of six years; then just a few new quartos until 1609; then none until *Othello* in 1622, and eighteen plays for the first time in 1623 in the First Folio!

Why were Shakespeare's first 6 plays published anonymously if he was a popular poet? Maguire claims that "the important name on the title page was the theatre company's," but *Venus and Adonis* and *The Rape of Lucrece* did well under the name "Shakespeare," and not that of a theatre company. Why didn't the author, the printers, and the theatre company seek to exploit his name? Why the sudden change in 1598, which amounts to a sort of "coming out" for Shakespeare? Why the drop-off in new quartos after six years? And why hold back many valuable plays until 1623, seven years after Shakspeare died? Doubters find these questions difficult to answer if the Stratford man was the author.

— Felicia Hardison Londré, Curators' Professor of Theatre, University of Missouri-Kansas City

### QUESTION 13: WAS SHAKESPEARE'S NAME USED AS A SELLING POINT ON WORKS WE NOW DON'T BELIEVE HE WROTE?

[Andrew Murphy, Professor of English, University of St Andrews, and author of *Shakespeare in Print: A History and Chronology of Shakespeare Publishing*, replies for the SBT]

Yes, it was.

When plays first began to be published, writers were rarely credited on the title pages. For example, the first play of Shakespeare's that survives—the 1594 edition of *Titus Andronicus*— makes no mention of him as author.

However, his name did very quickly become a selling point, so the title page of the 1608 edition of *King Lear*, for instance, features Shakespeare's name at the very top of the page, in large, bold letters.

Some publishers do seem to have tried to cash in on Shakespeare's growing popularity by issuing texts under his name that he hadn't actually written. In 1599, a collection of poems titled *The Passionate Pilgrime* was identified as being by Shakespeare when, in fact, only a small number of the poems were his.

Likewise, various plays, such as *The London Prodigal* (in 1605) and *A Yorkshire Tragedy* (in 1608), appeared with Shakespeare's name on the title pages, though evidence suggests that he hadn't actually written them.

#### DOUBTER RESPONSE:

We welcome Professor Murphy's admission that a name on a play didn't necessarily mean that a person with that name wrote the play. We suspect that Shakspeare wrote none of the plays with the name "Shakespeare" on them—a name similar to, but not necessarily the same as his own. If Shakspeare did write and publish plays with his name on them, why did this otherwise litigious man never sue over a fraudulent publication? The fact that it never happened suggests a hidden author who could not come forward.

As for Murphy's statement that "the name did very quickly become a selling point," it depends on what "quickly" means. We cannot agree that the name on the 1608 quarto of *King Lear*, eighteen years into, and near the end of his alleged career, was "quickly." But more to the point, perhaps Murphy can address the questions we've raised in our response to [Question 12](#), and especially why the name wasn't a selling point until 1598.

— John Hamill, Independent Scholar, Past President, Shakespeare Oxford Society; author of numerous authorship-related articles in *The Oxfordian*, and SO Newsletter

### QUESTION 14: IF SHAKESPEARE IS A FRAUD, WHAT ABOUT THE HISTORICAL EVIDENCE?

[AJ Leon, Senior Digital Advisor to *The Shakespeare Birthplace Trust*, replies for the SBT]

What I cannot understand is the way people who say he didn't write the work have to ignore all the evidence that shows he did.

Let's get this story straight.

We aren't talking about a belief that can be interpreted differently depending on our point of view. The evidence for William Shakespeare of Stratford-upon-Avon is not circumstantial. It is factual and multifaceted.

Sure, we don't have personal letters or diary entries, but that's not all that unusual for people of that period.

At least fourteen other writers mentioned him by name as a playwright and poet and discussed his work. Printers and publishers worked with him. Seven of his plays were co-authored for God's sake. Readers, actors, and theatre audiences were part of the living and breathing testimony of thousands of people. On his death he was memorialized as a writer, and his reputation grew.

To claim that Shakespeare of Stratford didn't write the plays is no less than to deny history and slap the greatest writer the world has ever known in the face.

#### DOUBTER RESPONSE:

First, yes, many people do say that "he did not write the works;" but what we all agree on is that there's "reasonable doubt," so it is a legitimate question for people to pursue. The SBT should stop trying to stigmatize and suppress a legitimate historical question.

Second, we do not "ignore" evidence that suggests he did. For example, the [\*Declaration of Reasonable Doubt\*](#) outlines "four main reasons to identify Mr. Shakspere ... with the author William Shakespeare." It says they seem to amount to a *prima facie* case for him. But it explains why each of the four is problematic, and then outlines some reasons why "We Say the Evidence Does Not Fit." What we can't understand is why Leon ignores it.

Third, it is extremely unusual that we have not a single letter in Mr. Shakspere's hand. If AJ Leon thinks otherwise, he is the one who is ignoring the evidence. He should read *Shakespeare's Unorthodox Biography*, by Diana Price (esp. "Literary Paper Trails").

Fourth, the fourteen other writers who, "mentioned him by name as a playwright and poet and discussed his work," never associate him with Stratford, and never indicate that they knew or met him personally.

Fifth, no document shows that the author worked directly with printers and publishers. He may have, but this says nothing about who he was. If such people keep the identities of pseudonymous authors and ghost-writers secret today, why wouldn't they have then?

Sixth, it is not certain that any of the plays was co-authored; but even if some were, it's not certain that the collaborators knew the author personally, or knew his true identity. Plays can be started and completed by different authors working independently. They can be written by one and revised by another, or completed, but revised posthumously. Any of these could easily account for several jarring inconsistencies in certain plays. It's also hard to distinguish collaboration from an author revising his own early works. The more scholars claim collaboration, the harder it is to explain the absence of letters, or other documentation of the alleged collaboration, especially with a man in Stratford.

Seventh, there's no "living and breathing testimony of thousands of people." Nonsense!

Eighth, on his death the Stratford man was not "memorialized as a writer," although many poets and playwrights of the time were, sometimes within days of their deaths. Francis Beaumont, for example, died three months after Shakspere, received many tributes and was interred in Westminster Abbey. No tributes exist for Shakespeare.

Ninth, we have as much respect for the author Shakespeare, whoever he was, as anyone. It is disgraceful that AJ Leon uses, and the SBT condones, such inflammatory language.

Tenth, Leon has misrepresented the issue, the evidence, our positions and our motives—all-too-typical of Stratfordians; if the evidence is so clear, why the need for such tactics?

— Richard Joyrich, M.D., President, Shakespeare Oxford Society

— John M. Shaban, Chairman and CEO, Shakespeare Authorship Coalition

## QUESTION 15: DID SHAKESPEARE BECOME FAMOUS IN HIS LIFE-TIME?

[Tiffany Stern, Professor of Early Modern Drama at Oxford University, and author of several books on Shakespeare performance, replies for the SBT]

Shakespeare was first known as an erotic poet because of *Venus and Adonis*, *Rape of Lucrece* and his 'sugred sonnets': in 1595 he's heralded as 'sweet Shakespeare' and 'Honie-tong'd Shakespeare'.<sup>1</sup>

But from 1598 onwards, Shakespeare's name is found on playbooks. Known as an actor-writer, 'Mr. ... Shakespeare' was lauded for having 'plaide ... Kingly parts in sport', while being 'our English Terence' (Terence was a famous classical playwright).<sup>2</sup>

He was seen, however, as not highly educated. Fellow playwright, Beaumont, 'would ... from all Learninge keepe these lines as [cl]eere as Shakespeares'; more positively, *Returne from Pernassus* maintains 'Few of the university pen plaies well' and concludes 'Shakespeare puts them all downe'.<sup>3</sup>

Though thought less brilliant than Ben Jonson, Shakespeare had a solid reputation. By 1630, a jest book calls 'Stratford upon Avon, ... remarkable for the birth of famous William Shakespeare'.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Frances Meres, *Palladis Tamia* (1598), 281; William Covell, *Polimanteia* (1595), R2r; John Weever, 'Ad Gulielmum Shakespeare', *Epigrammes* (1595), E6r.

<sup>2</sup> John Davies, 'To our English Terence, Mr. Will: Shake-speare', *The Scourge of Folly* (1611), 76.

<sup>3</sup> Francis Beaumont, 'To Mr B: J:' (c. 1615), Holgate MS, Pierpont Morgan Library, f. 110, quoted in E.K. Chambers, *William Shakespeare*, 2 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1930), 2: 222-5; *The Returne from Pernassus* (1606), G2v.

<sup>4</sup> *A Banquet of Jeasts* (1630), 157.

## DOUBTER RESPONSE:

The name "Shakespeare" was famous during the lifetime of William of Stratford, but there's no evidence that anyone identified him with Shakespeare until seven years after he died. Apart from the *assumption* that he was the author, nothing shows that he was famous. (See Ramon Jiménez' answer to [Key Question 4](#) below.) As stated in the [Declaration](#), "Contrary to the traditional view that the author became a prominent public figure, there is no record that he ever addressed the public directly, either in person or in writing... and nothing shows that either Elizabeth I, or James I, ever met Shakespeare, or spoke or wrote his name. Almost uniquely among Elizabethan poets, Shakespeare remained silent following the death of Elizabeth. Early in the reign of James I, records place Shakspere in Stratford while plays were staged in London for the court. Why was the popular playwright and leading actor of the King's Men not part of such events?"

Further, "Nobody, including literary contemporaries, ever recognized Shakspere as a writer during his lifetime; and when he died in 1616, no one seemed to notice. Not so much as a letter refers to the author's passing. If Shakspere was Shakespeare, surely something dating from 1616 should mention the author's death. Even Heminges, Condell and Richard Burbage, whom he mentioned in his will, had no recorded reaction. Nor did those who held rights to previously published editions of plays or poems rush new ones into print." It is difficult to argue that this man was famous.

Finally, it is ironic that Tiffany Stern quotes Davies about Shakespeare being "our English Terence," since the Roman writer Terence was credited with other writers' works! Terence himself said that some thought that he

was taking the credit for plays written by two noble Romans. Davies may well have had this in mind when he wrote the poem.

— *John Hamill, Independent Scholar, Past President, Shakespeare Oxford Society; author of numerous authorship-related articles in The Oxfordian, and SO Newsletter*

## QUESTION 16: SHOULD WE BE CONCERNED THAT THERE ARE GAPS IN THE HISTORICAL RECORD?

[*Andrew Hadfield, Professor of English at the University of Sussex, and author of Shakespeare and Republicanism, and Edmund Spenser: A Life, replies for the SBT*]

It always astonishes me that people are so surprised at gaps in the records of the lives of early modern people and that they demand, often stridently, that these be explained, or else they will assume there has been some sort of cover up. But we know so little about most people outside the very upper echelons of society. And what biographies were written were designed to tell exemplary stories, so hardly any survive of writers until things changed in the later seventeenth century. Hardly any personal letters survive, paper being scarce and invariably reused, so we should not read anything into the lack of a cache of Shakespeare letters. Nor should we be surprised that Shakespeare's will does not include some objects, such as books, as wills tended to mention only important and valuable items, everything else going to the next of kin. My favourite non-fact is that, although Thomas Nashe is, I think, the only English writer ever to have forced the authorities to close down the theatres and printing presses, making him something of a celebrity, we do not know when or how he died. Traces of Shakespeare, though scanty, do not require special explanation. Or, alternatively, we could imagine that a whole host of writers who emerged in the late sixteenth century, were imposters.

### DOUBTER RESPONSE:

It's true that we should expect gaps in the records for Elizabethan and Jacobean times. But gaps are different from total silence, especially when records for others do survive. Occupations leave traces; though some will disappear over 400 years, some should not.

In *Shakespeare's Unorthodox Biography* (2001), Diana Price studied the literary paper trails of twenty-five writers of the period, using all of the extant published biographies. She organized the various kinds of evidence used to document their writing careers into ten general categories—evidence of education, books owned or borrowed, letters about literary matters, etc. Only for Ben Jonson could she find evidence in all ten categories.

As expected, for some writers there are major gaps. For ten of the twenty-five, we have no record of correspondence; for fifteen no extant original manuscript or evidence of books owned, borrowed, given or written in. Price's data show that for Thomas Nashe there is indeed no "notice at death as a writer." But Nashe still left the most substantial literary paper trail after Jonson's, with evidence in all of the remaining nine categories.

Edmund Spenser left seven out of ten; and even Marlowe, who officially died at age 29, hit four of the ten categories (with Francis Beaumont, John Fletcher and Thomas Kyd). John Webster would be last on the list, with evidence in only three categories, except for one extreme outlier, with nothing at all in any of the ten categories: William Shakspeare. In other words, no unambiguous evidence from his lifetime proves that he was a writer.

Given the amount of time and effort devoted to searching for evidence relating to him, the lack of a substantial literary paper trail cannot be dismissed as some sort of fluke.

He did leave a substantial paper trail—just not a literary one. Some seventy documents show he bought and sold land, properties, grain and tithes, lent money, recouped debts. Any objective observer might conclude that he was a successful businessman, an actor, a theatre shareholder, perhaps some sort of theatrical wheeler-dealer, but not a writer. How could so many and varied documents survive, and yet none for his writing career?

A Stratfordian commonplace says that “absence of evidence is not evidence of absence.” Absence of expected evidence is indeed evidence of absence. Not only can Stratfordians not explain this remarkable lack of expected evidence for their man’s supposed career (based on what we find for other writers), they remain in denial about the entire issue.

*Shakespeare’s Unorthodox Biography: New Evidence of an Authorship Problem*, by Diana Price (Greenwood Press, 2001).

— *Michael D. Rubbo, M.A., Stanford University; Director, Much Ado About Something, the award-winning documentary on the case for Christopher Marlowe as Shakespeare*

## QUESTION 17: WHERE DID SHAKESPEARE GET HIS MONEY?

*[Boika Sokolova, who teaches Shakespeare and the drama of his contemporaries at the University of Notre Dame in London, replies for the SBT]*

Shakespeare was an actor, playwright and poet with lots of opportunities to earn an income in the new theatre business.

As a young actor, he would have been paid a weekly wage.

As a playwright he could sell his plays to a company at £6-£8 apiece. (For comparison, the annual income of a goldsmith was about £8.)

As a resident playwright for about twenty years, he would have had a salary, plus a benefit for each performed new play.

Unlike other playwrights, he was also a shareholder in a most successful London theatre company, which ended up owning two theatres, the Globe and Blackfriars. This is likely to have brought him around £150 a year. Performances at Court were another good source of money, as was patronage. Among his patrons were Lord Strange, the Earl of Southampton (to whom he dedicated *Venus and Adonis*), and King James.

In addition, Shakespeare prudently invested in land and other business ventures.

## DOUBTER RESPONSE:

Boika Sokolova does not answer the question. Rather than tell us where Mr. Shakspeare “did” get his money, she says he had “lots of opportunities” to earn an income; that he “would have been” paid a weekly wage; he “could” sell his plays to a theatre company; that as a resident playwright for about twenty years, he “would have had” a salary... ; and being a shareholder in two theatre companies, “is likely” to have brought him ...” The reason why she resorts to hypotheticals when it comes to his theatrical and alleged literary career is that, in fact, no record shows he ever received a payment for writing.

This is very strange. Philip Henslowe, in his records of payments to writers and actors, or “Henslowe’s diaries” (his account books), never mentions Shakespeare, even though Henslowe staged some of his plays. There are records for other writers and actors, and there’s lots of evidence for Shakspeare’s business transactions; but not



for literary work. There are approximately 70 documents relating to Shakspere, but all are non-literary. They reveal a businessman in Stratford, and a theatre entrepreneur/actor in London.

Sokolova makes one unequivocal statement—that “among [Shakspere’s] patrons were Lord Strange, the Earl of Southampton... and King James;” and that statement is false. No document shows that any of these supposed “patrons” ever paid William Shakspere for writing. The closest one comes is a grant of “red cloth” by King James to the actors to participate in his coronation procession through the city of London. The King’s Men received payment for plays put on at court, but nothing shows any patronage payments. Southampton’s biographers have searched in vain for evidence he bankrolled the Bard, assuming that he must have, since Shakespeare dedicated two narrative poems to him. Not only did they find no evidence of patronage, they found no evidence they ever met.

— William D. Rubinstein, *Professor of History, University of Wales, Aberystwyth, U.K.*

### QUESTION 18: WHAT WAS SHAKESPEARE’S SOCIAL STATUS?

[René Weis, *SBT Representative Trustee from the University of London, teacher of Shakespeare at UCL, Editor of Romeo and Juliet for Arden, and replies for the SBT*]

William Shakespeare was the son of a successful yeoman glover who had served a term as mayor of Stratford-upon-Avon. Through his mother Mary Arden, Shakespeare may have been related to the ancient Arden family of Park Hall. In 1596 the Shakespeares successfully applied for a coat-of-arms, which formally gentrified the family. From now on William Shakespeare, player and London playwright, was Master Shakespeare. He was mocked for his apparent pretentiousness by his friend Ben Jonson.

Shakespeare was socially ambitious, hence his purchase, a year after the coat-of-arms, of New Place, a large mansion house in Stratford. It seems that he, who was only ever a lodger in London, was keen to be lord of the manor in his home town. Throughout his life he astutely invested in land, tithes, and property; and he did not remit debts. Shakespeare’s evident concern with money and status may have its roots in his father’s long struggle with debt which confined John Shakespeare to his family home at a time when his teenage son was living there.

### DOUBTER RESPONSE:

René Weis’s assessment of “Shakespeare’s” social status (meaning the Stratford man’s) is mostly correct, except in saying he was a “London playwright.” It’s not clear he was. The problem is that the author’s social status appears very different from Shakspere’s. All but one of the plays (*Merry Wives of Windsor*) is set among the uppermost nobility. It’s hard to imagine how Shakspere could have understood the upper classes so well.

Weis speculates about Shakspere’s father’s “long struggle with debt which confined John Shakespeare to his family home at a time when his teenage son was living there.” In fact, we do not know for sure that Shakspere and his father lived together when the former was a teen. All we have for the first 28 years of his life are a few church records. Shakspere may have been motivated by his father’s situation, but nothing supports this.

If Shakspere was “socially ambitious,” and succeeded in his ambitions in London, why did he retire to Stratford at the end of his career, rather than remain in London in the company of some former social superiors who now welcomed him as their social equal? Surely that was a big come-down in status for the lead dramatist of the “King’s Men.” Why did he never own a home in London, or settle into retirement among the many high-status people who would have found it fascinating to have him as their friend?

Further, why did he evidently not keep in touch with any of them, so when it came time to make out his will he remembered none of his fellow writers, or any prominent person other than his three fellow actors, not even his alleged patron the Earl of Southampton?

— Richard Joyrich, M.D., President, Shakespeare Oxford Society

### QUESTION 19: COULD THE PLAYS HAVE BEEN WRITTEN BY SOMEONE WHO NEVER LEFT ENGLAND?

[Margaret Drabble, SBT Life Trustee, educated at Cambridge and briefly an RSC actress, before authoring seventeen novels and various works of non-fiction, replies for the SBT]

Shakespeare's geography was patchy. He gave Bohemia a seacoast and a desert, which many, including Ben Jonson, have delighted to ridicule; but *A Winter's Tale* is a romance, and accuracy was not his aim. Illyria in *Twelfth Night* is also a mythical place of dreams, a version of Elysium. His Italian cities, particularly Verona and Venice, glitter with Renaissance glamour, and one would like to think he might have been there; but equally he could and would have talked to travellers, seen paintings, read accounts, and constructed from them the lively cities we see on stage. It was not necessary for him to go to Rome to write his Roman tragedies: he found the Forum and the Capitol in Plutarch. He travelled in books and in his imagination, as writers do; and as the greatest writer of them all, he did it supremely well. His Egypt, with its flies and gnats of Nile, is as real as the Forest of Arden.

### DOUBTER RESPONSE:

Shakespeare's knowledge of geography was not "patchy." Rudolf II, King of Bohemia, did in fact reign over territory that included some Adriatic seacoast from 1575 to 1611. A new book, released this month, virtually proves that Shakespeare did leave England. The book is *The Shakespeare Guide to Italy: Retracing the Bard's Unknown Travels*, by Richard Paul Roe (HarperCollins). Roe has found "a secret Italy hidden in the plays of Shakespeare. It is an ingeniously-described Italy that has neither been recognized, nor even suspected—not in four hundred years, except by a curious few. It is exact; it is detailed; and it is brilliant." Shakespeare studies will never be the same.

Roe isn't the first to conclude that Shakespeare must have travelled extensively in Italy. The orthodox Italian scholar, Ernesto Grillo, wrote that "When we consider that in the north of Italy he reveals a profound knowledge of Milan, Bergamo, Verona, Mantua, Padua and Venice, the very limitation of the poet's notion of geography proves that he derived his information from an actual journey through Italy and not from books." Independent scholar Noemi Magri wrote many articles on the Italian plays, showing that they held detailed knowledge that could only have been acquired by being there. British scholar Kevin Gilvary made the same point. Roe's landmark book all but seals the case.

That said, we agree that nothing about the Egyptian settings in *Antony and Cleopatra*, or Viennese settings in *Measure for Measure* or Cyprian settings in *Othello*, suggests that the author must have been to Egypt, Vienna or Cyprus. Not every locale depicted in the plays argues that the author surely witnessed it first hand. Some are, to trained eyes knowledgeable in a particular local geography, more vividly depicted than others.

— Mark Anderson, Author, "Shakespeare" By Another Name (Gotham Books, 2005; 2011, 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed.)

## QUESTION 20: WHY IS IT IMPORTANT THAT ACTORS' NAMES APPEAR IN SOME OF THE EARLY PRINTED TEXTS OF SHAKESPEARE'S PLAYS?

[Harriet Walter, actor in all media, author of 3 books, performer in 17 Shakespearean roles, replies for the SBT]

Shakespeare knew many of the actors he wrote for throughout his career. The names of the principal actors are printed at the front of the 1623 First Folio, and Shakespeare's own name is first among them.

He knew how his fellow actors worked. He wrote some of the greatest of all theatrical parts for his friend Richard Burbage: Hamlet, Othello, and King Lear.

Some of the early play texts are revealing about Shakespeare's thought-processes. Exits are often missed out. He knew the actors would know when to leave. Occasionally characters are named who don't speak: Violenta in *All's Well That Ends Well*. There were probably second thoughts in rehearsal.

In the first edition of *Much Ado About Nothing* the names of the much-loved comic actors Will Kemp and Richard Cowley appear as speech prefixes instead of their characters' names: Dogberry and Verges. He was writing with the actors themselves in mind.

These are texts written by a poet and actor, and have the DNA of the playhouse running through them.

### DOUBTER RESPONSE:

It was routine to rewrite scripts in various forms after they were delivered. That an actor's name might appear in some version says nothing about the author's original. But there is no reason to think that only an actor in the company could have written these plays. A genius playwright who attended and observed plays could have done it. There is also no reason to assume a different author wouldn't have known the players. He may even have been an actor himself during his career, working closely with them.

Harriet Walter claims that the plays have "the DNA of the playhouse running through them." It is a specious analogy, invoking the idea of DNA evidence, as if it couldn't be wrong. Public playhouses were hardly the only places where plays were written and performed. A large majority of all documented performances of Shakespeare plays were not in the public playhouses at all, but elsewhere, such as at court, the great houses of the nobility, Oxford and Cambridge Universities, the London law schools known as "The Inns of Court," and the private Blackfriars theatre.

The Inns of Court, especially Gray's Inn, were renowned for writing and producing their own plays, with their own acting companies. Many playwrights of the time had attended the Inns of Court, which required students to participate in entertainments. Several Shakespeare plays were written specifically for Inns of Court entertainments, such as *The Comedy of Errors*, first staged during the 1594 Gray's Inn Christmas revels. Shakespeare's company, The Lord Chamberlain's Men, were performing a different play before the Queen at Greenwich at that time. Nothing about the plays requires that they could only have been written by Shakespeare, or by another actor in some public theatre.

— Peter Dawkins, M.A., Principal of the Francis Bacon Research Trust; and Trustee, Shakespearean Authorship Trust; Author, *The Shakespeare Enigma* (Polair Publishing)

## QUESTION 21: IN WHAT WAYS ARE THE PLAYS REVEALING ABOUT SHAKESPEARE'S KNOWLEDGE OF THEATRICAL PRACTICE?

*[Tina Packer, founder of Shakespeare & Company (1978), whose work crosses the States, and focuses equally on performance, education and training, replies for the SBT]*

As a theatrical poet, Shakespeare knew all about stagecraft. There are implied stage-directions within the speeches which help the actor to move. Volumnia speaks to her companions about her son, Coriolanus, 'He turns away. / Down ladies. Let us shame him with our knees.'

Music cues are integrated into the main action; music and its effects become part of Shakespeare's stories.

Nearly all of the plays can be performed with a company of around 14 people, and were adaptable for touring.

Plays allow for meaningful doubling of roles: the two brothers in Hamlet—Claudius and the Ghost of the brother he has murdered.

There is time for stage descents and for costume changes from the upper playing space.

And in the later plays, his writing draws on the resources of the new, smaller, indoor theatres like the one at Blackfriars which opened in 1608.

Shakespeare knew what it is to direct and to act, as well as to write.

### DOUBTER RESPONSE:

Nobody disputes the consummate stagecraft in the plays, but this is hardly an argument for the Stratford man. Do only professional actors understand practicalities of theatre? Every successful dramatist is familiar with theatrical practice, and most are not actors. All we can infer from the stage-worthiness of the plays is that whoever wrote them had firsthand knowledge of the theatre, and that he may well have known the main actors.

Tina Packer's statement that "music and its effects become part of Shakespeare's stories" suggests an author with musical training, as scholars have noted. It is even harder to explain how Shakespeare could have gotten musical training in Stratford than training in foreign languages like French, Italian and Greek; and of course both foreign languages and facility with music are most easily acquired while young, not later on in adulthood. Shakespeare's will mentions no musical instruments, nor any other intellectual property.

— *Bonner Miller Cutting, M.M., Independent Scholar; Board Member, Shakespeare Fellowship, and Shakespeare Authorship Coalition*

## QUESTION 22: AS AN ACTOR, WHAT IS YOUR SENSE OF SHAKESPEARE'S PERSONALITY?

*[Simon Callow, actor and writer, and performer in the one-man play Being Shakespeare, replies for the SBT]*

I think that as an actor you get a very clear sense of an author's personality and that of Shakespeare is above all open—open and receiving rather than judging or controlling. He allows his characters to have their own life, and he observes human life with absolute clarity, and some compassion.

It's exactly the opposite sensation that you get from, for example, acting in the plays of Ben Jonson, in which you have a strong sense of him controlling everything, judging everything, condemning everything, a hard,

intemperate personality. Shakespeare is all yielding, all experiencing, and nothing human is alien to him, and that's an extraordinarily warm and generous feeling.

#### **DOUBTER RESPONSE:**

The SBT often criticizes doubters for looking to the works for evidence of the author's identity, so it's odd that here they ask for an actor's "sense" of the author's personality. How is he to respond, except in terms of how he sees the author reflected in the works? Of course it's appropriate to look to the works, or they would not ask such a question.

Simon Callow's subjective response is fine, as far as it goes; but his is hardly the only possible answer, nor necessarily the most authoritative and insightful. Actors more experienced at playing Shakespeare, like Derek Jacobi or Mark Rylance, might see him differently. To get a scholarly, methodologically sound answer, one would have to do a legitimate study, with carefully selected actors and scholars, and a well designed set of questions. Unfortunately, the SBT does not appear at all interested. They already know what sort of answer they want, so one suitable response is all they need for their present purpose.

While it would, in fact, be interesting to do such a study to see what light it might shed on the sort of person who wrote all the works, it couldn't possibly provide any support for the Stratford man, because we know almost nothing about his personality anyway.

— *John Christian Plummer, Artistic Director, World's End Theatre; director of the version of Twelfth Night featured in the PBS documentary Shakespeare on the Hudson.*

#### **QUESTION 23: HOW DO YOU RESPOND AS AN ACTOR AND DIRECTOR TO THE SHAKESPEARE AUTHORSHIP CONSPIRACY THEORY?**

*[Janet Suzman, adequately trained in the classics, and who sees Shakespeare as a modern playwright (ref. her production of Othello in apartheid South Africa), replies for the SBT]*

I wonder why people think one must experience something to write about it. That's not what authors do. You don't have to be a king in order to play one. If we don't expect it of actors to have been something that they play, then why of the poet himself? It doesn't make any sense.

And then, you know, he's a surrealist, or a super-realist, his figures, his thoughts, his apperceptions about humanity are much larger than life. They may be true, but they're not exactly documentary realism. And documentary realism has nothing to do with this poet. He's out of that sphere.

He writes so much about appearance and reality—it's perhaps something that we should take on board, when you think of somebody who can't do that.

And then I don't understand why those people in that period might have stopped gossiping, human nature gossips all the time.

#### **DOUBTER RESPONSE:**

Authors write from their imaginations, but their imaginations are commonly based on their experiences. Eugene O'Neill, Tennessee Williams, Ibsen, Strindberg, Aphra Behn, Ben Jonson and Geoffrey Chaucer (to offer a few examples) drew on their life experiences. Shakespeare's plays reveal firsthand knowledge of the court, politics, military tactics, seamanship and foreign travels, suggesting an author very unlike the Stratford man.

A playwright need not have been a king, queen, courtier, soldier or sailor to write about them, but the most successful characterizations are those rooted in detailed observation. Actors need not know anything about the playwright; but when they do, the characters and other complex aspects are more easily fleshed out from the playwright's biography. Knowing that the author may have been close to kings and queens, and may have been to Italy and lived in Venice, grounds the actor's imagination in a more lifelike reality.

Shakespeare's "super-realism" is powerful because the poet is not cut off from reality.

His eloquent characterizations derive from a deep experience of life, which then soars. One gossips with one's peers. The young Shakespeare, newly arrived from Warwickshire, must have been a very upwardly mobile gossip to obtain the inside information found in certain relatively early plays, like *Love's Labour's Lost*, or *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Only one steeped in courtly ways—no mere gossip—might seem to be the true author of plays such as these, fanciful as they may be.

— Kristin Linklater, Professor of Theatre Arts, Columbia University School of the Arts

#### QUESTION 24: TO WHAT EXTENT CAN COLLABORATION BE IDENTIFIED IN THE SHAKESPEARE CANON?

[Gary Taylor, editor of the works of Shakespeare, and of Thomas Middleton, for Oxford University Press, replies for the SBT]

Shakespeare was a star, but he was also a team player. He formed temporary partnerships with other professional playwrights to work on specific projects. Elizabethan professions were normally based on an apprenticeship system, so at the beginning of his career Shakespeare worked with older, more experienced, better educated authors. For instance he teamed up with George Peele to write *Titus Andronicus*. Peele got the ball rolling; Shakespeare ran with it. At least three different writers got together to produce *Henry VI Part I*: Thomas Nashe, Christopher Marlowe and Shakespeare. When he got older, Shakespeare himself became the veteran, teaching his trade to promising younger men. He paired with Thomas Middleton on *Timon of Athens*, with George Wilkins on *Pericles*, with John Fletcher on *Cardenio*, *All is True* and *The Two Noble Kinsmen*. After his death, Shakespeare's company commissioned Thomas Middleton to update two of Shakespeare's plays: *Macbeth* and *Measure for Measure*. None of Shakespeare's plays is the product of an isolated genius.

#### DOUBTER RESPONSE:

Except for the 1634 edition of *The Two Noble Kinsmen*, published 18 years after William Shakespeare's death, there is no documentary or bibliographic evidence that Shakespeare ever collaborated with anyone.

The alleged evidence for collaboration is based on a wide variety of stylistic analyses, but the results routinely contradict each other. Over the past 100 years, as just one example, authorship attribution studies have 'proven' that *Edward III* was written by George Peele alone; by Christopher Marlowe with George Peele, Robert Greene, and Thomas Kyd; by Thomas Kyd alone; by Michael Drayton; by Robert Wilson; by William Shakespeare alone; by William Shakespeare and one unknown other; by William Shakespeare and Christopher Marlowe; by William Shakespeare and several others, excluding Marlowe; and most recently and very specifically by Thomas Kyd (60 percent) and William Shakespeare (40 percent).

There is no reliable evidence that Shakespeare "teamed up with George Peele" or with anyone else. Gary Taylor's statements are opinions, not facts.

— Ramon Jiménez, Author of two books about the Roman Republic, plus numerous authorship-related articles in *The Oxfordian* and *SO Newsletter*

— Robin Williams, President, *Mary Sidney Society*; doctoral candidate in English, Brunel University, London

## QUESTION 25: IS IT POSSIBLE THAT SHAKESPEARE COLLABORATED IN MINOR WAYS WITH OTHER AUTHORS?

[Eric Rasmussen, Chair of English at the University of Nevada, and co-editor with Jonathan Bate of the RSC Complete Works of Shakespeare, replies for the SBT]

We know from a wide body of evidence, related both to Shakespeare and to other theatre workers (notably the stable of playwrights that worked for Phillip Henslowe at the Rose Theatre), that drama was, as it remains, an essentially collaborative art form. Shakespeare was a frequent collaborator in the writing of scripts, especially at the beginning and the end of his career. Recent attribution studies have provided compelling evidence that Shakespeare got a toehold in the profession by contributing a few scenes to plays such as *Edward III* and *Arden of Faversham* in the early 1590s. Shakespeare then collaborated with George Peele on *Titus Andronicus*, with either Thomas Nashe or Thomas Kyd on *1 Henry VI*, with Thomas Middleton on *Timon of Athens*, and with George Wilkins on *Pericles*. He later passed the baton of principal dramatist for the King's Men to John Fletcher by collaborating with the younger playwright on *Henry VIII*, *The Two Noble Kinsmen*, and the lost *Cardenio*.

### DOUBTER RESPONSE:

Henslowe's *Diary* (mentioned obliquely above) is a 17-year record of plays performed and payments made, in which 28 playwrights are mentioned by name. Although the titles of several Shakespearean plays are included in the *Diary*, Shakespeare's own name does not appear in any of the collaborations by two or more playwrights. In fact, Shakespeare's name is never mentioned in Henslowe's *Diary*, nor in any other document related to playwriting. This suggests he worked alone, outside the well-known fraternity of Elizabethan playwrights.

The term "collaboration" implies, as Rasmussen wishes it to imply, that Shakespeare actively worked with other writers. Rasmussen neglects to mention that attribution studies provide theories based on stylistic interpretations, not facts—not one scrap of documentary evidence that Shakespeare actively worked with a writing partner has ever been found.

Although there are clear signs of interpolations in several plays, it was an easy task in the theatre for someone to add text to any play at a later date. The version of Christopher Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus* printed in 1616 is almost a third longer than the version printed in 1604. If Marlowe had been alive at the time, it would now be called a collaboration—but the records tell us that Marlowe had been dead 23 years when the 1616 version appeared. This is but one example to illustrate that what is assertively called "collaboration" does not prove that every collaboration is a result of writers sitting in a room together writing a play.

— Ramon Jiménez, Author of two books about the Roman Republic, plus numerous authorship-related articles in *The Oxfordian* and *SO Newsletter*

— Robin Williams, President, *Mary Sidney Society*; doctoral candidate in English, Brunel University, London

## QUESTION 26: WAS COLLABORATION COMMON IN SHAKESPEARE'S TIME?

[Peter Kirwan, tutor, blogger and researcher, and who has undertaken doctoral work at the University of Warwick on plays of disputed authorship, replies for the SBT]

Collaboration was arguably the default form of writing in the early theatre. Our best source, Philip Henslowe's diary, gives us a snapshot of several decades in which nearly two thirds of plays had multiple authors.

Shakespeare's contemporary, Thomas Heywood, claimed to have a finger in over 200 plays; and all of the major writers—including Jonson and Marlowe— worked with others.

It's not just about words, though. Anthony Munday was known as "the best plotter" of the day. Some writers specialised in stories, others patched up dialogue or worked out backstage practicalities. The manuscript of *Thomas More*, with some seven different hands, shows us the range of collaborations.

We know that the plays of Shakespeare were performed, and we also know that the sheer number of collaborators involved in creating plays meant that they were inherently social productions.

The idea of a single artistic mind presiding over a whole body of work is at odds with the very nature of professional theatre.

#### DOUBTER RESPONSE:

Collaboration may have been common with some playwrights, but this in itself does not prove that any other writer collaborated with—or even met—the man William Shakespeare.

Peter Kirwan (above) mentions that almost two-thirds of the payments recorded in Henslowe's *Diary* are for collaborations. The *Diary* records 282 plays; almost two-thirds is about 180. But Henslowe's *Diary* is a record of only one of at least seven playhouses active during the time—we know the names of more than 1500 plays (there is evidence of more than 3000 plays produced on stage during Shakespeare's life); of these 1500, only about one-eighth are known collaborations. This does not prove anything one way or another except that the emphasis on collaboration is perhaps misplaced, or has another agenda.

How odd that we acknowledge Shakespeare's genius as towering high above every other author; that his works are different from all others, such that we can pick out scenes, even individual lines, that he did not write because they do not have that Golden Touch; that he alone is master of this medium, to the extent that we don't even hold him to the same standards of other authors as far as documentary evidence. Yet suddenly, in this area of collaboration, Shakespeare is as common as every hack writer of the Elizabethan age. What is really going on here?

— Ramon Jiménez, *Author of two books about the Roman Republic, plus numerous authorship-related articles in The Oxfordian and SO Newsletter*

— Robin Williams, *President, Mary Sidney Society; doctoral candidate in English, Brunel University, London*

#### QUESTION 27: WHAT METHODS ARE USED TO FIND EVIDENCE OF MULTIPLE AUTHORSHIP IN SHAKESPEARE'S PLAYS?

[MacDonald (Mac) Jackson, *Professor Emeritus of English at the University of Auckland, and a Fellow of the Royal Society of New Zealand, replies for the SBT*]

Shakespeare and his fellow playwrights all had different styles. Their verse, vocabulary, grammar, sentence structure, imagery, phrasing and ideas can be analysed, and specific features counted in order to identify their contributions to a play. In *The Two Noble Kinsmen*, published as by Shakespeare and Fletcher, even trivial details help distinguish the two men's shares. Unlike Shakespeare, Fletcher prefers "ye" to "you" and avoids old fashioned "hath" and "doth". Fletcher adds an extra unstressed syllable to the end of a verse line far more often than Shakespeare.

From numerous such preferences, evident in plays written alone, we build up distinct authorial profiles.



## DOUBTER RESPONSE:

As Jiménez points out ([Question 24](#)), we have documentary evidence in the 1634 publication of *The Two Noble Kinsmen* that it is co-authored by John Fletcher and William Shakespeare (albeit 18 years after Mr. Shaksper's death). Even on that score, one should keep in mind that several plays were issued with title pages erroneously identifying the author as Shakespeare. The attribution to "Fletcher and Shakespeare" is not necessarily accurate. There is no other evidence that the two authors collaborated. Whether they ever met and actively collaborated, we cannot know.

There is no such documentation for any of the other alleged Shakespeare collaborations. Attribution studies are notoriously unreliable and consistently contradict each other. In the absence of documentary evidence, the validity of attribution studies is uncertain.

Although the studies can help to pinpoint differences in styles, and it is easily acknowledged that there are clear interpolations in several plays, it is not at all certain that a collaborator/interpolator/editor knew the original author personally. Plays may be started and completed by different authors working independently; they can be written by one and revised by another; they can be completed and revised posthumously; what appears to be collaboration can be an author revising his own early works.

The more that scholars claim collaboration, the harder it is to explain the absence of documentary evidence such as letters, especially at times when Mr. Shaksper was in Stratford—collaboration requires correspondence. We have letters and documents for other writers—why not for the greatest of them all?

— Ramon Jiménez, *Author of two books about the Roman Republic, plus numerous authorship-related articles in The Oxfordian and SO Newsletter*

— Robin Williams, *President, Mary Sidney Society; doctoral candidate in English, Brunel University, London*

## QUESTION 28: DOES SHAKESPEARE'S DRAMATIC VERSE SEEM TO BE DIFFERENT FROM MARLOWE'S?

*[Antony Sher, South African-born British actor, writer, theatre director and painter, who has played many roles by Shakespeare and his contemporaries, replies for the SBT]*

As an actor, you get to taste the language of different playwrights—taste it, literally, in the mouth. Shakespeare is full of subtle, complex, delicate flavours; Marlowe is rougher, more raw. And then there's their use of the iambic pentameter. Marlowe's mighty lines have a thumping regularity to them. Shakespeare is like a master jazz musician, both keeping to the beat and jamming round it. So to those people who suggest that Marlowe wasn't killed, but went on to write all of Shakespeare, I believe it's simply impossible. Shakespeare couldn't be Marlowe—or anyone else.

## DOUBTER RESPONSE:

Antony Sher won praise for his portrayal of Tamburlaine, but we know of no other Marlowe character he has played. Appearing as Marlowe's Faustus, Barabas and Mortimer (whose successors, Prospero, Shylock and Gloucester he *has* played) might have shown him how far Marlowe progressed in his short lifetime away from the "high astounding terms" of Tamburlaine. Also, according to orthodox chronologies, the Leontes and Prospero characters Sher played were written over twenty years after Tamburlaine (long enough for his style to have changed far more than that), a fact his comparison ignores.

The general move away from regular iambic pentameter (characterized by a strict ten syllables and unavoidable pause at the end of each line) to a style which "jazzed up" the rhythm, started with Marlowe and continued

throughout “Shakespeare’s” career. For example, the plays normally attributed to Marlowe average about 13 feminine endings (an 11<sup>th</sup> syllable) and run-on lines (no pause), for every 100 lines of verse. Following Marlowe’s, those Shakespeare plays mentioned by Francis Meres in 1598 doubled that, at an average frequency of 26 such incidences, whereas Shakespeare’s last ten plays had a massive 63 per 100 lines on average. The overall trend of the Marlowe and Shakespeare plays year by year is remarkably smooth, displaying the evolution one would expect from a single, gifted, writer. That Marlowe has been called “the herald of Shakespeare,” his “teacher and guide,” and that Shakespeare “imitated” and “emulated” Marlowe’s work is very understandable.

Given this, and the fact that great artists often change significantly over time (Mozart, Picasso, Henry James), wouldn’t it be quite astonishing if those roles hadn’t “tasted” very different, even if they were written by the same man?

— Ros Barber, Ph.D. (*English Literature*), poet and author of *The Marlowe Papers* (Sceptre 2012)—a verse novel written entirely in iambic pentameter.

## QUESTION 29: DID SHAKESPEARE HAVE AN ARISTOCRATIC PATRON?

[Michael Holroyd, biographer and former President of *The Royal Society of Literature*, replies for the SBT]

Shakespeare had a romantic view of the aristocracy. They seemed to inhabit an altogether different world from his own. The obsequious dedications he wrote to his patron, the Earl of Southampton, for his narrative poems have disturbed some of his admirers (especially when compared with Webster’s dedication of *The Duchess of Malfi* to Baron Berkeley—“I do not altogether look up to your title”). But there was calculation as well as deference in Shakespeare’s “well-sugared” words. It was rumoured he had been given money by Southampton to join the Chamberlain’s Men, and he received 44 shillings in gold for designing the impresa which the Earl of Rutland wore in the annual Accession Tilt at Whitehall. Though he appears to have regretted crooking “the pregnant hinges of the knee” for aristocratic patronage, his posthumous First Folio was dedicated to the Earls of Pembroke and Montgomery.

### DOUBTER RESPONSE:

There’s no evidence that Shakespeare had a patron, or that Shakspeare had one either.

Notice that Michael Holroyd never gives a direct answer. If he had to prove Shakespeare had a patron, he couldn’t; so he talks about the aristocracy and Shakespeare’s dedications to Southampton instead, plus a mere “rumor” that Southampton once gave him money to join the Chamberlain’s Men. He simply assumes that Southampton was Shakespeare’s patron, even though there’s no document that proves he was. Southampton biographer Charlotte Stopes spent years trying to find evidence of a relationship in Southampton’s voluminous personal papers, and failed. Subsequent biographers have fared no better.

The only “evidence” for the supposed relationship is the two dedications; but they are not evidence so much as the basis for an inference based in turn on an assumption that the author of the dedications, “William Shakespeare,” was, indeed, the Stratford Man, not the pen name of someone else to whom Southampton was not a patron but a friend.

It’s unclear what point Holroyd is trying to make in his last sentence. Is he suggesting that Shakspeare had something to do with dedicating the First Folio to Pembroke and Montgomery? Seven years after he died is a bit late to be flattering potential patrons. More likely the First Folio dedication was due to political considerations at that time.

— A. J. (Tony) Pointon, Emeritus Professor, former Director of Research, University of Portsmouth, England; Author, *The Man who was Never Shakespeare*, Parapress, 2011.

### QUESTION 30: WHAT WAS THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE ARISTOCRACY AND THE THEATRE IN SHAKESPEARE'S TIME?

[Farah Karim-Cooper, *Head of Research & Courses, Globe Education, replies for the SBT*]

The aristocracy was very important to Elizabethan theatre, not least because the theatre companies needed influential members of the court and government to advocate for them against the city authorities, who were opposed to the commercial repertory companies. For example, the Shakespeare company patron, Henry Carey, wrote to the Lord Mayor of London in October 1594 to ask if the theatre company could perform within the city walls (which was prohibited at the time).

Acting was not a highly respected trade when the theatres first opened in the 1570s, so the patronage system was crucial for the theatrical profession as a whole. To have the financial and ideological support of influential members of the Elizabethan aristocracy would ensure that the profession of theatre would thrive. Many playwrights and poets would formally recognise their patrons in print through dedications.

Shakespeare was supported not only by the Lord Chamberlain, patron of his theatre company, and later in 1603 King James I, but his gifts as a poet were recognised early in his career by the Earl of Southampton, whose name as dedicatee is on Shakespeare's first publications, *Venus and Adonis* (1593) and *The Rape of Lucrece* (1594).

#### DOUBTER RESPONSE:

Yes, the aristocracy was very important to Elizabethan theatre. What does this have to do with the question of authorship? Henry Carey, Lord Hunsdon—a close associate of my famous ancestor, William Cecil, the first Lord Burghley—was indeed the patron of the Lord Chamberlain's Men, renamed the "King's Men" early in the reign of James I. There was nothing unusual in this. Each theatre company needed a sponsor to function. But sponsorship did not necessarily entail "patronage" in the sense of financial support.

Similarly, the fact that a poet or playwright dedicated a work to a prominent nobleman did not necessarily mean that the nobleman was the writer's patron, or even necessarily that the writer was seeking patronage. Thus, the fact that "Shakespeare" dedicated both *Venus & Adonis* and *Lucrece* to the Earl of Southampton proves nothing, in and of itself. If, in fact, Southampton was Shakespeare's patron, there should be clear evidence for it. There is none—no documentary evidence that Shakespeare ever met Southampton, or that he ever received any payment or patronage from the Earl, and certainly none that, as Karim-Cooper claims, Southampton recognized his gifts as a poet early in his career.

Farah Karim-Cooper is correct in claiming that "Many playwrights and poets would formally recognise their patrons in print through dedications." But does it not strike her and her SBT colleagues as odd that Shakespeare never dedicated a play to anyone, and that the only epistle to one of his plays (*Troilus and Cressida*) was written by some other person? Why would a poet-playwright motivated by profit, as they say Shakespeare was, never seek patronage again after dedicating the two early narrative poems to Southampton? One could hypothesize that he needed no other patron, but there's no evidence of this. Orthodox Shakespeare scholars should acknowledge what they do not know for sure.

— Michael Cecil, Baron Burghley, Marquess of Exeter

### QUESTION 3I: HOW HAS THE SHAKESPEARE AUTHORSHIP DISCUSSION BEEN PRESENTED IN FICTION?

[Paul Franssen, lecturer in English Literature at Utrecht University, the Netherlands, replies for the SBT]

Apart from scholarship, Anti-Stratfordians have also produced fiction about the authorship question. Some of these works focus on the preferred candidate—Bacon or Oxford—and suggest that the name “Shake-speare” was just his pseudonym. But sometimes Shakespeare does exist, as the real author’s front man. Then he is usually portrayed as a country bumpkin, without any talent or manners, and Stratford as the back of beyond. That Shakespeare’s father was a respectable tradesman, and Stratford’s former mayor; that the town boasted a good grammar school; those inconvenient facts are ignored. The reason is obvious: the entire anti-Stratfordian case rests on the assumption that the Man from Stratford could not possibly have had the knowledge needed to write his plays, that only an aristocrat could have done so. To make this scenario look more likely, Shakespeare is ridiculed as an ignoramus, and facts that suggest otherwise are swept underneath the carpet.

#### DOUBTER RESPONSE:

Paul Franssen says that “the entire anti-Stratfordian case rests on the assumption that the Man from Stratford could not possibly have had the knowledge needed to write his plays.” No, this is not our position. As stated in our response to [Question 5](#), the issue is “not” that a commoner, “even in the rigid, hierarchical social structure of Elizabethan England, could not have managed to do it somehow; but how could it have happened without leaving a single trace?” Also, “it would have been a remarkable achievement, and should have been much commented upon at the time... That is not what one finds.”

Franssen only addresses fictional works by authorship doubters, not by Stratfordians. He does not mention, for example, the fictional so-called biography, *Will in the World*, by Harvard English Professor Stephen Greenblatt. The book begins, “Let us imagine,” and Greenblatt admits that it is not a work of biography, but of his personal fantasies. He was criticized for this by his colleague, James Shapiro, in his book, *Contested Will*, and ridiculed by perhaps our best living English Renaissance scholar, Alastair Fowler.

Greenblatt slipped up in 2004, committing an uncharacteristic act of candour, reported in [an article in Harvard Alumni Magazine \(Sept-Oct, 2004\)](#). Referring to the authorship controversy, Professor Greenblatt said:

“... the process of writing the book ... has made me respect that preposterous fantasy, if I may say so, rather more than when I began ... because I have now taken several years of hard work and 40 years of serious academic training to grapple with the difficulty of making the connections meaningful and compelling between the life of this writer and the works that he produced.”

Greenblatt found it “difficult” to make meaningful connections between the writer and the works! This is our point, and the reason why so many people have expressed doubt. Yet despite this insight, a year later Greenblatt wrote as follows in a letter to the editor of the *New York Times*:

“The idea that William Shakespeare’s authorship... is a matter of conjecture, and the idea that the ‘authorship controversy’ should be taught in the classroom are the exact equivalent of current arguments that ‘intelligent design’ be taught alongside evolution.

“In both cases an overwhelming... consensus, based on a serious assessment of hard evidence, is challenged by passionately held fantasies whose adherents demand equal time. The demand seems harmless enough until one reflects on its implications. Should claims that the Holocaust did not occur also be made part of the standard curriculum?”

Now *that* is fiction! An “overwhelming consensus”? Two years later, on April 22, 2007, the *Times* reported the results of a [survey](#) it conducted among Shakespeare professors in the U.S. Eighty-two percent said that there is “no good reason” to question whether William Shakespeare of Stratford-on-Avon was the principal author of the poems and plays attributed to him; but 6% said that there is “good reason,” and an additional 11% said there is “possibly good reason.” One would not find that 17% of biology professors harbour doubts about evolution, or that 17% of history professors doubt the Holocaust. But one does find that 17% of U.S. Shakespeare professors have doubts about the Bard.

Doubters are in the minority, but not such a small minority that they should be ignored, or prohibited from teaching their students about the issue, as Prof. Greenblatt suggests.

In fact, nearly every biography of Shakespeare should be considered a work of fiction. Orthodox Shakespeare scholars have the wrong man, as seen in the seemingly endless stream of fanciful so-called biographies, trying to put flesh on the bones of what Mark Twain termed “a brontosaurus—nine bones and six hundred barrels of plaster of Paris.”

— *John M. Shahan, Chairman and CEO, Shakespeare Authorship Coalition*

— *Dr. Kurt Kreiler, Author of Anonymous SHAKE-SPEARE: The Man Behind*

### QUESTION 32: ARE THERE ANY OTHER WRITERS WHOSE AUTHORSHIP IS QUESTIONED?

*[Martin Wiggins, Senior Lecturer and Fellow at The Shakespeare Institute, University of Birmingham, replies for the SBT]*

In 1647, The King’s Men—the acting company which owned and performed the plays of Shakespeare—published a collection of plays by their other great authorial brand, Francis Beaumont and John Fletcher. The book contained plays by Beaumont and Fletcher, plays by Beaumont writing on his own, and Fletcher on his own, and it contained plays written by neither. Many plays of this period were published with no author’s name on the title pages, but Shakespeare’s plays were probably not among them.

In 1599, or thereabouts, there appeared *The Passionate Pilgrim*, a collection of poems with Shakespeare’s name on the title page. But according to the playwright Thomas Heywood, Shakespeare was ‘much offended’ with the publisher ‘that altogether unknown to him presumed to make so bold with his name.’ The King’s Men may not have cared very much about dramatic authorship later in the seventeenth century, but Shakespeare cared, and Shakespeare was really careful.

### DOUBTER RESPONSE:

Martin Wiggins ignores the question, to which the answer is “many.” But it is not very relevant to the question of authorship. Wiggins’ point that “The King’s Men may not have cared much about dramatic authorship ... in the seventeenth century, but Shakespeare cared” is interesting because, contrary to what he says, the opposite is true, as he should know.

Frank Arthur Mumby, a leading expert on publishing history, wrote “it is a remarkable fact that not only were all his plays published without the slightest sign of interest on his part, but his Sonnets as well...” Mr. Shakspeare is regarded by historians as having been litigious in his business dealings, but strangely not when it came to his poems and plays. E.K. Chambers observed, not without astonishment, that other writers “were far from adopting Shakespeare’s attitude of detachment from the literary fate of his works.”

— *Robert Detobel, Co-editor of the German Neues Shake-speare Journal*

### QUESTION 33: WHAT KIND OF AUTHORITY IS THE 1623 FOLIO COLLECTION OF SHAKESPEARE'S PLAYS?

*[David Bevington, Phyllis Fay Horton Distinguished Service Professor Emeritus in the Humanities at the University of Chicago, replies for the SBT]*

The 1623 Folio edition of Shakespeare's plays, published seven years after he died, is an extraordinarily important authority in establishing what he wrote. Approximately half of the plays it contains, including *Macbeth*, *Antony and Cleopatra* and *The Tempest*, had not been published prior to 1623 and might otherwise be lost to us. The lists of plays corresponds to many other pieces of evidence as to what plays were his. The editors, John Heminges and Henry Condell, Shakespeare's long time colleagues in the King's acting company, had access to drafts and scripts of the plays that had been used in production. They prefaced it with tributes from prominent intellectuals and writers, notably Ben Jonson, who publicly proclaimed in the Folio volume that he regarded Shakespeare as a genius of tragedy equal to Sophocles, Euripides and Aeschylus, and the greatest writer of comedy the world had ever seen. This is stirring praise indeed, coming from a man of such fierce intellectual integrity. That Ben Jonson, and so many others, could have been bamboozled into praising Shakespeare if the plays were not his, or would have consented to a widespread conspiracy to perpetuate a lie about the authorship, is simply inconceivable.

#### DOUBTER RESPONSE:

We agree with the first 80 per cent of what David Bevington says about the significance of the First Folio. Ben Jonson, however, was not "bamboozled." He praised Shakespeare and rightly so. The plays were his, appearing as by William Shakespeare, just as the works of Mark Twain were his and appeared under his pen name. The authorship question is whether "William Shakespeare" was a pen name. Note that nothing in the First Folio clearly and unambiguously attributes the plays to Shakspere of Stratford-upon-Avon.

There is no evidence of a "widespread conspiracy to perpetuate a lie." Doubters make no such claim, and no "widespread" conspiracy would have been required. This is an assumption that Stratfordians impose on doubters for the sake of argument. If a writer uses a pseudonym, does this mean that he, his family, friends and publisher are part of a "widespread conspiracy" to conceal his identity? What is "widespread"? There is little evidence that people knew who the author Shakespeare was in the first place.

However the claim that actors Heminges and Condell wrote the introductory material in the First Folio, or edited the plays, was shown to be false by George Steevens in 1770. His conclusion has been accepted by most Shakespeare scholars ever since. Would they and Ben Jonson have helped to perpetuate a myth for some good reason? Probably yes. We know that this claim by the two actors is false. Why assume everything else is true?

— *Richard Whalen, Past President, Shakespeare Oxford Society; author of numerous research articles and book reviews in Oxfordian publications over nearly two decades*

### QUESTION 34: THE 1623 FOLIO INCLUDES POEMS IN PRAISE OF SHAKESPEARE BY OTHER WRITERS. DO THESE SUPPORT SHAKESPEARE'S AUTHORSHIP OF THE WORKS?

*[Ewan Fernie, Professor of Shakespeare Studies at The Shakespeare Institute, University of Birmingham, Stratford-upon-Avon, replies for the SBT]*

The poems in praise of Shakespeare from the 1623 *Folio* couldn't do more to point at the man behind, and, indeed, in the work.

Ben Jonson first meditates on the engraving of Shakespeare on the facing page, insisting a better likeness—the lively figure of his wit—is revealed not in ‘his picture, but his book’.

In their ‘Epistle to the Great Variety of Readers,’ Shakespeare’s fellow actors, Heminge and Condell, speak of the care and pain they have taken to present Shakespeare’s writings to the world ‘as he conceived them’. And they, too, imagine Shakespeare’s works as a triumph over death.

The consolation and joy in Jonson’s chattier [!] poem to the memory of his ‘beloved, the Author’ also derives from the continued life his friend enjoys in print, shaking a lance ‘as brandish’t at the eyes of ignorance’.

‘Shake a lance’ is a pun on Shakespeare of course. The ‘eyes of ignorance,’ unsuspected by Jonson, are those who dare to doubt he wrote the plays.

#### DOUBTER RESPONSE:

The poems in the First Folio praising Shakespeare do not point unambiguously to the man Fernie accepts as the dramatist. As was often the case in Elizabethan-Jacobean times, the poems about the author are ambiguous, and cannot be taken at face value. Ben Jonson was a “master” of ambiguity, as noted by Annabel Patterson of Yale and Leah Marcus of Vanderbilt—both well-respected English Renaissance scholars—and by Jonson’s biographer, David Riggs of Stanford.

Even the references to “Stratford” and “Avon” are found on two different pages. Other than these two brief allusions, neither Ben Jonson nor Leonard Digges provides any identifying information—not his dates of birth and death, or names of any family members, nor any revealing episode from his life. Short on individualizing facts, they gave us generalized superlatives that describe the author, but nowhere is the man. If the Folio “couldn’t do more,” where is the coat of arms that Shakspeare was so proud of?

Ewan Fernie’s claim that the Folio “couldn’t do more” is belied by the fact that Shakspeare’s home town is identified only via widely separated allusions that one must combine by putting “Sweet swan of Avon” together with “time dissolves thy Stratford moniment.” To get the town, the words get reversed, hyphens get added, and also the word “upon.” “Stratford-upon-Avon” does not appear. If he was from Stratford, why not just say so?

— *Richard Whalen, Past President, Shakespeare Oxford Society; author of numerous research articles and book reviews in Oxfordian publications over nearly two decades*

#### QUESTION 35: DOES SHAKESPEARE’S WILL SHED ANY LIGHT ON HIS PROFESSIONAL PRACTICE?

*[Mairi Macdonald, former Head of Local Collections at the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust, and contributor to The New Dictionary of National Biography and the Oxford Companion to Shakespeare, replies for the SBT]*

Shakespeare’s will contains virtually no references to his theatrical life in London. He describes himself as ‘William Shackspeare of Stratford-upon-Avon... gent’, and the only direct reference to the capital is to the Blackfriars property, part of the extensive real estate left to Susanna. With hindsight, we know that ‘my ffellowes John Hemyngees, Rychard Burbage & Henry Cundell,’ to whom he left 26s 8d each for a mourning ring, were professional colleagues; but intriguingly their legacies are a belated insertion in the middle of purely local remembrances. More relevant to an idea of his theatrical life would have been mention of his theatre shareholding, but shares and leases were regarded as personal estate and would have been recorded in the inventory of Shakespeare’s moveable property taken after his death. This, sadly, does not survive; and we are left, in his will, with virtually no evidence of his professional life or practice.

## DOUBTER RESPONSE:

Mairi Macdonald is correct in saying that Shakspere's will "contains virtually no reference to his theatrical life in London." She might have thought from that alone that there is reason to doubt he was the author. Actually it contains no references whatsoever to theatrical life: no costumes, no theatrical memorabilia, no bequests to apprentices. Only the monetary gift to fellow actors Heminges, Burbage and Condell "to buy them rings," and she acknowledges that this was an interlineation. It's odd that Shakspere the actor only remembered his fellow actors as an afterthought, and then with nothing special.

But since he was an actor, how does Shakspere's will compare to those of other actors? *Playhouse Wills*, edited by E.A.J. Honigmann and Susan Brock, sheds light on that question. Thomas Pope, Augustine Phillips, John Underwood, John Shank, Henry Condell and John Heminges all bequeathed shares in the premises of the theatres and/or shares in the theatrical proceeds in the main bodies of their wills—where such valuable assets belong. If Shakspere owned theatre shares, they should have been in the body of his will, too.

The assertion that "shares and leases were regarded as personal estate and would have been recorded in the inventory of Shakespeare's moveable property... after his death" is wrong. Personal property appears in the main body of wills of testators of all occupations. Only appraised values of items are usually listed in inventories. The missing inventory is a handy device for explaining away missing property one would expect in the will of a literary man, and Stratfordians resort to it often; but it doesn't explain as much as they would like to think.

— *Bonner Miller Cutting, M.M., Independent Scholar; Board Member, Shakespeare Fellowship, and Shakespeare Authorship Coalition*

## QUESTION 36: IS IT SUSPICIOUS THAT NO BOOKS ARE MENTIONED IN SHAKESPEARE'S WILL?

[*Diana Owen, Director of The Shakespeare Birthplace Trust, replies for the SBT*]

Books were not often mentioned in wills; they might have been listed in inventories. Sadly, the inventory of Shakespeare's possessions doesn't survive. Those of his possessions that are not named as bequests were inherited by his daughter and son-in-law, Susannah and John Hall; and in John Hall's 1635 will, he bequeathed what he called a 'study of books' to his son-in-law, Thomas Nashe, 'to dispose of them as you see good.'

In 1637 the study of New Place (Shakespeare's home) was broken into as part of a legal dispute, and 'divers books' and 'other goods of great value' were taken away.

In the collections of The Shakespeare Birthplace Trust are two books which might have belonged to Shakespeare. One is Plutarch's *Lives of the Noble Grecians and Romans* of 1579. Our copy belonged to Lord Strange, 5<sup>th</sup> Earl of Derby, whose company of actors performed some of Shakespeare's early works. Perhaps this is the very copy that Shakespeare used to write his Roman plays. In 1643, Queen Henrietta Maria (whose husband Charles I loved Shakespeare) visited Stratford and was given the life of Katherine de Medici [sic] by Susannah Hall, possibly from her late father's own library.

## DOUBTER RESPONSE:

All the conjectures ("might have," "perhaps," "possibly") do not mitigate the fact that no books are mentioned in the will. Then as now, testators made specific bequests of their most precious possessions; thus the absence of books, at the very least, is an indication that books were not important to this person.



There is also no mention of any bookshelves, cabinets or cases that could contain books, tables or desks on which to write or study from books, manuscripts, papers, correspondence, maps, musical instruments—nothing suggesting in any way that this was a writer. This is surprising, and contrary to our expectation of a profoundly learned individual associated with the creation of the Shakespeare canon.

It is indeed surprising that no books appear in this will in light of the sheer number, and also the rarity of many of the books used as sources in the plays. Many were expensive, leather-bound books. It is highly unlikely that such prized items would have been relegated to an inventory, something usually prepared by neighbours. If so, they would have been listed with livestock, crops, and mundane household items.

Moreover, there is no bequest for the education of anyone! He left bequests for five minor children, but never suggested that the money be used for their education, even though it was common to do so. He had a sizable estate, but left no money to educate anyone in Stratford. He made no bequests to the town grammar school, allegedly the source of the education that enabled him to write the Shakespeare canon; this at a time when ordinary people left bequests to educate others in their community. In fact, the early 17<sup>th</sup> century reached a high point in philanthropic giving in England. (*When Death Do Us Part*, Arkell, ed). Yet Shakespeare, of all people, was an exception? The SBT should stop pretending that the only problem with the will is the absence of books.

— *Bonner Miller Cutting, M.M., Independent Scholar; Board Member, Shakespeare Fellowship, and Shakespeare Authorship Coalition*

### QUESTION 37: HOW WAS SHAKESPEARE COMMEMORATED ON HIS DEATH?

[*Peter Kyle, Chairman of the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust, Director General of the English-Speaking Union, and former Chief Executive of Shakespeare's Globe, replies for the SBT*]

Shakespeare was commemorated on his death in 1616 by a fine monument which was erected in Holy Trinity Church. It carries inscriptions praising him as a writer comparable to great figures of antiquity. The Dutch-born sculptor, Gerard Janssen, had a workshop in Southwark, near The Globe Theatre, and produced the stone effigy for Shakespeare's Stratford friend, John Coombe, for Holy Trinity Church in 1614.

The First Folio of 1623 is itself a great memorial to Shakespeare made possible by his friends and fellow actors John Heminges and Henry Condell. Shakespeare had left money to both of them to buy mourning rings.

At the front of the First Folio Heminges and Condell write a touching letter to Shakespeare's 'Great Variety of Readers'. There are commendatory poems from the writers Ben Jonson, Hugh Holland, Leonard Digges, and James Mabbe. In an edition of Shakespeare's poems in 1640, there is an elegy by William Basse of which there are also many early manuscript versions, one of them headed 'On William Shakespeare, buried at Stratford-upon-Avon, his town of nativity.'

### DOUBTER RESPONSE:

"Shakespeare," the author, was not commemorated on the death of Mr. Shaksper in 1616. Contrary to what Peter Kyle says, the death of the Stratford man went unnoticed until 1623. The plain slab under which he is said to have been buried does not even carry his name. If he was the author, he should have been eulogized and buried in Westminster Abbey. That would have been a suitable commemoration, but nothing like it happened. The earliest reference to Shaksper's monument is in 1623, not in 1616 as Kyle implies. There is no evidence at all that it was built in 1616, or that anyone saw it prior to 1623.

According to antiquarian William Dugdale, the original effigy at Holy Trinity Church depicted a man with a

drooping moustache clutching a sack of wool or grain to his belly, likely a businessman, with no pen, no paper, no writing surface as in today's monument. This is what Dugdale drew during his 1634 visit to Stratford, and what Hollar engraved for Dugdale's *Antiquities of Warwickshire* (1656). Records show that the monument was repaired and "beautified" several times in the 1700s. So yes, today's effigy clearly does depict a writer—with pen, and paper, and a pillow (of all things!) as a writing surface.

The inscription never specifically says that it is a monument to the writer Shakespeare. To anyone living in Stratford who may have known the man, the epitaph could appear to say no such thing. It neither names, nor quotes from, any of the works, and it never mentions poetry, plays, acting or theatre. Shakespeare's biographers often ignore the epitaph. Epitaphs of other writers of the time identify them clearly as writers; why not Shakespeare's epitaph?

No document says that actors Heminges and Condell "made possible" the First Folio. They were not men of letters, or editors capable of undertaking a publishing project. Ben Jonson was qualified, having published his own folio in 1616. Most scholars have long thought that Jonson probably wrote the epistles signed by Heminges and Condell.

The elegy that Peter Kyle says was by William Basse was not by him. It first appeared in 1633 in a posthumous volume of poems by John Donne, where it is attributed to him. It was entitled "An Epitaph upon Shakespeare," and said nothing about Basse or birth and death in Stratford. Basse didn't include the poem in either of two anthologies of his own poems, probably because it wasn't his. Three dozen manuscript copies of the poem have turned up, but only eight have titles mentioning Stratford, or death in 1616. None indicates who added these references to Stratford, or to his burial in Stratford in 1616. They were likely added to the eight copies after 1633, almost two decades after he died.

— *Richard Whalen, Past President, Shakespeare Oxford Society; author of numerous research articles and book reviews in Oxfordian publications over nearly two decades*

### QUESTION 38: DOES THE MEMORIAL BUST OF SHAKESPEARE TELL US ANYTHING ABOUT HIS PROFESSION?

*[Paul Edmondson, Head of Research and Knowledge for The Shakespeare Birthplace Trust, co-author (with Stanley Wells) of Shakespeare's Sonnets, and a priest in The Church of England, replies for the SBT]*

A memorial bust for Shakespeare was erected in Holy Trinity Church, Stratford-upon-Avon, between his death in 1616, and 1623, when Leonard Digges refers to it as Shakespeare's 'Stratford monument' in a poem at the front of the First Folio.

The bust was installed during the lifetime of his widow, two daughters, and his son-in-law. Anne Shakespeare died in 1623.

Its inscription starts with two lines in Latin, comparing Shakespeare with famous classical writers: calling him 'a Socrates' in mind (after the Greek philosopher) and 'a Virgil in art' (after the Roman poet).

In English we go on to read that 'all that he hath writ, leaves living art but page to serve his wit.' Shakespeare is here honoured as a great writer. 'Living art' refers to his work as a dramatist, and the image of a page serving him is also a pun on the page of a book.

The monument and its inscription were presumably approved by the vicar, the surviving members of Shakespeare's family, and many townspeople who had known Shakespeare.

## DOUBTER RESPONSE:

At least Paul Edmondson doesn't say that "Shakespeare was commemorated on his death in 1616 by a fine monument...", as Peter Kyle does. Rather, he says that it was "erected... between his death in 1616, and 1623," when it's referred to in the First Folio. Okay so far. But then he claims that the "bust" was installed "during the lifetime of his widow... Anne Shakespeare died in 1623." This is sheer speculation. We do not know exactly when the monument was built, or precisely when Anne Shakspere died, either. The Folio was published in December, 1623, although its printing began a year earlier.

Nor does anything show that the vicar, surviving family members, or any townspeople approved the monument, as Edmondson asserts we may presume. It is all supposition. There is no record of anyone in Stratford saying they thought Shakspere was a writer, and no record of his family, the vicar or townspeople objecting to the sack-holder bust.

The monument's inscription is rarely quoted, probably because it seems too weak and laconic for the greatest poet-playwright of the time (or its implications too dangerous!). The lines in Latin liken the author to Nestor, Socrates and Virgil in terms of judgement, genius and art, respectively. Nestor was a counsellor in the Trojan War; Socrates was a philosopher in Plato; but neither was a writer. Virgil was a poet (and he may even have used a pseudonym for some of his poetry), but he was not Shakespeare's favourite poet. It should have been Ovid, who had by far the most influence of anyone on Shakespeare. The inscription does not even give Mr. Shakspere's full name, referring to him only as "Shakspeare." And again, there is no name at all on his gravestone nearby on the floor. Why would the greatest writer of the time have been buried in a grave without a name?

— Peter Dawkins, M.A., Principal of the Francis Bacon Research Trust; and Trustee, Shakespearean Authorship Trust; Author, *The Shakespeare Enigma* (Polair Publishing)

## QUESTION 39: WHAT DO WE LEARN ABOUT SHAKESPEARE FROM BEN JONSON?

[Gregory (Greg) Doran, Chief Associate Director of *The Royal Shakespeare Company*, and director of many plays by Shakespeare and his contemporaries, replies for the SBT]

Ben Jonson loved Shakespeare this side idolatry, calling him "Thou star of poets," and of course: that he was "Not for an age but for all time".

But he was also critical of his friend: he insisted that Shakespeare lacked art, citing how he had described a sea-shore in landlocked Bohemia. The players say he never blotted a line, "would he had blotted a thousand" he writes. And he even gets in a dig at his fellow grammar school boy's poor grasp of the Classics: "And though thou hadst small Latin and less Greek".

Jonson was not a man to keep a secret. William Drummond recorded his friend's drunken conversation, late at night before he sank into a stupor, imagining Tartars fighting Turks around his great toe; and he could be pretty indiscreet. But in all his writing, Jonson never reveals even the slightest hint that the man he refers to fondly as "My gentle Shakespeare" is anything other than the "Sweet Swan of Avon".

## DOUBTER RESPONSE:

Again, Jonson was a master of ambiguity and put this to use in the Shakespeare Folio. In his tribute to the author, he famously said "And though thou hadst small Latin and less Greek," which is often thought to mean

Shakespeare knew little Latin and Greek. But then Jonson immediately compares him to Aeschylus, Euripides, and Sophocles. If he did not know much Greek, why compare him to these famous Greek playwrights? In this context a truer meaning of Jonson's grammatical construction is "And *even if* thou hadst small Latin and less Greek." Shakespeare sometimes used "though" in the same way, as for example: "I'll follow thee, *though* Hell itself should gape" *Hamlet* 1, ii, 247. So Jonson also suggests that Shakespeare *knew* Latin and Greek, which he clearly did. As seen in the works, he knew Latin and Greek well (also French, Italian and Spanish). Throughout the prefatory matter, Jonson practices his skill at deliberate ambiguity, even at times speaking of the author, and the actor Shakspeare, as different persons.

Here is another instance of Jonson speaking of author and actor as different persons: In his tribute to "The author, Mr. William Shakespeare," in the First Folio, Jonson is full of praise, likening the author to Apollo, god of light, renowned for his inspiration and illumination, and to Mercury, messenger of the gods, renowned for his eloquence. But in the only contemporary reference to the actor that could be called biographical (*Timber: or Discoveries; Made upon Men and Matter*, in Jonson's *Workes*, 1641, 97-8), Jonson likens him to the Roman orator Haterius, a highly ineloquent, unenlightened man with a reputation for getting so carried away with words that he muddled them, speaking so much that he had to be stopped. This is not the man praised in the Folio.

About Bohemia, Jonson was wrong and Shakespeare was right. It did have a coastline on the Adriatic at one time. Robert Greene also gave Bohemia a coastline in *Pandosto*.

— Peter Dawkins, M.A., Principal of the Francis Bacon Research Trust; and Trustee, Shakespearean Authorship Trust; Author, *The Shakespeare Enigma* (Polair Publishing)

#### QUESTION 40: WHEN DID PEOPLE START TO QUESTION SHAKESPEARE'S AUTHORSHIP OF THE WORKS?

[Lena Cowen Orlin, Professor of English at Georgetown University, replies for the SBT]

In 1623, Leonard Digges predicted that Shakespeare's plays would outlive his "Stratford monument." Eleven years later, a traveler to Stratford wrote that he'd seen the funeral monument of that "famous" poet. Further on in the century, there was a rumor that the writer William Davenant was Shakespeare's illegitimate son. What made the story credible was that Davenant was born in Oxford, and Oxford was a stopover point for Shakespeare's frequent trips between Stratford and London. Stratford vicar John Ward, who ministered to Shakespeare's descendants, was told that when Shakespeare came home to Stratford for good, he still sent new plays back to London twice a year. For the first biography of Shakespeare in 1708, Nicholas Rowe dispatched a man to Stratford to research the playwright's life in town and parish records. In other words, everyone connected the author Shakespeare with the town of Stratford. All the facts were there. It wasn't until 250 years later that anyone questioned the facts.

#### DOUBTER RESPONSE:

First, let's get a few facts straight:

1. Stratford "monument" is incorrect. The word used in the First Folio is "moniment." It may have been intended as monument, based on 17<sup>th</sup> century phonetic spellings, but "moniment" could carry a different meaning—it could mean a collection of documents.
2. The Davenant "rumour" is just that: a rumour. No document shows that Shakspeare ever stayed over at Oxford during his frequent trips between Stratford and London.

3. Vicar John Ward said “Mr. Shakespeare was a natural wit, without any art at all; hee frequented the plays all his younger time, but in his elder days lived at Stratford, and supplied the stage with two plays every year, and for itt had an allowance so large, that hee spent at the rate of 1,000 li a-year, as I have heard.” So he said the man had “no art;” and also implied that he did much of his writing *after* retiring to Stratford. This counts as evidence for Mr. Shakspere? It was hearsay, as Ward himself admits.

4. Yes, Rowe wrote his biography (in 1709 actually) using information from Stratford obtained by his actor-friend, Thomas Betterton. Is it not important that he wrote that Shakspere did not even complete grammar school, and gained no proficiency in Latin? If so, how could he have been the author, given the many Latin, Greek, French and Italian source works reflected in the plays—works not yet translated into English?

Lena Cowen Orlin says “everyone connected the author Shakespeare with the town of Stratford,” but all of her examples postdate the First Folio in 1623 when that story was put out. There is no evidence that anyone thought the author was from Stratford before then.

Orlin is wrong; questioning of the authorship began in Shakespeare’s own time, and in several cases by other writers who were likely in a position to know the truth. The first questioning of authorship was by Robert Greene in *Greene’s Groatsworth of Wit* (1592) (see our response to [Question 9](#)), even before the name first appeared in print. Then it continued almost immediately after the name appeared on his earliest published poems.

In his *Scourge of Villainie*, first printed anonymously in 1598, poet John Marston wrote as follows:

“Far fly thy fame,  
Most, most of me beloved, whose silent name  
One letter bounds. Thy true judicial style  
I ever honour, and if my love beguile  
Not much my hopes, then thy unvalu’d worth  
Shall mount fair place when Apes are turned forth.”

It sounds as if Marston knew of some great, concealed author who had a “silent name.”

The unknown author of the last of three satirical plays entitled *Return from Parnassus*, acted by the students of St. John’s College, Cambridge, during the Christmas revels of 1601-2, seems to refer to Shakspere, as indicated by the title “esquire” he had recently acquired, and calling him a “mimick ape” who mouths words better wits have framed.

Poet John Davies of Hereford, in his book of epigrams, *The Scourge of Folly* (1610), includes an epigram addressed to “Mr. Will Shake-speare,” referring to Shakespeare as “our English Terence.” Terence was a Roman slave who allegedly acted as a mask for the writings of great men who wished to keep their authorship of works concealed.

In 1624 (post-Folio) the second edition of Thomas Vickers’ manual of rhetoric gave a list of outstanding English poets, including Geoffrey Chaucer, Edmund Spenser, Michael Drayton, and George Wither, but omitting Shakespeare! Surely he must have known about Shakespeare in 1624. In the third edition (1628), Vickers corrected the omission with a peculiar new sentence inserted after the list: “To these I believe should be added that famous poet who takes his name from ‘Shaking’ and ‘Speare.’” (Schurink, Fred, “An unnoticed early reference to Shakespeare,” *Notes and Queries*, March 2006, 72-74)

Here is a reference to Shakespeare implying that the name is a made-up, or pen name. The logical explanation is that Vickers knew the First Folio’s attribution was incorrect, and didn’t want to acquiesce in the

misattribution of the plays to the Stratford man in 1623; so he made no mention of Shakespeare in his 1624 publication the following year. By the time of the 1628 edition, he had figured out a way to include Shakespeare while revealing that it was a pen name, but without assuming the risk of openly saying so.\*

The Glasgow University copy of the First Folio shows annotations next to the names of several of the “Principal Actors in all these plays.” Next to Shakespeare’s name is what appears to be a contemporary annotation, reading “leass for making.” After consulting the *Oxford English Dictionary*, the author of the article reporting the discovery wrote:

“Although there is no specific entry for ‘leass,’ there are multiple meanings for ‘lease’ spelled various ways. As a noun or adjective, the word may be spelled ‘leas’, ‘laes’, ‘lese’, ‘les’, ‘lees’, ‘lesse’, ‘less’, ‘leace’, ‘leis(s)’, ‘leas(s)e’, ‘leys’, and ‘lase’. [Note particularly the spelling ‘leas(s)e’.] What is important, of course, is the meaning. As an adjective, it means: ‘untrue, false, lying’, as a noun, ‘untruth, falsehood, lying’ (3).”

It was also not uncommon to drop the terminal “e” from words during this period.

The article concluded (based on more than what is shown here) that “in this original Shakespeare First Folio [we have] contemporary documentary evidence of someone who knew certain actors and knew of actors of the ... period, [and who] stated his opinion that the actor, William Shakespeare, was “untruthful or lying for making” [plays]!”\*\*

George Wither, a poet who would have known Shakespeare, in a poem of his titled, *The Great Assizes holden in Parnassus by Apollo and his Assessours* (1645), declared that the actor Shakspere was a mimic who pretended to be the author Shakespeare.

So there are seven examples showing that even during the period there were doubters.

And finally, we have the author’s own words, in which he himself says that he did not want, and did not expect, his name to be remembered (Sonnets 72 and 81, respectively). As we point out in [Appendix A, Key Question 5](#), “None of this makes sense, unless his name was not associated with his works at the time.” So here we have a contemporary statement in the author’s own words that calls the identity of the author into question.

\*Donald Frederick Nelson, “Schurink’s Discovery of a Century,” *Shakespeare Oxford Newsletter*, Vol. 44, No. 1, Spring 2008, 10-11.

\*\*Frank Davis, M.D. “‘Leass for Making’: Shakespeare Outed as a Liar?” *Shakespeare Oxford Newsletter*, Vol. 43, No. 2, Spring 2007, 3-5.

— Frank Davis, M.D., *Past President, Shakespeare Oxford Society*

— Peter Dawkins, M.A., *Principal of the Francis Bacon Research Trust; and Trustee, Shakespearean Authorship Trust; Author, The Shakespeare Enigma (Polair Publishing)*

#### QUESTION 4I: WHAT REASONS DO PEOPLE GIVE FOR QUESTIONING SHAKESPEARE’S AUTHORSHIP OF THE PLAYS?

[Stuart Hampton-Reeves, Professor of Research-informed Teaching at the University of Central Lancashire, Chair of the British Shakespeare Association, and author of several books on Shakespeare in performance, replies for the SBT]

Of course there are as many reasons for doubting Shakespeare’s authorship as there are people who doubt them. And I think some people just love a good story and like to challenge accepted conventions. And I think

those people who feel particularly strongly about this often start with a genuine passion for Shakespeare. It's more like a love affair. But when they turn to the archives, and look at the records that have survived about the man, they find very little in there to fall in love with. They don't find the voice of Romeo, or the voice of Hamlet, or the tragic absurdity of Lear. What they find instead is a story about what seems to be a fairly ordinary man, living an ordinary life. And since Shakespeare cannot live up to the author that they've fallen in love with, they turn to the archives to look for other, more colourful characters. I think this is a function of the way that Shakespeare writes. He was able to speak with many different voices, and the only conspiracy of silence is the conspiracy to silence his own voice in his works.

#### DOUBTER RESPONSE:

To say that "there are as many reasons for doubting ... as ... people who doubt" is false. There is a great deal of agreement about the main reasons to doubt Shakespeare's authorship. These reasons are outlined in the [\*Declaration of Reasonable Doubt\*](#), first issued in 2007, and now signed by more than 2,200 people.

There is no mystery about why many people question Shakespeare's authorship, except among those who are in denial, refusing to read the *Declaration*, or even acknowledge its existence. One reason that is *not* in the *Declaration* is that people find "very little to fall in love with" in the records relating to the Stratford man, as Hampton-Reeves says. No matter how much the SBT tries to pretend that doubt about the authorship is due to the psychology of doubters, it is, always has been, and always will be about the evidence.

Originally the issue was based on a lack of connection between the man and the work. Since then, extensive research has found (1) no documentary evidence that Shakespeare was a writer, (2) no record that he was ever paid as a writer (although he was an actor), (3) no letter in which he is recognized as a writer, (4) no record of anyone referring to him personally as a writer, (5) no one in his family who acknowledged him as a writer, and (6) he himself left no record that he was a writer. In fact, all we have in his hand are six signatures on legal documents, but otherwise no manuscript, letter, or even a poem. As a doubter once said, Shakespeare was "a singularly taciturn fountain of eloquence."

We have twenty-one references to works attributed to "Shakespeare," but no personal reference to Shakespeare as the author of any of them, or as the author of anything else. References to the Stratford man as an actor do not prove, or even suggest, that he was also a writer. In fact, no other professional playwright of that period is known to have been a professional actor. A few, Ben Jonson included, acted in plays at the beginnings of their careers, but as soon as they were established as writers, they abandoned acting.

Thus, the main reason for doubt is not some romantic search for "the voice of Hamlet," but, rather, the fact that "the greatest battery of organised research that has ever been directed upon a single person," as one Oxford history professor put it, came up empty.

— Robin Williams, President, Mary Sidney Society; doctoral candidate in English, Brunel University in West London

#### QUESTION 42: WHAT PSYCHOLOGICAL IMPULSE MIGHT LIE BEHIND THE QUESTIONING OF SHAKESPEARE'S AUTHORSHIP?

*[Anouchka Grose, writer and psychoanalyst, practising in London, replies for the SBT]*

Doubting Shakespeare's authorship might be a way of dealing with envy and competition. So if great people aren't actually that great, then you don't have to feel quite so measly in relation to them. Then there's also the fact that conspiracy theories often try to give rational explanations for things that are just too sublime or

irrational. So the famous figure who dies in a stupid accident must have been killed by the CIA, or whatever. So the idea that Shakespeare was able to do so many things—to know so much about the world, and about the interior lives of human beings, and then to be able to articulate all of that, using strict rhyme and meter, across such a huge body of work—makes him a kind of uncanny figure. And it might be more comforting to think that his works were written by a group of writers (maybe including men and women), or that he actually only wrote a couple of the plays himself.

#### DOUBTER RESPONSE:

The correct answer is that the underlying “psychological impulse” is a search for truth. Is this not the same “impulse” that underlies many of humanity’s intellectual pursuits? Anouchka Grose gives no hint in her comments that she considered this rather obvious possibility. The impulse of the SBT would appear to be to try to suppress this truth-seeking, using Anouchka Grose to assist in its efforts to stigmatize the issue as a “conspiracy theory.”

It is outrageous, considering who has signed the *Declaration of Reasonable Doubt*, that doubters still get labelled as “conspiracy theorists.” A quick glance at the signatory list negates this negative stereotype—U.S. Supreme Court Justices; Shakespearean actors; more than 800 advanced degrees; nearly 400 current or former college faculty members; 360 English literature graduates. Does it make sense to think that all of these people are deranged conspiracy theorists? No, it makes no sense at all. So what is going on here?

For years, up until last April, the SBT had a page on its website that said the following:

“The phenomenon of disbelief in Shakespeare’s authorship is a psychological aberration of considerable interest. Endorsement of it in favour of aristocratic candidates may be ascribed to snobbery - reluctance to believe... works of genius could emanate from a man of relatively humble origin - an attitude that would not permit Marlowe to have written his own works, let alone Shakespeare’s. Other causes include ignorance; poor sense of logic; refusal, wilful or otherwise, to accept evidence; folly; the desire for publicity; and even certifiable madness (as in the sad case of Delia Bacon, who hoped to open Shakespeare’s grave in 1856).”

Outraged that the SBT would define all doubters, without any valid scientific evidence, as psychologically aberrant—implying that doubters are all mentally defective one way or another, on April 5, 2010, the Shakespeare Authorship Coalition sent a letter to then SBT Chairman Stanley Wells, calling attention to the above paragraph and saying that,

“If these allegations are true, it should be possible for qualified experts in the disciplines of psychiatry, psychology and sociology to validate your claims with empirical evidence. I hereby challenge you to either obtain such expert validation, or stop making the claims. Specifically, I challenge you to either back up your claims on the SBT website with data worthy of the high scholarly standards you claim to represent, or remove them forthwith.”

The complete text of the letter appears at the end of this document as Appendix C. The SAC has received no reply, but the SBT did take the authorship page down last spring. It has been replaced, however, by an even more aggressive campaign against doubters. Their label of “psychologically aberrant” has been replaced with “conspiracy theorist,” and all doubters, even our best Shakespearean actors, are now “anti-Shakespeareans.”

The inclusion of Anouchka Grose, a lone psychoanalyst among an otherwise strikingly homogeneous group of English professors and theatre professionals, suggests that they wanted to support their claims with someone who would be perceived as an authority. But looking at Grose’s testimony (if she can be thought of as a sort of ‘expert witness’), how credible is she? “A writer and psychoanalyst, practising in London” the SBT says.

There is no mention of any particular expertise in the diagnosis of mental disorders, using psychological



testing or any other objective methods. There is no mention of any academic position. Not even any mention of knowledge in the subject she's addressing. Her website and books say nothing about conspiracy theories/theorists that we can see. Nor is there any indication that she has any knowledge about the authorship question.

Having a lone psychoanalyst offer a subjective opinion on the "psychological impulse" that "might" lie behind questioning authorship and expecting this to be taken seriously strikes us as bizarre—like asking any single actor to sum up Shakespeare's personality, or allowing a single Indian journalist to speak for everyone on the Indian subcontinent. And we are supposed to take these methodologically-challenged people seriously when they say that there is "no room for doubt" about the identity of William Shakespeare?

This is not only an issue of competence, important as that is; there is a moral dimension. The letter to SBT Chairman Stanley Wells of April 5, 2010 also points out the following:

"You appear to label as "psychologically aberrant" anyone who disagrees with your view. You appear to be exploiting prejudices against the mentally ill to discredit your opponents. The use of such tactics is morally reprehensible, and those who would resort to them are unworthy of being regarded as legitimate stewards of the legacy of William Shakespeare."

Finally, let us not forget that Shakespeare, more than other writers, created characters who struggled with madness, portraying them so realistically and sympathetically as to suggest that he understood their maladies from first-hand experience. The list includes Hamlet, Ophelia, Titus, Timon, King Lear, and Edgar/Tom O' Bedlam. Yet people who present themselves as the guardians of the legacy of Shakespeare have no qualms about exploiting the stigma against the mentally ill as a weapon to use against their opponents.

To those at the SBT responsible for claims that doubt about Shakespeare's authorship is a "psychological aberration," and that doubters are ignorant snobs, and/or publicity hounds with poor senses of logic, who refuse to accept evidence and may be certifiably mad, that we are "anti-Shakespeareans," "intellectual thieves," "conspiracy theorists," "pursuing a poisonous, insidious agenda," there is a question we would like to ask you:

Why, in the face of so much evidence for reasonable doubt, and so many well-regarded people who see it as such, do SBT people refuse to consider any alternatives, and reply with worn-out clichés, cheap insults, pop psychoanalysis and *ad hominem* arguments?

The answer is that they are defending both a quasi-religious orthodoxy and a fat living. If they allowed themselves to doubt at all, regardless of the evidence, it would threaten both their flush incomes and the beliefs in which they have invested their identities. If they can so glibly accuse doubters of snobbery and parricidal tendencies, we can accuse them of being authoritarian personalities and/or hypocrites. The truth is that they are afraid of the scholarship of doubters, rarely read it, and continue to think that poking fun at Delia Bacon's infirmity and J. Thomas Looney's name is a substitute for honesty and scholarly integrity. Asking the SBT to honestly research the Authorship Question is like asking a religion's high priests to honestly research their basic beliefs. The issue for them is long-settled, and like all good authoritarians they prefer to keep it that way. If English professors can diagnose mental disorders, then that is our diagnosis of the SBT.

— John M. Shahan, M.S.P.H., Chairman and CEO, Shakespeare Authorship Coalition

— Frank Davis, M.D., Past President, Shakespeare Oxford Society

— Robin Fox, Ph.D., D.Sc., University Professor of Social Theory, Rutgers University

— Richard Joyrich, M.D., President, Shakespeare Oxford Society

— Jan Scheffer, M.D., Psychiatrist and Psychoanalyst, Utrecht, The Netherlands

— Earl Showerman, M.D., President, Shakespeare Fellowship

— Richard Waugaman, M.D., Clinical Professor of Psychiatry, Georgetown University

### QUESTION 43: WHAT PART DOES JAMES WILMOT PLAY IN THE AUTHORSHIP STORY?

[Stanley Wells, *Honorary President of The Shakespeare Birthplace Trust, Professor Emeritus at the University of Birmingham, author of many books about Shakespeare, and general editor of the Oxford and Penguin Shakespeares, replies for the SBT*]

James Wilmot was a Warwickshire clergyman who lived from 1726 to 1807. There's a manuscript in the Senate House Library of the University of London which seems to represent two lectures given to the Ipswich Philosophical [sic] Society in 1805 by a man called James Corton Cowell. According to this, Wilmot had started trying to write a biography of Shakespeare, but, finding little evidence, decided that the works must have been written by Francis Bacon., which would make Wilmot the first anti- Stratfordian. But people now have questioned the authenticity of this manuscript. There's no evidence that either Cowell or the Ipswich Philosophical Society ever existed. And in 2010 James Shapiro, in his book *Contested Will*, showed conclusively that the manuscript is a forgery, done probably in the early twentieth century. And that means that the beginnings of the authorship debate can now be said to date not from the late eighteenth century, as had been supposed, but with Delia Bacon, some fifty years later.

#### DOUBTER RESPONSE:

The answer is that the James Wilmot episode sheds no light on the origins of the authorship question. The first person to investigate the manuscript in the Senate House Library of the University of London was not Professor James Shapiro, or any orthodox Shakespeare scholar, but, rather, Dr. John Rollett, a prominent authorship doubter and researcher, himself living in Ipswich. It was Rollett, in 2002, who noticed the absence of any record of either the Ipswich Philosophic [recte] Society or the said James Corton Cowell. Educated middle-class men—such as Cowell was supposed to be—left numerous records among those that survive: births and deaths, marriages, voting lists, property transactions, legal cases, newspaper reports, wills. After many hours of research in the Suffolk Record Office, Dr. Rollett drew a complete blank. He then asked an eminent local historian (and past President of the Society of Antiquaries) to investigate; he too could find no trace of the man.

Rollett followed this up, involving Dr. Dan Wright, Director of the Shakespeare Authorship Research Centre at Concordia University in Portland, Oregon, Dr. Daniel Mackay, and Dr. Alan Nelson, a noted documents and handwriting expert in the English department at U.C., Berkeley. Professor Nelson, an orthodox scholar, also involved two additional document experts in assessing the Wilmot address. The consensus was that the document was either a later copy of a genuine manuscript, or a later forgery. But since no trace of James Corton Cowell could be found in the local records, the evidence strongly favoured forgery.

Professor Wright gave an account of these findings at a conference in April 2003, concluding that the manuscript was a Baconian forgery. His presentation was written up and published in *Shakespeare Matters* (Vol. 2, no. 4; Summer 2003). Professor Shapiro refers to this account on page 284 of his book *Contested Will* (2010), but his announcement on page 12 of his “discovery” that the manuscript was a forgery makes no mention of the fact that this conclusion had been documented in print seven years earlier. It would be appropriate for Professor Shapiro to give full credit to Dr. Rollett for being the first to question the manuscript's authenticity, and to acknowledge Rollett and Wright's determination to initiate a formal scientific investigation into the authenticity and provenance of the manuscript prior to any orthodox scholar.

In any case, Shakespeare's authorship was first questioned in his own time (See Question 40).

— Daniel L. Wright, Ph.D., *Professor of English; Director, Shakespeare Authorship Research Centre, Concordia University, Portland, Oregon*

#### QUESTION 44: WHAT PART DID DELIA BACON PLAY IN THE SHAKESPEARE AUTHORSHIP DISCUSSION?

[Graham Holderness, writer, Professor of English at the University of Hertfordshire, and author of *Nine Lives of William Shakespeare* (Continuum, 2011), replies for the SBT]

The Shakespeare Authorship controversy really begins with a remarkable New England scholar, Delia Bacon, who in the middle of the 19th century concluded that there was an inexplicable gap between the Shakespeare biography and the philosophical understanding to be found in the works. The plays must therefore have been written by a group of educated and worldly courtiers, including Francis Bacon and Walter Raleigh, who hoped to replace monarchical tyranny with republican liberty, but in defeat turned to literature, writing under cover of the Shakespeare disguise. Bacon used remarkably modern methods of literary analysis, argued that the plays were written collaboratively, and that they contained a radical political agenda, all many years before these ideas became current. But her intellectual isolation forced her into the pursuit of a ‘monomania’, and her unfortunate collapse into mental illness enabled her opponents cruelly to label her as a madwoman. In every respect her career shaped the future of the Shakespeare Authorship Question.

#### DOUBTER RESPONSE:

Graham Holderness has written a nice summary, and we thank him for it. Delia Bacon was a most remarkable woman. She burst onto the scene by winning First Prize (\$100) in a Philadelphia Saturday Courier writing contest, besting the young Edgar Allan Poe. She was widely recognized as a brilliant historian on the New England lecture circuit. Friends and patrons included Ralph Waldo Emerson, Thomas Carlyle and Nathaniel Hawthorne, all of whom supported her work. Their prolific correspondence is extant.

Her first article about Shakespeare appeared in *Putnam’s Magazine* in 1856. Its success encouraged her to publish *The Philosophy of the Plays of Shakespeare Unfolded* in 1857. Some blame her, while others credit her, for being first to devote a book to the subject. It includes a brilliant analysis of three plays: *King Lear*, *Julius Caesar*, and *Coriolanus*. Bacon was no madwoman—not when she worked out her theories and wrote her book. But she became physically ill from stress and malnutrition, travelling alone in England—uncommon for a woman at the time—pursuing her search for Shakespeare’s identity. She suffered what we would today call a nervous breakdown, and died at the age of 48.

Bacon was challenging a quasi-religious myth—an enterprise for which there were few precedents or sources of intellectual and moral support. She paid a terrible price for it. Defenders of orthodoxy, including the SBT, have used Bacon’s tragic end to stereotype doubters and suppress most dissent, imposing a strict conformity in much of academia. A side effect is that non-academics and scholars from other disciplines now fill the void.

In 2000, Elliott Baker edited an abridged edition of *Shakespeare’s Philosophy Unfolded*, making the thoughts of this remarkable woman, Delia Bacon, easily accessible to us all.

— Carole Sue Lipman, President, Shakespeare Authorship Roundtable of Los Angeles

#### QUESTION 45: IS IT PLAUSIBLE THAT SIR FRANCIS BACON WROTE THE PLAYS ATTRIBUTED TO SHAKESPEARE?

[Alan Stewart, Professor of English and Comparative Literature at Columbia University, and International Director of the Centre for Editing Lives and Letters in London, replies for the SBT]

Francis Bacon was an early and leading contender in the hunt to find the man who could have written

Shakespeare's plays. He fits the bill in many ways. The dates are right: Bacon was born in 1561, three years before Shakespeare, and he lived until 1626, helpfully long enough to have seen the First Folio into print three years earlier. More importantly, he possessed the intellectual scope and ambition to be worthy of those plays. He once wrote that he had taken all knowledge to be his province, and he achieved success in his lifetime in multiple fields: as a courtier, a politician, parliamentarian, lawyer, essayist, natural philosopher—indeed, he is the father of modern science.

But the man could not write a play. We know this because he penned some court entertainments, and they are sadly static affairs in which stock characters—a hermit, a soldier, a secretary—stand and deliver set pieces about the joys of being a hermit, a soldier, a secretary. There's not a trace here of the grasp of plot, character, nuance, conflict that we expect in Shakespeare's plays. In short, Francis Bacon had no drama.

#### DOUBTER RESPONSE:

As Professor Stuart admits, Francis Bacon fits the bill for being Shakespeare in many ways. But contrary to what he says, Bacon certainly could write a play, a fact testified to in the many published tributes from his contemporaries following his death in 1626. He was praised as the finest poet of his time, but a secret poet—the Apollo of his age, leader of the Muses, who renovated Philosophy using the socks of Comedy and buskin of Tragedy—plays that must have existed in sufficient quantity and quality to do the job claimed.

Not only did others refer to him as a secret poet, Bacon did so himself. In this context, his friend Toby Matthew said he was known by *another name* in England and abroad.

Besides stage plays, Bacon was involved in organising, writing and producing masques and entertainments, including plays, for the Inns of Court and the court of Elizabeth I. He wrote devices and speeches for noblemen appearing in the Queen's entertainments.

Under James I, he was the "chief contriver" of *The Marriage of the Thames and Rhine*, written with Francis Beaumont to celebrate the marriage of Princess Elizabeth to the German Prince Frederick, Elector Palatine. Bacon devised, organised and paid for *The Masque of Flowers* for the wedding of James' favourite, Robert Carr, Earl of Somerset, to Lady Francis Howard, daughter of the Earl of Suffolk, who was Lord Chamberlain.

In 1594, Bacon was Deputy-Treasurer of Gray's Inn, responsible for the extra-grand Christmas Revels: *The Prince of Purpoole and the Honourable Order of the Knights of the Helmet*. During these Revels, *The Comedy of Errors* was first performed, written and acted by students, as was customary. He is known to have been writing for them beforehand with members of Gray's Inn at his country home of Twickenham Lodge. Speeches known to have been written by him are in the Northumberland Manuscript collection. The contents of this collection of Bacon's work, compiled before 1597, and originating from Bacon's "scrivenry," lists Shakespeare's *Richard II* and *Richard III* as being included in the collection, and, apparently, as having been written by Bacon.

In 1597-8, John Marston and Joseph Hall, in an exchange of satires, pointed to Bacon as the author of the two narrative poems, *Venus and Adonis* and *The Rape of Lucrece*. They referred to the author as "Labeo," who used another person's name to hide his authorship, and was associated with "*Mediocra firma*," the heraldic motto of Francis and Anthony Bacon. But only Francis was a lawyer, who lost favour with the Queen, just as Antistus Labeo, the Roman lawyer, had lost favour with the Roman Emperor.

It is far more plausible that the brilliant and learned Sir Francis Bacon wrote the plays than that a semi-literate actor-businessman who left nothing in his own hand except six poorly-executed signatures and a will with nothing at all related to writing wrote them.

— Peter Dawkins, M.A., Principal of the Francis Bacon Research Trust; and Trustee, Shakespearean Authorship Trust; Author, *The Shakespeare Enigma* (Polair Publishing)

#### QUESTION 46: DO YOU AGREE WITH MARK TWAIN THAT YOU HAVE TO EXPERIENCE SOMETHING IN ORDER TO WRITE ABOUT IT?

[Jay Halio, Professor Emeritus at the University of Delaware, and who has published widely on Shakespeare, replies for the SBT]

Twain may be right, but only up to a point. Surprisingly, he obviously fails to account for the autonomy of the imagination. How did Swift experience Gulliver's travels to Lilliput, for example, or the voyage to the Houyhnhms, but through the imagination, the most powerful attribute of the human intellect? Consider also Shakespeare's contemporaries: Edmund Spenser and *The Faerie Queen*, Marlowe's *Faustus* and *Tamburlaine*. How else could they have been experienced but through the imagination? Shakespeare's imagination carried him everywhere, through time as well as place, and has never been surpassed.

#### DOUBTER RESPONSE:

What Twain really said was that you have to know something about a subject in order to write about it, and that most people write about what they know.

Professor Halio speaks of "the autonomy of the imagination," and says "Shakespeare's imagination carried him everywhere..." Everywhere? So knowledge does not have to be learned, it can be imagined? Twain focuses on the Bard being "limitlessly familiar with the laws, and law-courts, and law-proceedings, and lawyer-talk, and lawyer-ways. . ." He claims that the legal expertise in the plays reflects practical experience that cannot be connected with the presumed writer. How can a writer "imagine" legal knowledge?

Furthermore, the depth and breadth of many disciplines of knowledge found in the works is staggering. Lengthy lists can be found in various places, such as in the [Declaration of Reasonable Doubt](#), and in other rebuttals in this document. Is it credible to think that all of that knowledge could have been acquired via imagination?

"Imagination" and "genius" are mystifications used to shore up a house of cards based on the assumption that Shakespeare's works could have been written by someone who left no trace of evidence that he had done so. There are no plays, no poems, no letters, or diaries in the supposed author's own hand. Twain said that the Stratford myth is based on "guesses, inferences, theories, conjectures— an Eiffel Tower of artificialities rising sky-high from a very flat and very thin foundation of inconsequential facts."

— Keir Cutler, Ph.D. (doctorate in theatre), Actor, Playwright; adapter of Twain's book *Is Shakespeare Dead?*

#### QUESTION 47: WHY DID SIGMUND FREUD DOUBT SHAKESPEARE'S AUTHORSHIP?

[Paul Prescott, Associate Professor of English at the University of Warwick, and Associate Academic in the RSC-Warwick Centre for Teaching Shakespeare, replies for the SBT]

It's fun to psychoanalyze the founder of psychoanalysis. Why was Freud a doubter? Was it a professional sense that the truth is always obscure and never self-evident? Was it because the facts of Shakespeare's life were irreconcilable with Freud's crassly biographical reading of Hamlet? Or was it a form of revenge on the only writer with a greater understanding of psychology than his own?

Why do we relate to *Richard III*? Because, Freud wrote, he magnifies something in all of us: "We all reproach Nature for congenital disadvantages... Why did She not give us the lofty brow of genius or the noble profile of aristocracy? Why were we born in a middle-class home instead of in a royal palace?", Freud asked.

There's a submerged anti-Stratfordian logic here: To come from a middle class home is not something to be envied. But we envy Shakespeare. Ergo Shakespeare cannot have come from a middle class home.

Whatever lay behind Freud's doubts, it's an attempted patricide—an unconscious retaliation against an overwhelming father figure. Perhaps, after all, Freud was right about Oedipus, if very wrong about William Shakespeare.

#### DOUBTER RESPONSE:

How ironic that an English professor in that fraternity of Shakespeare scholars which is so territorial about their supposed area of expertise would frivolously encroach on ours. Paul Prescott is wrong about Freud. He offers nothing credible to back up his subjective opinion. Here again it's unclear what qualifications he has to render such an opinion, or what his methodology may be, other than to continue the pattern of *ad hominem* attacks against anyone who dares question Shakespeare's authorship, no matter how respected.

Prescott may find it "fun" to psychoanalyze Freud, but he should still get his facts right. There is no mystery about it. Freud was curious, as many other skeptics were, about the Stratford man's background. What impressed Freud was the methodology presented in J. Thomas Looney's book, not some distortion of psychology. Freud recognized that the psychology of Shakespeare, as found in his works, is not the psychology apparent in the detailed but mundane record of William of Stratford, and that should surprise no one. It is the same reason that orthodox scholars keep denying: Mr. Shakspere does not fit.

Freud's reputation is based on his willingness to ignore conventional wisdom in pursuit of truth. Consequently he has always been controversial. But he did much to synthesize our knowledge of the unconscious mind, and to expand it by practicing psychoanalysis. One core finding of psychoanalysis is that people defend themselves against disturbing realizations through the ego's defence mechanisms. One of the most unhealthy of these defence mechanisms is denial. In our opinion much of the Shakespeare industry is just what the title of this document says it is: "An Industry in Denial"—about the fact that there are good reasons to doubt the identity of the author of the works of Shakespeare.

— Jan Scheffer, M.D., Psychiatrist and Psychoanalyst; Board Member, Society for Psychoanalysis and Culture, Utrecht, Netherlands

— Richard Waugaman, M.D., Clinical Professor of Psychiatry, Georgetown University; Training and Supervising Analyst, Emeritus, Washington Psychoanalytic Institute

#### QUESTION 48: WHY DID HENRY JAMES DOUBT SHAKESPEARE'S AUTHORSHIP?

[Adrian Poole, Professor of English Literature at the University of Cambridge, replies for the SBT]

Henry James told a friend he thought it 'almost as impossible to conceive that Bacon wrote the plays as to conceive that the man from Stratford, as we know the man from Stratford, did.' Almost, but not quite. By the early 1900s, a great deal was known about the man from Stratford. The Romantic idea of Shakespeare's transcendent genius had collided with the distinctly Victorian image of a hard-headed businessman. How could the man who wrote *Hamlet* go on to sue a Stratford neighbour for an unpaid debt? Henry James pretended to be shocked, but he was also fascinated. Did Shakespeare harbour some general truth about artists, even the greatest?—that they are always divided, their creativity always a mystery? This is why late in his own career James described the author of *The Tempest*, unforgettably, as 'the monster and magician of a thousand masks'.

## DOUBTER RESPONSE:

Why did James doubt? For the same reason Freud doubted, and thousands of others. He does not fit! Mr. Poole's transparent effort to minimize the views of Henry James omits the famous statement: "I am a sort of haunted by the conviction that the divine William is the biggest and most successful fraud ever practiced on a patient world. The more I turn him around and round the more he so affects me." James cut to the chase. Poole, on the other hand, barely begins to engage the question. Rather, he obfuscates.

According to Leon Edel, James believed that Shakespeare's power and contributions had "withstood the siege of the years; he had survived as invulnerable granite. . . . James had always mocked the legends of Stratford-on-Avon. He argued that the facts of Stratford spoke for a common-place man; the plays for the greatest genius the world had ever known," calling the question of authorship "the most attaching of literary mysteries." (See his story "The Birthplace," cited in our response to [Question 55](#).)

— Ren Draya, Ph.D., Professor of British and American Literature; Chair of the Department of English and Communications, Blackburn College, Carlinville, Illinois

## QUESTION 49: DOES THE EARL OF OXFORD HAVE ANY CONNECTION WITH THE THEATRE?

[Michael Dobson, Director of The Shakespeare Institute (University of Birmingham) in Stratford-upon-Avon, replies for the SBT]

The Earl of Oxford was involved in the theatre in different capacities, though mainly as a side-effect of his stormy political career. Lending your name to a theatre company, and helping to script entertainments for social functions at court, could be useful ways of attracting attention. In the 1580s he became patron of an acting troupe, Oxford's Men, who seem mainly to have toured the provinces. Oxford's more important contribution to the Elizabethan stage was also made in the 1580s, when he supported John Lyly, the playwright, by employing him as a secretary. In 1598, Francis Meres reported that Oxford had written comedies himself – in the same list of writers in which he elsewhere praises Shakespeare – but sadly these don't survive. In general Oxford seems to have been busier feuding and fighting, both against the Spanish and against his political rivals at court.

## DOUBTER RESPONSE:

Edward de Vere, 17<sup>th</sup> Earl of Oxford had connections to theatre from his childhood in rural Essex until late in life in the town of Hackney, near the theatres north of London. Contrary to what Michael Dobson says, most of his theatre connections had nothing to do with his career at court, which was long over when "Shakespeare" appeared in 1593. But as a high-ranking earl and Lord Great Chamberlain of England, he was prominent at court while young, and clearly had a flamboyant streak and a taste for public display.

Oxford came from a literary family. The Ellesmere manuscript of Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*, now at the Huntington Library, was owned and preserved by the Earls of Oxford. Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, Shakespeare's most important source work, was translated into English by his uncle Arthur Golding. Golding and the teenage Oxford lived in the same household while Ovid was translated. Uncle Henry Howard, Earl of Surrey, translated Virgil's *Aeneid* and introduced blank verse and the Shakespearean sonnet into English. One of Oxford's tutors during his teens possessed the only surviving copy of *Beowulf*.

Edward's father, the 16<sup>th</sup> Earl, had his own group of players. He patronized the acting company of historian John Bale, author of *Kynge Johan*, the first English history play. Oxford's childhood tutor, Sir Thomas Smith, produced the comedies of Aristophanes while at Cambridge. Oxford himself studied there, at Queens' College and St John's College, both known in the Tudor Period for presentation of plays. Lord Burghley, Oxford's guardian during his minority (then his father-in-law) was a patron of Gray's Inn (one of the four law schools in London), known for having its students put on plays. One scholar said it provided an "ideal rendezvous for poets, dramatists, and novelists." Oxford himself attended Gray's Inn, matriculating in 1567. As mentioned previously, the earliest known performance of *The Comedy of Errors* was at Gray's Inn, in 1594.

Recent evidence suggests Oxford was involved in producing the *History of Murderous Michael* at court in 1577/8, a play later published anonymously as *Arden of Feversham*. In March 1579, Gilbert Talbot, in a letter to his father, reported that a "device" had been presented at court "by the persons of th' Earl of Oxford [and three of his fellow noblemen]," suggesting they had acted in it personally. Oxford clearly had a dramatic flair, entering and winning tournaments and appearing in a number of court pageants. He was a favourite of the Queen in his youth, and was known for his dancing and musical ability.

Dobson cites Oxford's sponsorship of two acting companies in the 1580s as evidence of his involvement with theatre and notes that he hired writer John Lyly as his secretary. He neglects to mention that Lyly and Oxford held the lease on the Blackfriar's Theatre, where Oxford's Boys performed. They sometimes staged plays at court, including the *History of Agamemnon and Ulysses*, quite possibly a precursor to *Troilus and Cressida*.

Oxford also hired Anthony Munday, a young poet-playwright, novelist and translator. As noted elsewhere, Oxford received large numbers of dedications from other authors (not just Lyly and Munday). Edmund Spenser included a sonnet in *The Fairie Queene* referring to the mutual "love" between Oxford and the "Heliconian imps," legendary muses of various arts and learning. Oxford received dedications from Robert Greene and Thomas Watson. All of these writers are known to have influenced Shakespeare.

In 1589, the anonymous author of *The Arte of English Poesie* (thought to be George Puttenham) praised Oxford as among the best writers for "Comedy and interlude."

Dobson claims that Francis Meres (1598) reported that Oxford "had written comedies." In fact, Meres said that among Elizabethan playwrights Oxford was "best" for comedy. Dobson says "sadly" (his comedies) "don't survive." Do they survive as Shakespeare's? Nor does the fact that Meres names both Oxford and Shakespeare mean they were two different people. Meres may not have known that "Shakespeare" was his pseudonym; but if he did know, is it likely that he would have carelessly blown his cover in print?

In the dedication to *Quips Upon Questions* (1600), Robert Armin, shortly thereafter a comic actor with the Lord Chamberlain's Men (Shakespeare's company), wrote "on Tuesday I take my journey (to wait on the right honorable good my Lord my Master whom I serve) to Hackney." The Earl of Oxford lived in [Hackney](#) at the time, and it seems Armin was a [member](#) of Oxford's acting company, Oxford's Men, in late 1599. Many orthodox scholars think "Shakespeare" wrote [comic roles](#) with Armin in mind, including that of Touchstone in *As You Like It*, said to have been written around 1599. So here is a report of an actor visiting Oxford very close to the time orthodox scholars say Shakespeare was writing a play that included a role tailored to that specific actor.

That Oxford still took an active interest in theatre is clear from a letter of March 1602, from the Privy Council to the Lord Mayor of London. Oxford's Servants and the Earl of Worcester's men formed a company. The Queen, "at the suit of the Earl of Oxford" gave her assent to assign The Boar's Head as a permanent venue to the new company.



Dobson suggests that rather than writing plays, Oxford was busy “feuding and fighting, both against the Spanish and against his political rivals at court.” Clearly this isn’t true during the last sixteen years of his life, when works appeared in “Shakespeare’s” name. The year 1588 saw the defeat of the Spanish Armada, plus the death of Robert Dudley, Earl of Leicester, Queen Elizabeth’s favourite and Oxford’s most feared rival at court. And the temperament Dobson describes is quite typical of our greatest literary geniuses. Oxford’s life, from start to finish, was connected to a culture of playwrights and theatre.

— Earl Showerman, M.D., President, Shakespeare Fellowship

#### QUESTION 50: ARE THERE ANY FACTUAL OBJECTIONS TO THE BELIEF THAT THE EARL OF OXFORD WROTE THE WORK ATTRIBUTED TO SHAKESPEARE?

[Alan Nelson, Professor Emeritus in the Department of English at the University of California, Berkeley, whose books include *Monstrous Adversary: The Life of Edward de Vere, Seventeenth Earl of Oxford* (Liverpool University Press, 2003), replies for the SBT]

Arguments tying Edward de Vere, 17<sup>th</sup> Earl of Oxford, to Shakespeare fly in the face of fact and logic.

Oxford was a poet, but the poetry of his adult years is so unlike Shakespeare, and so devoid of literary genius, that even his supporters dismiss it as his “juvenilia”.

Oxford patronized his own playing company from 1580 to 1602. If he wrote plays for the professional stage—and there is no evidence that he did—he would not have written for a rival company.

Oxford reportedly wrote comedies—all lost—but no histories or tragedies. He devoted his last years not to his literary legacy, but to tin-mining in Cornwall. His death in 1604 occurred much too early for *Macbeth*, *King Lear*, *Winter’s Tale*, and *The Tempest*.

While Oxford led a life of dramatic incident, his mindless slaughter of a hapless undercook, and his verbal abuse of his wife in the closing months of her fifth pregnancy, contradict Shakespearean sympathy for servants and women.

The conspiracy theory which makes Oxford the son of Princess Elizabeth, and the father-by-incest of the Earl of Southampton, invokes an English court and culture unknown to history or historians.

#### DOUBTER RESPONSE:

Professor Nelson, a paleographer (neither a historian nor an English literature expert), misinterprets the evidence and misrepresents our views, as Stratfordians frequently do.

Most of Oxford’s extant verses are *not* from his adult years and *do* show signs of genius. Eight of the 16 verses that have come down to us in Oxford’s name were written by age sixteen, and the rest probably in his twenties—long before the first Shakespeare works appeared. His style could easily have developed over the years into Shakespeare’s style. Professor Steven May, today’s leading expert, rated Oxford “the premier Elizabethan courtier poet,” and “the chief innovator due to the range of his subject matter and the variety of its execution...”, based largely on the eight poems he wrote by age sixteen!\* Other top authorities have admired his poems and several are included in anthologies.

Oxford was praised by his contemporaries as the best of the Elizabethan courtier poets. One of them said: “I know very many notable gentlemen in the Court that have written commendably, and suppressed it again, or else suffered it to be published without their own names on it.” Oxford also headed a list of those who had

“written excellently well as it would appear if their doings could be found out and made public with the rest.”\*\* Long after he died he was named first on a list of the six finest poets of the Elizabethan age—a list that did not include the name “Shakespeare”! Could this be because the real Shakespeare was one of those already on the list, perhaps the first name on the list? \*\*\*

Oxford’s poems do contain echoes of Shakespeare. One is in the form now known as the “Shakespearean sonnet.” Yet Stratfordians say his poems are “nothing” like the Bard’s. His poems are the “juvenilia” that Shakespeare, who surely had to learn his craft, lacks. Claims that stylometric evidence “eliminates” Oxford are disputed by Oxfordians. \*\*\*\*

Oxford was a patron of acting companies of both men and boys, but there is no reason to believe they would have staged his plays if he was hiding his identity as a playwright. He would have had them staged by a company with which he wasn’t closely associated.

Oxford was hailed as “the best among us for Comedy.” Nobody knows they are “lost,” only that they haven’t come down to us in his name; perhaps in Shakespeare’s name?

Nor does it mean that he did not also write histories and tragedies. This doesn’t follow. We know that in 1598 Francis Meres named Oxford as “the best for comedy.” Period.

Stratfordian dating of the plays is based on circular reasoning. They assume Shakspeare was their author, and then spread the plays over his lifetime without any firm evidence. No definitive evidence dates any of the plays later than 1604, not even “collaborations.” Source works for the plays end around 1604, and the flow of new quartos declines then. As with stylometric evidence, the dates of the plays remain under intense dispute. \*\*\*\*\* The dates can only be fixed within a range, but they all could have been written by 1604. Stratfordians cannot explain why the author was not involved in publishing his Sonnets. The answer, supported by many pieces of evidence, is that he had already died by 1609.

Nothing shows that Oxford “devoted his last years to tin-mining in Cornwall.” He was not in Cornwall and he did not own, manage or visit any tin mine during his last years. We have two dozen letters and memos over five years in which he analyzes the receipts from the mines and asks the Queen for a share of them. She often granted such favours. The “tin mine letters” wouldn’t have kept him from revising old plays and writing new ones during the last fourteen years of his life, when so many of the plays are thought to have been written.

Oxford did not mindlessly slaughter a hapless undercook—another gross exaggeration. At age 17, while practicing fencing outside, his foil apparently severed the undercook’s femoral artery. The coroner ruled that the undercook stumbled and fell on the point of Oxford’s sword while drunk. Exactly what happened is still debated, and will probably never be known. “Mindless slaughter” is sheer speculation. Oxford was never charged.

The record doesn’t say why Oxford verbally abused his pregnant wife, but knowing his proud, mercurial and eccentric personality it certainly wouldn’t have been beyond him. (Being the wife of a nobleman, or king, could be difficult.) But it hardly disqualifies him. Did Shakspeare show “sympathy” in leaving his wife nothing except the second best bed? Does this disqualify Shakspeare as the author? If not, then Nelson has a double standard.

Not only are the two unfortunate episodes Nelson mentions not inconsistent with Oxford having been Shakespeare, these characteristics that Nelson claims should disqualify him typify the temperaments of literary geniuses. They should count for, not against Oxford. Like most Stratfordians, Nelson ignores the scientific evidence re: creativity and genius. The plays are full of examples of Oxford-like men mistreating women, and regretting it. In famous words ending *The Tempest* the author asks us to pardon him for his

“crimes.” Geniuses often have much to regret in their lives, which can be a motivation for writing. (See [Appendix A, Key Question 3](#) for a summary of the relevant empirical evidence.)

As Nelson knows, so-called “Prince Tudor” scenarios such as those seen in *Anonymous* are not accepted by most Oxfordians, and are not at all essential to the case for Oxford. Most Oxfordians find them inconsistent with the evidence, and adamantly reject them. The leading Oxfordian organization in the U.K. repudiates PT scenarios on its website. So finally we have a statement from Professor Nelson that most Oxfordians agree with.

\* Steven W. May, Ph.D., *The Elizabethan Courtier Poets*, Pegasus Press, 1999, page 54.

\*\* George Puttenham? (first published anonymously) *The Arte of English Poesie*, 1589.

\*\*\* Henry Peacham, *The Compleat Gentleman*, London, Constable, 1622.

\*\*\*\* John M. Shahan & Richard F. Whalen, “Apples to Oranges in Bard Stylometrics: Elliott and Valenza fail to eliminate Oxford,” *The Oxfordian*, Vol. IX, 2006, pp. 113-125. (See also subsequent articles in *The Oxfordian* in Vols. X, 2008, XI, 2009, and XII, 2010)

\*\*\*\*\* De Vere Society, Kevin Gilvary, ed., *Dating Shakespeare’s Plays: A Critical Review of the Evidence*. Parapress, U.K., 2010.

*This response to Question 50 is endorsed by the following Oxfordian organizations:*

[The De Vere Society of Great Britain](#)

[The Shakespeare Fellowship](#)

[The Neue Shake-speare Gesellschaft](#)

[The Shakespeare Oxford Society](#)

## QUESTION 51: ARE THERE ANY FACTUAL OBJECTIONS TO THE BELIEF THAT CHRISTOPHER MARLOWE WROTE THE WORK ATTRIBUTED TO SHAKESPEARE?

[Charles Nicholl, author of books about Marlowe (*The Reckoning*), Shakespeare (*The Lodger*), and other Elizabethans, replies for the SBT]

There are many implausibilities about the idea that Christopher Marlowe wrote the plays of Shakespeare, but over and above these there is one glaring factual objection, which is that Marlowe was stabbed to death in 1593, as evidenced in various documents, including a coroner’s report, and that he was therefore actually dead when most of the Shakespeare plays were written.

To counter this very large stumbling-block, a complicated story has been proposed in which the body seen by the coroner was actually somebody else’s, and Marlowe had meanwhile been spirited away to the continent, there to spend the next twenty-odd years grooming his false whiskers and writing plays such as *Hamlet*.

There are many interesting questions to be asked about Marlowe’s relationship with Shakespeare, but the question ‘Did he write the plays of Shakespeare?’ is not one of them.

### DOUBTER RESPONSE:

Charles Nicholl’s *The Reckoning* is a “must” for anyone interested in Marlowe. Unfortunately, his speculation in the 1992 edition about why Marlowe died at Deptford Strand in May 1593 was mistaken, and he proposed a new solution for his 2002 edition. At least ten other scholars have tried to explain the death since Nicholl’s initial attempt. Only two claim the inquest gives a true report of what happened that evening. Each of the others offers a different answer, but all agree that it’s more likely the whole story was a pack of lies.

Marlovians argue that these lies could extend to the identity of the body the jurors saw. They point out that at the time of his alleged death:

- Marlowe was facing torture, trial and execution, accused of promoting atheism.
- His three companions were all associated with powerful men more likely to have joined forces to save him than to have him killed.
- Deptford Strand was the *only place in England* where the Privy Council not only had direct jurisdiction, but where their own coroner would preside alone over the inquest, and where they had a potential substitute corpse available nearby precisely when it was needed.

The Marlovian argument, therefore, is that Nicholl and others are posing the wrong question. Instead of asking why Marlowe was killed (about which his biographers are in almost total disagreement), they should ask what was the *purpose of the meeting*? Marlovians argue that the most logical reason for those particular people to have met at that particular place, on that particular day, was to fake his death, and that any other “evidence” comes from people having apparently believed it.

— Peter Farey, M.A., *Independent Researcher; a co-winner of the 2007 Calvin & Rose G. Hoffman memorial prize for “a distinguished publication on Christopher Marlowe.”*

## QUESTION 52: WHO ELSE HAS BEEN SUGGESTED AS THE POSSIBLE AUTHOR OF THE WORKS ATTRIBUTED TO SHAKESPEARE?

[Matt Kubus, doctoral researcher at The Shakespeare Institute, and a regular contributor to Blogging Shakespeare, replies for the SBT]

Woody Allen comically warned us in an essay some years ago that when you ask the average man or woman who wrote the plays of William Shakespeare you should not be surprised “if you get answers like Sir Francis Bacon, Ben Jonson, Queen Elizabeth and possibly even the Homestead Act.” You may laugh at Mr. Allen’s hyperbole, but is it any less improbable than some of the other candidates put forth? The case has been made for no fewer than 77 persons or groups of people to be the true dramatist or dramatists of those plays attributed to William Shakespeare. A list of those unusual suspects—those lesser-known individuals—would read as such:

William Alexander, Lancelot Andrews, Richard Burbage, Edmund Campione (who died in 1581), Miguel de Cervantes, The Jesuit priests, Thomas Kyd (who died in 1594), Sir Thomas More (who was beheaded in 1535), Cardinal Wolsey, and even King James I himself.

The list goes on, and suddenly the Homestead Act looks more plausible than ever.

## DOUBTER RESPONSE:

Matt Kubus uses ridicule to make a spurious argument that does not address the issue.

The number of candidates proposed is irrelevant to whether the question itself is valid. The number of candidates shows that the doubts are widespread. Kubus omits some major candidates, but lists obscure ones who have no support at all. There are really just a few leading candidates who have gained any significant support.

— Robin Williams, President, Mary Sidney Society; doctoral candidate in English, Brunel University, London

**QUESTION 53: DEGREES ARE AWARDED TO THOSE DOUBTING SHAKESPEARE'S AUTHORSHIP AT BRUNEL AND CONCORDIA [OREGON] UNIVERSITIES. WHAT IS THE INTELLECTUAL JUSTIFICATION FOR THIS?**

*[Victoria Buckley, whose work includes doctoral research on Shakespeare and the Gunpowder Plot at the University of Sussex, replies for the SBT]*

Concordia University's Shakespeare authorship research centre regards traditional Shakespeare scholarship as 'an industry in denial' and invites enthusiastic amateurs to, Horatio-like, assist in the process of 'reporting the cause aright'. For \$125 a year anyone with an undergraduate degree can become an associate research scholar. \$10,000 buys the title of Life Scholar.

**DOUBTER RESPONSE:**

Victoria Buckley evidently wants people to think something is misguided at Concordia University. Not so. We merely act in the interest of, and on requests from, our alumnae and others who wish to prolong their Shakespeare studies after attaining their degrees. We provide access to our databases so they can study and do research on a fascinating topic they otherwise could not easily pursue in many of their post-collegiate vocations and locales.

Associate research scholars, for a small annual fee that helps defray the university's costs, gain 24/7 access to journals and other publications that otherwise often aren't easily accessible in print or readily available online. Our Life Scholar program provides support to the university, enabling us to expand our resources and extend them to others who may have limited or no access to them. Does the University of Sussex not do this?

The SBT and its academic allies may not like that their exclusive control of access to published, juried scholarship may be coming to an end, but they have no cause to chide us for meeting former students' needs rather than restricting their access to published knowledge. Why are the SBT and its allies so worried? Of what are they so afraid?

— *Daniel L. Wright, Ph.D., Professor of English; Director, Shakespeare Authorship Research Centre, Concordia University, Portland, Oregon*

*Victoria Buckley, for the SBT:*

Brunel's Master's programme in Shakespeare Authorship Studies propounds the view that it was the desire for a national and global icon which produced the Shakespeare industry, and argues Shakespeare was not one, but many authors. While there is certainly intellectual justification for serious enquiry into the early modern collaborative writing process, both institutions seek to disprove the research of generations of scholars, and are in danger of obfuscating long-established critical approaches to the history and literary production of the period.

**DOUBTER RESPONSE:**

Heaven forbid that any college or university should ever disprove "the research of generations of scholars," or challenge "long-established critical approaches." Don't people sometimes win Nobel Prizes for exactly that?

If, as the SBT says, their evidence is so clear and strong that there can be "no room for doubt," then they have nothing to fear. The Stratfordian theory could not possibly be displaced. All they have to do is make it clear,

by writing it up and presenting it for all of us to see. The problem, of course, is that they cannot, because their assertions are not anything as clear as they say.

What is at stake here is whether a highly defensive, self-interested industry, based on Stratford tourism, can defend itself from a small minority of truth-seekers by imposing strict demands for conformity, with biases favouring their tradition and legends, on academia. Whatever else one may think of our two universities, we have no such conflicts of interest in protecting vested interests or tenured traditions. Our universities exist to serve the needs of our students, not an industry—or a tradition uncritically examined.

Our position:

“Berowne: What is the end of study? let me know.  
King: Why, that to know which else we should not know.  
Berowne: Things hid and barr’d, you mean, from common sense?  
King: Aye, that is study’s godlike recompense.  
Berowne: Come on then; I will swear to study so,  
To know the thing I am forbid to know”

— *William Shakespeare, Love’s Labour’s Lost (I,i,55-60)*

*Victoria Buckley, for the SBT:*

Schoenbaum’s assertion that the Looney Oxfordian theory derives in part from a medium, channelling the disembodied voice of Shakespeare in 1942, neatly demonstrates why it deserves no place in academic Shakespearean curricula.

#### **DOUBTER RESPONSE:**

Schoenbaum’s assertion is wrong. The Oxfordian theory is based on factual evidence and logical inference. The use of mediums by Percy Allen in the 1940s has nothing to do with it. This is yet another example of the SBT using highly unrepresentative narratives and anecdotes to mischaracterize, discredit and smear the entire authorship movement. Just because one may find a few such examples of unscientific eccentricity amongst a handful of enthusiasts, that doesn’t mean they are representative of the larger community. Certainly J.T. Looney was never influenced by such nonsense. He published his book, *Shakespeare Identified* in 1920; how could it have been influenced by some other person using a medium in 1942?

A theory should be evaluated based on the best arguments of its strongest proponents. The strongest arguments of the proponents of doubt about Shakespeare’s authorship are very compelling indeed. They should be read.

— *Daniel L. Wright, Ph.D., Professor of English; Director, Shakespeare Authorship Research Centre, Concordia University, Portland, Oregon*

#### **QUESTION 54: WHAT IS THE ATTITUDE OF MAINSTREAM SHAKESPEARE SCHOLARS TOWARDS THE AUTHORSHIP DISCUSSION?**

*[Peter Holland, McMeel Family Professor in Shakespeare Studies in the Department of Film, Television and Theatre, and Associate Dean for the Arts at the University of Notre Dame, replies for the SBT]*

For a long time, Shakespeare scholars ignored the authorship controversy, treating it as a bizarre, marginal phenomenon. After all, the proponents of other candidates don’t develop their arguments according to the

standards of scholarship developed in so many fields of academic study (history, biography, textual analysis and so on). Discussing the details of their case with anti-Stratfordians was and continues to be frustrating, because the kinds of evidence they adduce—hypothesis piled on speculation, built on conspiracy theories and secret codes—can't be met with logical argument.

But those of us intrigued by the ways in which popular beliefs develop (Elvis lives, Barack Obama wasn't born in the USA, and so on) are fascinated by why it should be that some people might think that Shakespeare couldn't have written Shakespeare. The strange passion that drives these theories is a powerful fact about our society's need to believe.

#### DOUBTER RESPONSE:

Asking a Stratfordian about the attitude of mainstream Shakespeare scholars to the authorship issue is like asking a priest about the attitude of the Pope toward atheists. Peter Holland is wrong in claiming that authorship doubters do not develop their arguments “according to the standards of scholarship developed in many fields of academic study.” Indeed, a substantial proportion of doubters come from those fields of study, including English departments. This is easily verified by visiting the website of the Shakespeare Authorship Coalition and checking the backgrounds of [Declaration](#) signatories there. Many *Declaration* signatories are just as impressive as any of the 60 SBT responders.

— A. J. (Tony) Pointon, Emeritus Professor, former Director of Research, University of Portsmouth, England; Author, *The Man who was Never Shakespeare*, Parapress, 2011.

#### QUESTION 55: WHAT OTHER THEORIES MIGHT BE COMPARED TO THE SHAKESPEARE AUTHORSHIP CONSPIRACY THEORY AND WHY? [REFERRED TO ONLY AS THE “AUTHORSHIP ISSUE” IN THE TRANSCRIPT]

[Kate McLuskie, Director of *The Shakespeare Institute*, University of Birmingham, from 2005 to 2011, and author of *Writers and their Work: Macbeth*, replies for the SBT]

Shakespeare knew: telling and believing stories is the best, and the worst, way to get at the truth: his plays are full of figures telling stories, and lies; and the most unlikely truth of all—that Banquo's ghost could come to the banquet—is dismissed as a woman's story by a winter's fire.

Small wonder, then, that the tale of a Stratford glover's son who became the greatest poet-playwright in England, might be misbelieved. The stories that are believed always involve dark and sinister forces, hidden truths, stolen documents.

From the death of Diana to the president's complicity in 9/11, the stories of conspiracy always seem more satisfying than the messy complexity of truth. They certainly make for better movies. If we prefer to believe that fair is foul, and foul is fair, the case for Shakespeare's authorship of his plays will remain a mystery. Alternatively, you can engage with the more removed mysteries of the plays themselves.

#### DOUBTER RESPONSE:

Calling it the “Shakespeare Authorship Conspiracy Theory” is a PR ploy by the SBT. Interestingly, they refer to it as the “authorship issue” in the transcript, showing how unnatural it is even for them to call it a “conspiracy theory.” We must be very special. Indeed, they don't even bother to define the term, so they can use it just as they please. The examples they offer seem intended to suggest that all conspiracy theories are false, but of course this is not so. Why does the word exist in our language if there are none?

The historical record is clear: actual conspiracies are often uncovered by people willing to tolerate derision, even threats, for calling attention to something that doesn't add up. Woodward and Bernstein were pilloried for saying Nixon was engaged in a conspiracy. Those who tried to expose the "Iran Contra scandal" were mocked and ridiculed for it. Investigators who exposed a long-term study of poor black men in Tuskegee, Alabama, infected with syphilis were called "kooks," "anti-American." Conspiracies are common.

Fortunately most are also relatively benign. As George Bernard Shaw said, for example, "all professions are conspiracies against the laity." Is the Birthplace Trust a conspiracy? Henry James certainly seems to have thought so, based on his story "The Birthplace" in his book, *The Better Sort* (Charles Scribner's Sons, 1903). This seems worth considering.

Those replying to all of the questions the SBT has asked on this subject (why so many?) do not appear to have any particular expertise. One of us spent years researching and writing a book on popular conspiracy theories: "What I discovered is that most do not hold up under scrutiny. The more one digs, the shakier and less credible they become. The Authorship Question was different. The more I dug, the more credible it seemed, until I became fully convinced of its validity. What I had set out expecting to debunk turned out to be the most compelling, fact-based 'conspiracy' I had ever researched."

— *John M. Shaban, Chairman and CEO, Shakespeare Authorship Coalition*

— *James Broderick, Ph.D., Associate Professor of English and Journalism, New Jersey City University; author with Darren Miller of Web of Conspiracy: A Guide to Conspiracy Theory Sites on the Internet.*

## QUESTION 56: WHY CONSPIRACY THEORIES?

*[Simon Palfrey, Professor of English Literature and Fellow of Brasenose College, University of Oxford, replies for the SBT]*

Conspiracy theories began once the Bard had been sainted. We like our saints to have a touch of the impossible about them. They are not merely human. Conspiracy is another word, then, for God, delivering something astonishing and then kicking over the traces.

In this way of thinking, our fancies about authorship express our deep-rooted need for magic. There may only be a few conspiracy theorists, but how many of us long for just one of their conspiracies to be true?

But we don't want the wrong kind of magic. Just as the princess is in truth a shepherdess, we don't want our lowborn heroes to be inveterately plebeian. We might think we do, but we don't.

Or maybe Coleridge had it right: Shakespeare must have remained a child, some sort of changeling. Had he been a real flesh and blood man, he would have been a monster.

Or maybe our blank-faced nobody was in on it from the start: stealing into unknown spaces; seeing everything and everyone before a soul has even noticed him; and then disappearing. He was his own conspirator.

## DOUBTER RESPONSE:

Having tried, and failed, to find anything about this worthy of a response, we pass on it. Anyone interested in our response to charges that the Shakespeare authorship issue is a 'conspiracy theory' (whatever that means) should see our replies to questions [42](#) and [55](#). We find it odd that the SBT could claim doubters are unscholarly and then publish this.

— *The Editor*



## QUESTION 57: WHAT DOES STEPHEN FRY THINK ABOUT THE SHAKESPEARE AUTHORSHIP ISSUE?

[Stephen Fry, *British Actor, Writer, Lord of Dance, Prince of Swimwear and Blogger, replies for the SBT*]

Well, I suppose it would be rude to point out that the man who came up with the Oxfordian theory was called Looney; and I don't wish to be mean against those who try hard to push the case for Oxford, but it's an uphill battle. I thought Caroline Spurgeon settled this in 1935 with her master work *Shakespeare's Imagery*. There seems to be absolutely no doubt to anybody who reads Shakespeare, and is familiar with the text, that these are the works of a countryman. This is a man who knows about kites and fields, and it's certainly not the work of an aristocrat. It just doesn't ring true in any sense. I don't see that I have any particular party pre-reason why I should believe that it was Shakespeare of Stratford who was the 'onlie begetter' of those plays and sonnets, but the onus surely is on the Oxfordians. It's an extraordinary idea that human beings then, as now, have the competence to hide such an extraordinary and ridiculous conspiracy. Why? Why do it? I mean, all right, everybody seems to know how aristocrats behaved in the 1580s and 90s, and apparently they weren't allowed to write poetry, and Sidney's poetry was published after his death; but actually, I mean, come along, I just do not believe that the Earl of Oxford sat down in all that labour and wrote those plays and allowed the name and credit to go to someone else. The rest is circumstantial drivel. I mean look at what Ben Jonson wrote about him; look at those words of the 'native woodnotes wild' [sic]; the fact that they were seven years after his death doesn't seem to me to make them any less true, it just makes Ben Jonson a greater and colder liar. Why would he wish to lie about a man he barely knew, this man Oxford, in order to big up Shakespeare? It's nothing about it seems to me to smell of anything other than people who like burying away in conspiracy theories, and conspiracy theories throughout history have always been trumped by cock-up theories. No one has ever managed successfully to conspire, so far as I know, in the history of our planet, because they're all hopeless, because they're all the kind of people we went to school with who make elementary errors and are foolish. But there is a voice that comes out of the canon of Shakespeare that is absolutely unmistakable. I see it reproduced nowhere in the poems of de Vere, nowhere, not even by a hint, in fact de Vere was the kind of poet Shakespeare managed very, very well managed to parody. It's such a pity, such a pity, that people get waylaid into somehow that thinking—it's like these people who believe the pyramids were built by aliens because mankind isn't capable of achieving something so great without, without what? Without the education of de Vere? De Vere wasn't a particularly well-educated man anyway, and the Bacon theory, and any other theory, has behind it the working of a supreme and extraordinary mind. But there is no evidence that de Vere had a particularly remarkable mind at all; despite his name, he didn't have his education at Oxford. I just cannot see it; I look, and I look with the eyes I hope of a believer, and all I just see is the petty little matchings of dates and scratchings of 'oh, look, he went to Pomona or he went to Padua and Shakespeare never went to Padua'. Well, for heaven's sake, Shakespeare never went to Bermuda; he never went to Athens. I mean as far as we know he never went to Elsinore, nor indeed as far as we know did Kyd or de Vere or anyone else who claims to have written various kinds of *Hamlet*. I've gone on too long because I'm too cross and I find it all too silly, just silly. Just look at the plays and hear the voice, the single human voice which comes out in many colours and characters, but is unquestionably a voice that has to be given the name, and the only name I've seen that fits it is William Shakespeare, the Stratfordian, the poacher of Arden, and yes many of the silly little rumours, the folklore that went round about his childhood, were very much after the fact. But he is our only Shakescene, and Richard [sic] Greene's envy seems to be the proof much more for Shakespeare's existence than of Shakespeare's ability to be a copycat. Long live the Swan of Avon. Long live the Bard of Avon. Thank you all for listening.

## DOUBTER RESPONSE:

Stephen Fry's response is extremely disappointing. Many of us have long admired him. His answer reflects a remarkable degree of ignorance, which makes us wonder why he would address a subject he clearly knows so little about, and especially to ridicule it so. Since he has chosen to answer with an attack on Oxford, it is Oxfordians who respond. We would prefer not to be disagreeing with Mr. Fry, but we have to correct the record.

Fry says, "I suppose it would be rude to point out that the man who came up with the Oxfordian theory was called Looney." Yes, it is very rude, and it is also totally irrelevant.

He says, "There seems to be ... no doubt ... that these are the works of a countryman... and certainly not the work of an aristocrat." Edward de Vere spent much of the first twelve years of his life in the country, in rural Essex and along the Thames west of London. It was not until after his father died that he was sent to London and became a royal ward. There he lived at Cecil House, which enclosed the former Covent Garden. His guardian, Sir William Cecil, took a great interest in the natural world. His gardener, John Gerard published the encyclopedic guide called *Great Herball or General Historie of Plants*. So Oxford was able to be in close contact with the pre-eminent horticulturalist of the day. Shakespeare refers to many plants, and gives their legends, symbolisms and remedies. However, he did not mention plain flowers such as the foxglove or the forget-me-not.

He says, "It's an extraordinary idea that human beings then, as now, have the competence to hide such an extraordinary and ridiculous conspiracy." It would hardly be unprecedented; but, as we pointed out earlier, it's not clear that any large-scale conspiracy was needed. Most authorship doubters do not propose that there was any great conspiracy involved.

And, "I just do not believe that the Earl of Oxford sat down in all that labour and wrote those plays and allowed the name and credit to go to someone else." The author himself said that he neither wanted, nor expected, his name to be remembered (Sonnets 72 and 81). This makes no sense, unless his name was not yet associated with his works at the time.

And, "look at what Ben Jonson wrote about him... the fact that they were seven years after his death doesn't seem to me to make them any less true... Why would he wish to lie about a man he barely knew, this man Oxford, in order to big up Shakespeare?" Because the author said that it was what he wanted and his family was honouring his wishes posthumously? All three men (the only three men) to whom Shakespeare's works were dedicated either married, or were candidates to marry, the three daughters of Edward de Vere. Two are the dedicatees of the First Folio in which Jonson's eulogy appears; it was a family affair. That explains why Ben Jonson would have gone along with an exercise in myth-making.

And, "nothing about it seems to me to smell of anything other than people who like burying away in conspiracy theories." Like Supreme Court justices, many of our greatest writers, thinkers, statesmen and several of the finest Shakespearean actors who have ever lived?

And, "conspiracy theories throughout history have always been trumped by cock-up theories. No one has ever managed successfully to conspire ... in the history of our planet." Not true. Many fine writers on the Hollywood Blacklist, for example, successfully concealed their identities and continued their careers as screenwriters using pseudonyms or front men.

And, "there is a voice that comes out of the canon ... I see it reproduced nowhere in the poems of de Vere." Even many orthodox scholars admit there are similarities between Oxford's extant poems, mostly written as a

teenager or young adult, and Shakespeare's. Rather than deny the similarities, they try to dismiss them all as mere "commonplaces."

And, "De Vere wasn't a particularly well-educated man anyway." Not true. He had the best tutors anywhere, honorary degrees from Oxford and Cambridge, studied at Gray's Inn. He knew at least five languages and was repeatedly praised for his outstanding intellect.

And, "there is no evidence that de Vere had a particularly remarkable mind at all." Not true! Oxford was always rated the greatest Elizabethan courtier-poet, and "best for comedy." He was second only to Robert Dudley in the number of literary works dedicated to him, many of them quite lavish in their praise. Nothing was ever dedicated to "Shakespeare." Nearly twenty years after he died, he was still rated one of the greatest poets of the age.

And, "I look, and I look ... he went to Pomona or he went to Padua and Shakespeare never went to Padua." Just read *The Shakespeare Guide to Italy: Retracing the Bard's Unknown Travels*, by Richard Paul Roe (HarperCollins, 2011) and then say he never went to Italy.

And, "Just look at the plays and hear the voice, the single human voice which comes out in many colours and characters, but is unquestionably a voice that ... is William Shakespeare." So again, the SBT demonstrates that its methods are superior to those of the doubters?

And, "Long live the Swan of Avon. Long live the Bard of Avon. Thank you all for listening." Thank you, Stephen, for making it clear that you're not entirely objective on this issue. There is a legitimate question here, you know. You should be better informed about it.

— *A few of your many disappointed admirers among Shakespeare authorship doubters*

## QUESTION 58: WHAT ABOUT THE INDIAN PERSPECTIVE OF THE SHAKESPEARE AUTHORSHIP CONSPIRACY THEORY?

[K.S. Vijay Elanqova, journalist for The Hindu, writer and a poet, replies for the SBT]

I come from a remote part of India, and the first book I ever read (at the age of 13) was Shakespeare in old spelling. I have loved Shakespeare all my life, and I remember always wanting to visit his birthplace. Therefore, I do not understand where this conspiracy theory comes from. Genius can come from humble origins. Ben Jonson's father was a brick-layer. Many of our Indian writers came from poor backgrounds—perhaps with a humble heart their inspiration was greater. Subramania Bharethi was from a poor family, but was able to impress the king with his poetry. He knew fourteen languages, including French and English. He was inspired by Shakespeare, Shelley, Byron, and Keats. In India we are aware of all these conspiracy theories, but we do not support them ever. We have a high respect for our two-thousand year old written history. Shakespeare's contemporaries did not doubt his authorship or the great minds for 300 years. I am concerned that today's younger generation should not be misled by this insubstantial, inconsequential and ridiculous theory. We all love Shakespeare from Stratford.

## DOUBTER RESPONSE:

We find Mr. Elanqova's statement sincere, and can easily identify with his sentiments. We, too, love Shakespeare. The great majority of us learned to love the author and his works long before hearing that there was any question about who actually wrote them. The idea is counter-intuitive and disturbing; few people come to doubt quickly or easily, and fewer still doubt because they do not want to believe the myth of the Stratford

man. It's a very appealing story, especially for people steeped in liberal democratic traditions. But historical truth is about evidence, and too much of the evidence just doesn't add up.

Elanqova says that he does "not understand where this conspiracy theory comes from." He should look into it. It's not as if it's a new theory and little has been written about it. There are literally hundreds of books in print, and thousands of pages available online. A good place to start is the [\*Declaration of Reasonable Doubt\*](#), followed by Diana Price's book, *Shakespeare's Unorthodox Biography: New Evidence of an Authorship Problem* (Greenwood-Praeger, 2001). Both are neutral about the true identity of the author. As for it being a "conspiracy theory," please see our replies to Questions [33](#), [42](#), [55](#) and [56](#).

We would like to correct two common misconceptions in what Mr. Elanqova has said. As we say elsewhere in this document, we do *not* argue that great writers cannot come from humble beginnings. This is a mischaracterization promulgated by our opponents. The issue is not that it *could not* have happened, but that there is so little contemporary evidence that it *did* happen in the case of Shakspere. It would have been a remarkable achievement, and should have left a convincing paper trail for how it happened; but there is no such paper trail. Second, he says that "Shakespeare's contemporaries did not doubt his authorship... for 300 years." In fact, doubts about his identity began during his lifetime. See [Question 40](#).

Finally, we find it strange that the SBT would ask a single Indian journalist to give "the Indian perspective," as if any one person could speak for the entire Indian subcontinent. How can he represent something like a billion people based on his subjective viewpoint? A number of Indian nationals have signed our [\*Declaration\*](#). What about their opinions?

— James W. Brooks, Jr., Ph. D. (Physics)

## QUESTION 59: WHY DON'T YOU BELIEVE THAT SHAKESPEARE WROTE SHAKESPEARE?

*[Roland Emmerich, director of films including Anonymous, outnumbered 59 to 1 and with no script to read from like the rest, and speaking a foreign language, gave the following answer during a debate at the English Speaking Union in London, where this answer was recorded]*

"I don't think that William Shakespeare of Stratford, you know, like, wrote these plays because in his will he left not one book. Lots of works of Shakespeare's are, like, kind of, based on other material. Secondly, you know, his father was illiterate, his two daughters were too—very unlikely for a big author of this magnitude, you know, to not, like, teach his children how to write and read.

"There's also this fact, you know, in a way, you know, he retired early and became a grain merchant. And there's one thing which always got me because I'm a very visual person. When you look at his eight signatures, they look not the signature of a learned man or writer, when you, like, compare them with all the other signatures."

## ROLAND EMMERICH'S ANSWER WHEN GIVEN THE SAME OPPORTUNITY TO PREPARE AS OTHERS

For me there are many reasons to doubt the traditional attribution of the works of William Shakespeare to the man from Stratford. The points that strike me most are his signatures—all poorly executed, and hardly a sign for true penmanship; his detailed will, that famously mentioned his "second best bed," but fails to include anything that gives the slightest hint that the man from Stratford had a literary career; and the fact that his two daughters were functionally illiterate. And why did nobody seem to notice the great poet's death in 1616,

which was followed by complete silence? The [Declaration of Reasonable Doubt](#), which contains more arguments on this debate, is what everybody should read to learn more about this subject.

## QUESTION 60: WHAT DO YOU THINK ABOUT SHAKESPEARE'S REPUTATION BEING STOLEN AND PASSED OFF AS SOMEONE ELSE'S?

*[Dan Snow, television presenter and writer, replies for the SBT]*

I was amazed to discover the other day that a distant ancestor of mine was The Earl of Southampton, who was Shakespeare's literary patron.

And one of the points that's not often made is that the Shakespeare Authorship Conspiracy Theory is actually a shameless act of intellectual theft.

The whole thing is motivated, I think, by an insidious jealousy, by people who, unfortunately, can't accept and rejoice in another man's talent.

All of the alternative nominees—77 different people the last time I looked (including, one person thinks, my ancestor)—are actually imposters. They themselves can't help being nominated; I'm sure they'd actually be appalled at the thought of having the finger pointed at them.

And of course none of it began until the nineteenth century, and I think perhaps the theory can be understood as part of the Victorian quest for points of origin—as unsettling as Darwin's theory of evolution was for scripture. But it's moved on, and it's turned nasty.

I think intellectual fraud is a very serious offence, and I'm naming it when I see it.

The fact is that all the historical evidence does point to William Shakespeare of Stratford-upon-Avon—a market-town lad, developed by Elizabethan schooling and the culture at the time—who had enormous talent, and who has enjoyed more success than any other writer who has ever lived.

### DOUBTER RESPONSE:

First we want to correct two factual errors. It is not true that “none of it began until the nineteenth century.” Doubts about the author's identity started during his own lifetime. See our response to [Question 40](#). It is not true that “all the historical evidence does point to William Shakespeare of Stratford-upon-Avon.” See our responses to Questions 1 - 59, and then the [Declaration of Reasonable Doubt About the Identity of William Shakespeare](#).

The SBT has chosen to end its 60 Minutes with a biased, loaded question that assumes the truth of their indefensible position, and launches a slanderous attack on those with whom it disagrees. This hardly represents the spirit of a collegial inquiry into the truth, but then that's obviously not what they are after if they regard us as intellectual thieves.

Let's get this straight: First the SBT and its allies charge repeatedly throughout their “60 Minutes” that authorship doubters are poor, deluded and deranged conspiracy theorists, but then at the last Minute they change their tune and say we are all common criminals. If one outrageous false allegation will not stick, then maybe another false allegation will! Which is it? Hasn't it occurred to them that these two scenarios are mutually exclusive? And don't tell us Snow speaks for himself. The SBT chose what to include and what not.

This is what the authorship question is all about. The SBT and its allies promote a man as the author Shakespeare who palpably does not fit; then they attack anyone who tries to find the person who does fit.

And they harm their allies by exposing them to ridicule. The fact that they would resort to such an accusation suggests they will deny to the end. Calling us criminals relieves them of any obligation to engage with us in mutual inquiry. That appears to be the point of their entire “60 Minutes” campaign—demonize then shun.

Snow says doubt is motivated “by an insidious jealousy, by people who, unfortunately, can’t accept and rejoice in another man’s talent.” He provides nothing to back this up. What evidence does he offer? None. Is he an expert psychologist or psychoanalyst? No. Is he a neutral, unbiased, disinterested observer with no personal stake in this? Hardly. We therefore feel justified in concluding that his charge is a desperate attempt to divert attention from the weakness of the case for Shakespeare by hurling mud at his opponents. At the very least the SBT should have considered his qualifications to be psychologising.

We doubters are truth seekers; we believe in robust, unbridled questioning of authority. Can’t rejoice in another man’s talent? We revel in the greatness of his plays and poems! Loving them as we do, we feel obligated to pursue, discover and tell the truth about him. Knowing his identity will enlighten us about literary creativity and the nature of genius. It is entirely fitting and proper that we should put forth alternative theories to be tested. Some will be right, some not; this is in the spirit of inquiry—how we expand knowledge.

The question of Shakespeare’s authorship should be open to all—to debate the evidence openly and amicably, without fear of being labelled “conspiracy theorists,” or “thieves.” The notion that anyone would “steal” credit for writing Shakespeare’s works is absurd. Only one with a proprietary interest in controlling or capitalizing on him would say so. The SBT seems to think they “own” Shakespeare, but Shakespeare belongs to all of us.

— Thomas Regnier, J.D., LL.M., author, “Could Shakespeare Think Like a Lawyer?”, University of Miami Law Review (2003)

— Alex McNeil, J.D., Past President, Shakespeare Fellowship; Former Administrator (retired), Massachusetts Appeals Court; Author, Total Television

## QUESTION 6I: WHAT WERE SHAKESPEARE’S LINKS TO THE ROYALTY OF HIS DAY?

[HRH, Charles, Prince of Wales: *The Prince of Wales is President of The Royal Shakespeare Company*]

*King Henry V, King Henry IV Parts 1 and 2, the three parts of King Henry VI, King Richard II, King Richard III, King John, King Lear...* it is obvious that Shakespeare was fascinated by royalty. The great thing is that his monarchs, who range from saintly to villainous, from inadequate to heroic are understandable, fallible human beings.

Shakespeare’s company performed before Queen Elizabeth three or four times a year and at least three times as often for King James. Within days of arriving from Scotland the King granted them a royal charter, enabling them to be renamed “The King’s Men.” He appointed them Grooms of the Chamber, resplendent in red livery when on duty at Court.

When I acted the part of *Macbeth* at school (Gordonstoun is about ten miles from the “blasted heath” on which Macbeth and Banquo meet the witches), I did not realize, as I do now, that King James was fascinated by witchcraft and claimed descent from Banquo. Shakespeare was not above a bit of flattery where royalty was concerned.

It seems certain that Shakespeare and his King must have known each other well.

## DOUBTER RESPONSE:

We agree that Shakespeare was fascinated by royalty, and that he portrays very diverse monarchs as understandable, fallible human beings. Several of the English history plays are among his earliest, thought to have been written shortly after he arrived in London. We know these plays are all based on Holinshed, but how did an 'upstart crow' manage to portray a world so different from his own with such insight so soon after his arrival? We would have thought this might come only after slowly gaining access to such circles. Not that a commoner couldn't have done it, but it's incredible that it happened so soon.

And if he did gain access to the royal court, why don't more records of the time show it? We do not know of any Shakespearean play that he ever appeared in, or even attended, at the court of Elizabeth I, or James I. As stated in the *Declaration of Reasonable Doubt*,

“... no record shows that either Elizabeth I, or James I, ever met Shakespeare, or spoke or wrote his name...”

Some say there is nothing unusual about the absence of such records from so long ago, but we have documents for many other much-less-prominent writers from that period. Why not for the lead dramatist of the King's Men, who was supposedly in his heyday?

No well-informed playwright would have written a play like *Macbeth* for King James I. Coming from Scotland, James was insecure and fearful on the throne early in his reign. He feared witchcraft and would not have appreciated a play in which a Scottish king is murdered while asleep in bed by a trusted courtier who had been prompted by witches. There are records of many plays being performed for King James, but never *Macbeth*.

Shakespeare and his King may have known each other well, but who was Shakespeare?

With respect,  
Shakespeare authorship doubters

*That concludes our rebuttals to the Birthplace Trust's "60 Minutes with Shakespeare." We hope you have found them both interesting and enlightening, and that you now have a better understanding of why we believe the Shakespeare authorship issue should be taken seriously. Despite the efforts of the SBT and its allies to suppress it as just another "conspiracy theory," it will never go away because, contrary to what they claim, it is really all about the evidence.*

*Up to this point we have been responding to the 61 questions posed by the Birthplace Trust. In the two appendices that follow, we first ask and answer an additional "Five key questions that the SBT did not ask, and cannot answer," and then address what we have chosen to call "Six common myths about the works, doubters and the Stratford man." These appendices provide important additional evidence and arguments; we hope that you will read them also.*

## Appendix A: Five key questions the SBT did not ask, and cannot answer

### I. WHAT IS THE BASIS OF CLAIMS THAT THERE IS “NO ROOM FOR DOUBT” ABOUT WHO WROTE THE WORKS?

We do not know why the Birthplace Trust claims that there is “no room for doubt.” In light of the many reasons presented in the [\*Declaration of Reasonable Doubt\*](#), and all of the highly credible people who have expressed doubt, their position appears untenable. Hopefully they will clear this all up in response to the [\*Shakespeare Authorship Petition\*](#).

### 2. WHAT DO THE SIX SIGNATURES OFTEN ATTRIBUTED TO THE STRATFORD MAN TELL US ABOUT HIS WRITING?

The six signatures generally attributed to Mr. Shakspeare of Stratford-upon-Avon are so badly executed that even experts can't agree on how each of them is spelled. Each of the six is in the “English secretary hand” then taught in grammar schools.

But at a time when literate people proudly signed with more care and distinction\*, especially on legal documents, Shakspeare's six signatures fall way below the norm.

This can easily be seen by comparing his six signatures to those of dozens of other actors, found in Henslowe's diary and papers. It is ever more apparent when they are compared to the signatures of other writers of the day, found in W.W. Greg's book, *English Literary Autographs 1550-1650*. It is telling that Greg chose not to include any of Shakspeare's signatures in his book, offering the following excuse:

“Of course, it will be understood that of many writers I should have liked to include no autograph was available, beyond, in some cases, a bare signature, which I had decided was of no use for my purpose.” We do find them useful for our purpose.

Looking at the six signatures individually, three are on the three pages of his will, finalized about a month before he died. Some say he may have been ill at the time. But that would not explain the illegibility of the other three, one dating from 1612 (legal deposition) and two from 1613 (Blackfriar's gatehouse mortgage and deed).

In none of the signatures can each of the letters be confidently discerned, unlike even the poorest signatures of his contemporary actors. Especially striking is the comparison to other writers, almost all of whom signed with the Italian hand\*\*.

Given the illegibility of Shakspeare's six signatures, and the absence of anything else in his hand, it seems highly unlikely that this man was, in fact, a professional writer.

\* “In Elizabethan and Jacobean times men took their handwriting, even the workaday secretary hand, more seriously than is common today. They were taught it in school, and as adults many of them carried on the effort to attain regularity and distinction in their secretary hands.” Giles E. Dawson & Laetitia Kennedy-Skipton. *Elizabethan handwriting 1500-1650, a Manual* New York: W.W. Norton & Co, 1966

\*\* “Educated men who had been to the Universities or had traveled abroad were capable of employing with equal facility both the English and the Italian character, and though they employed the former in their ordinary correspondence, they signed their names in the Italian hand.” Sylvanus Urban, editor of *The Gentleman's Magazine*, Vol. 287, 1899.

— Frank Davis, M.D., Past President, Shakespeare Oxford Society



### 3. WHAT DO SCIENTIFIC STUDIES OF GENIUS SAY ABOUT THE SORT OF PERSON WHO WROTE THE WORKS?

Orthodox scholars often reduce the question of whether Shakspere had the background to become a genius to whether he attended the Stratford grammar school. They say that as the son of a former town official he could have attended for free. They assume he did, and so case closed, as if this were enough to account for the great genius of Shakespeare. Academic research on genius says otherwise. There should be more, and it is not there.

Dean Keith Simonton, Ph.D., Professor of Psychology at the University of California at Davis, and a leading expert on creativity and genius, describes the characteristics one would expect to find in *Origins of Genius, Darwinian Perspectives on Creativity* (1999).

The research he summarizes is based on the biographies of other, well-known geniuses (not including Shakespeare because too little is known about him—especially his youth). The typical characteristics are (1) enriched home environments during childhood, (2) living in diverse locales during childhood, (3) family reversal of fortune—especially loss of one or both parents early in life, (4) self-educated, with unusually broad interests, (5) a tendency to be independent, autonomous, unconventional, rebellious, iconoclastic, (6) later-born children, not first-borns or ‘functional’ first-borns, (7) emotionally and psychologically unstable, (8) multicultural and bilingual (*Origins*, Chapters 3 and 4).

Looking over these characteristics, it is difficult to make a case that Shakspere fits. He was a functional firstborn (two older siblings died before he was born). Nothing points to an enriched home environment. Both of his parents signed with a mark, and chances are that they had no books. He seems to have spent his entire youth living in Stratford. His father fell on hard times, but there was no great reversal of family fortune during his childhood. Both parents lived until he reached adulthood. He was not multicultural, and nothing suggests he ever left England. Nor does anything suggest he was bilingual. Some assume he was self-educated, without documentary evidence. Nothing shows that he was particularly unconventional or rebellious, or mentally or emotionally unstable.

The idea that Shakspere was our greatest literary genius seems to contradict much of what we thought we knew about the developmental and personality characteristics of literary geniuses. How could all of the scientific evidence be so wrong in this one case? The fact that Mr. Shakspere does not seem to fit is one of the most important reasons for pursuing the authorship question—to resolve the nature of literary creative genius.

### 4. WHAT ABOUT THE MANY PEOPLE WHO KNEW THE STRATFORD MAN, AND KNEW ABOUT THE AUTHOR SHAKESPEARE, BUT NEVER CONNECTED THE TWO?

The failure of anyone in Stratford-upon-Avon to connect their neighbor William Shakspere to the well-known and admired Shakespeare canon is a key question that has never been answered, or even addressed, by orthodox scholars.

Sir Fulke Greville, a poet and dramatist himself, was born and raised in the area and was related to the Ardens, the family of Shakespeare’s mother. He was an important man in Stratford-on-Avon, and on the death of his father in 1606 was appointed to the office his father had held—Recorder of Warwick and Stratford-upon-Avon. His closest friends were the poets Edward Dyer and Philip Sidney, and he was a patron of Samuel Daniel. Yet nowhere in any of Fulke Greville’s reminiscences, or in the letters he wrote or received, is there any mention of the well-known poet and playwright, William Shakespeare, who supposedly was living right under his nose.

The poet and dramatist Michael Drayton was born and raised in Warwickshire, only about twenty-five miles from Stratford-upon-Avon. He wrote plays that appeared on the London stage in the late 1590s, about the same time as those of Shakespeare. In 1612 Drayton published his poem *Poly-Olbion*, a county-by-county history that included well-known men of every kind. In it he referred often to Chaucer, to Spenser, and to other English poets. But in his section on Warwickshire, he never mentioned Stratford-upon-Avon or Shakespeare, even though by 1612 Shakespeare was a well-known playwright. During the last 30 years of his life he spent many summers visiting a household in Clifford Chambers, a village about two miles from Stratford-upon-Avon. He was also an occasional patient of Dr. John Hall, William Shakspere's son-in-law. Yet nowhere in his substantial correspondence did Michael Drayton ever refer to William Shakespeare until more than ten years after Mr. Shakspere's death. When he finally did, he wrote four lines about what a good comedian he was. It is unclear whether he was referring to him as a playwright, an actor, or in some other capacity.

Mr. Shakspere's own son-in-law, Dr. John Hall, kept hundreds of anecdotal records about his patients and their ailments. He frequently noted their characteristics and achievements, remarking, for instance, that Michael Drayton was an "excellent poet." Dr. Hall surely treated his wife's father during the ten years they lived within minutes of each other. But nowhere in his notebook is there any mention of William Shakspere, not even at his death in 1616. It is indeed strange that in the early 1630s, as he was collecting the cases he wished to publish, he should neglect to include any record of his treating his supposedly famous father-in-law whose collected works had been published only a few years earlier.

The eminent historian and antiquary William Camden was deeply involved in the literary and intellectual world of his time. He knew Philip Sidney, was a valued friend of Michael Drayton, and is said to have been a teacher of Ben Jonson. In 1597, in his position of Clarenceaux King of Arms, he was one of the two officials in the College of Arms who approved the application of John Shakspere, William's father, to have his existing coat of arms impaled with the arms of his wife's family, the Ardens of Wilmcote. Thus, William Camden was acquainted with the Stratford Shaksperes, father and son.

In 1607 Camden published the sixth edition of *Britannia*, his county-by-county history of England. In the section on Stratford-upon-Avon, he described this "small market-town" as owing "all its consequence" to two natives—John de Stratford, later Archbishop of Canterbury, who built the church, and Hugh Clopton, later mayor of London, who built the Clopton bridge across the Avon. He failed to mention the well-known playwright William Shakespeare, who supposedly lived in the same town.

The theater-owner Philip Henslowe and the noted actor Edward Alleyn were leading members of the Elizabethan stage community for several decades. In their surviving diaries, letters and other papers, they mention dozens of actors, playwrights, plays, and playing companies. Yet in none of these documents does the name "William Shakespeare" appear. If Shakespeare really were the busy actor and playwright we are told he was, then Henslowe and Alleyn would surely have known him, and mentioned him in their diaries and letters.

This body of evidence, none of which has ever been refuted, suggests that there is at least a reasonable doubt that the Stratford businessman was England's greatest dramatist.

— Ramon Jiménez, *Author of two books about the Roman Republic, plus numerous authorship-related articles in The Oxfordian and SO Newsletter*

## 5. WHY DID THE AUTHOR SAY HE DIDN'T EXPECT, AND DIDN'T WANT, HIS NAME TO BE REMEMBERED?

Orthodox scholars say no one questioned the author's identity until long after he died. But they fail to note

that the author himself said that he neither wanted, nor expected his name to be remembered; and his works could immortalize others, but not himself.

None of this makes sense, unless his name wasn't associated with his works at the time.

He says repeatedly that he is in disgrace, beyond recovery (Sonnets 29, 37, 112, 121). Is it hard to imagine that such a man would want his name kept separate from his works?

### Sonnet 72

O! lest the world should task you to recite  
What merit lived in me, that you should love  
After my death,—dear love, forget me quite,  
For you in me can nothing worthy prove.  
Unless you would devise some virtuous lie,  
To do more for me than mine own desert,  
And hang more praise upon deceased I  
Than niggard truth would willingly impart:  
O! lest your true love may seem false in this  
That you for love speak well of me untrue,  
**My name be buried where my body is,  
And live no more to shame nor me nor you.  
For I am shamed by that which I bring forth,  
And so should you, to love things nothing worth.**

### Sonnet 81

Or I shall live your epitaph to make,  
Or you survive when I in earth am rotten,  
**From hence your memory death cannot take,  
Although in me each part will be forgotten.  
Your name from hence immortal life shall have,  
Though I, once gone, to all the world must die:  
The earth can yield me but a common grave,  
When you entombed in men's eyes shall lie.**  
Your monument shall be my gentle verse,  
Which eyes not yet created shall o'er-read;  
And tongues to be your being shall rehearse,  
When all the breathers of this world are dead;  
You still shall live, such virtue hath my pen,  
Where breath most breathes, even in the mouths of men.

## Appendix B: Six myths about the works, doubters and the Stratford man

### 1. AS LONG AS WE HAVE THE PLAYS AND POEMS, THE IDENTITY OF THE AUTHOR DOES NOT REALLY MATTER.

If the identity of Shakespeare does not matter, whose identity does matter? Anyone's? Of course his identity matters. As long as these works are important, so is the author. They can't be fully understood and appreciated without understanding his viewpoint. So it is a critical question for anyone seeking to understand the works, the formative literary culture in which they were produced, or the nature of literary creativity and genius. Even orthodox scholars no longer say, as they once did, that it doesn't matter.

### 2. DOUBTERS ARGUE THAT A MAN FROM HUMBLE ORIGINS COULD NOT HAVE BECOME A GREAT WRITER.

This is a false stereotype promulgated by defenders of orthodoxy to discredit doubters. They never quote any doubters who hold this view; they should be asked for a citation. An accurate statement is the one that is found in the *Declaration of Reasonable Doubt*: "Scholars know nothing about how [Mr. Shakspeare] acquired the breadth and depth of knowledge displayed in the works. This is not to say that a commoner, even in the rigid, hierarchical social structure of Elizabethan England, could not have managed to do it somehow; but how could it have happened without leaving a single trace?" That is the issue: It would have been a remarkable achievement; it should have been noted and left evidence for how it happened. That is not what one finds in the case of Mr. Shakspeare.

### 3. DOUBTERS WHO SUPPORT ARISTOCRATIC CANDIDATES AS THE AUTHOR ARE MOTIVATED BY SNOBBERY.

It is absurd to think that all of the many outstanding authorship doubters are motivated by snobbery. Was Walt Whitman, the poet of democracy and the common man, a snob? This *ad hominem* argument is a red herring employed by defenders of orthodoxy. Those who resort to it should be asked to provide evidence to back up the claims. They cannot. It is a means for them to avoid having to deal with evidence that does not support them.

As U.S. Supreme Court Justice Antonin Scalia has pointed out "It is ... more likely that [Stratfordians] are affected by a democratic bias than [supporters of given aristocrat] are affected by an aristocratic bias." (Article, *The Wall Street Journal*, April 19, 2009)

### 4. THE PHENOMENON OF DOUBT ABOUT SHAKESPEARE'S IDENTITY IS A PSYCHOLOGICAL ABERRATION.

This claim, which appeared on the website of the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust, is false. The SBT, when challenged, has failed to back up its claim. See the letter in Appendix C.

### 5. THE AUTHORSHIP CONTROVERSY IS JUST ANOTHER CONSPIRACY THEORY, NO DIFFERENT FROM OTHERS.

It is absurd to think that all of the many outstanding doubters are conspiracy theorists. Too many very credible people have expressed doubts, focusing just on this one author. This *ad hominem* argument is a red herring used

by Stratfordians to change the subject. Those who resort to it should be asked for the names of independent experts who agree. It is a means for them to avoid having to deal with evidence that does not support them.

## **6. DOUBTERS DON'T USE THE SAME METHODS AS MAINSTREAM SCHOLARS IN ATTRIBUTING AUTHORSHIP.**

There may be some authorship doubters who use methods that are not acceptable to mainstream scholars, but they are exceptions, not the rule. It is absurd to think this of all the many outstanding doubters, many of whom are mainstream scholars themselves. More than 800 signers of the *Declaration of Reasonable Doubt* have advanced degrees. Where is the evidence that all of these people use methods unacceptable to ... whom?

## Appendix C: Letter from SAC Chairman to SBT Chairman Stanley Wells

Complete text of the letter of April 5, 2010, twice quoted above, from SAC Chairman John M. Shahan to Professor Stanley Wells, then Chairman of the Birthplace Trust:

April 5, 2010

Professor Stanley Wells, Chairman  
The Shakespeare Birthplace Trust—Shakespeare Centre  
Henley Street, Stratford-upon-Avon  
Warwickshire CV37 6QW  
U.K.

Dear Professor Wells,

I am writing on behalf of the Shakespeare Authorship Coalition to challenge your claim on the SBT website (see “Shakespeare’s Authorship” page, bottom) that the phenomenon of widespread doubt about William Shakespeare’s identity is “a psychological aberration of considerable interest,” attributable to a variety of causes, including “snobbery” based on class prejudice, or “even certifiable madness (as in the sad case of Delia Bacon ...).”

If these allegations are true, it should be possible for qualified experts in the disciplines of psychiatry, psychology and sociology to validate your claims with empirical evidence. I hereby challenge you to either obtain such expert validation, or stop making the claims. Specifically, I challenge you to either back up your claims on the SBT website with data worthy of the high scholarly standards you claim to represent, or remove them forthwith.

Any theory should be evaluated based on the best arguments of its strongest proponents. There will, of course, be some level of aberrant thinking and behavior in any population; but to prove your claims, not only must you show that the prevalence of these conditions and behaviors is much greater among authorship doubters than in the general population, or in a control group, such as orthodox Shakespeare scholars, but that they are pervasive.

The enclosed “*Declaration of Reasonable Doubt*” names twenty prominent past doubters, including Mark Twain, William and Henry James, Tyrone Guthrie and Sir John Gielgud. On what basis do you claim that their doubts were due entirely to the defects you allege? Over 1,700 people have signed the *Declaration*. Of these, over 300 are current or former college/university faculty members. Some of them are much better qualified to diagnose psychological disorders than you are. On what basis do you claim that they are aberrant?

You appear to label as “psychologically aberrant” anyone who disagrees with your view. You appear to be exploiting prejudices against the mentally ill to discredit your opponents. The use of such tactics is morally reprehensible, and those who would resort to them are unworthy of being regarded as legitimate stewards of the legacy of William Shakespeare. If you continue to make such allegations, on your website or elsewhere, with no credible evidence to back them up, you should assume that the SAC will pursue this issue further.

Sincerely,

John M. Shahan  
Chairman, SAC

cc: Richard Hyde, Vice Chairman, SBT  
Diana Owen, Ph.D., Director, SBT

*That completes our reply to the Birthplace Trust’s “60 Minutes with Shakespeare” campaign. Thank you for taking the time to read it. For additional information, we recommend that you explore the websites of the many authorship organizations that have endorsed this document. If you haven’t yet done so, you may wish to read the [Declaration of Reasonable Doubt](#) at the [website of the Shakespeare Authorship Coalition \(SAC\)](#) and then consider signing it yourself.*