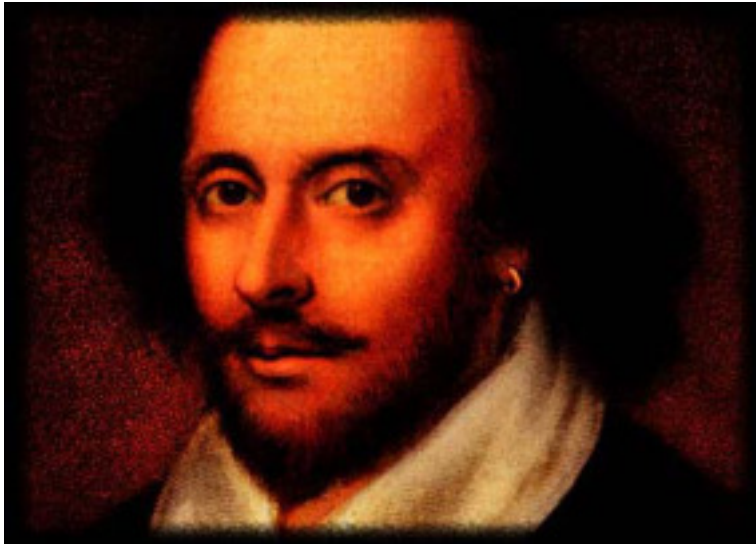


Shakespeare Authorship Controversy?

What Controversy?



Over five thousand books have been written regarding who wrote the works of William Shakespeare. Mark Rylance recently expressed concern that the question of Shakespeare authorship is not taken seriously. After five thousand books on the back of no evidence... I think it's been taken as seriously as it can be taken for far too long.

So what ARE the theories? Where do they stem from and why have many people bought into them? Is it basic Human snobbery? A Man who didn't go to University (neither did Ben Jonson by the way) or that wasn't a connected Aristocrat can't possibly of written the plays. He was a simple Country boy, wed at Eighteen and could have no knowledge of Courtly matters, foreign countries, the Classical world, War, History, Medicine, Law, Politics or, indeed, anything.

All this is to be ignorant of the truth. Shakespeare's Father was the Mayor of Stratford. He wasn't exactly a Peasant's boy. He went to Grammar School, rigorous in teaching Latin, Greek, History and so on. He loved Ovid. During his lost years of 1585 to 1592 he was probably working as an Actor but may have possibly travelled abroad. Can such a Man not find his way to compete with the University wits that dominated Theatre? It is mere snobbery to say that he cannot.

Few Actors buy into any Anti Stratfordian theory. Rylance and Sir Derek Jacobi being the predominant of the few that do. The biggest mystery here is why two such figures would or could believe any of the theories. The Anti Stratfordian "movement" has been going on for about two hundred years. Therefore for two hundred years after Shakespeare's death no one questions his authorship at all.

Anti Stratfordians will say, at times, that there's no evidence to even connect the name "William Shakespeare" to the plays. Simply not true. His name appears on original quartos and folios. His name is on Theatre registers. It's well documented by the Master of the Revels that Shakespeare and his Men presented plays at Court. Ben Jonson refers to him in his private papers. Seven years after his death, his company members Heminges and Condell put together the first folio.

From 1616, at the time of Shakespeares death to the 1850's no one questions the authorship. Since then the world of Shakespearean investigation has been flooded with conspiracy theories. All of which rely on no evidence what so ever and lots of conjecture, snobbery and a very twisted kind of wish fulfilment.

Over fifty individuals have been put forward as the actual Author of the work. The few listed below are the firm favourites.

Francis Bacon:

Philosopher, Statesman, Scientist, Jurist and Author. He served as Lord Chancellor of England. Credited as creating empiricism in the scientific community.

Bacon's own writing is nothing like or as good as Shakespeare's. Bacon had such a busy and full life, why and how would he pen Shakespeare's work?

Bacon disliked the Theatre and had no Theatrical connections whatsoever. Baconians argue proof in the fact that Stratford is never mentioned in the plays but Bacon's home of St Albans is mentioned fifteen times. Well, The Battle of St Albans was key to the plot of Henry VI parts II and III. For that matter, places in Italy are mentioned a good deal but are we REALLY to assume Shakespeare is from Venice or Florence? Many Italians HAVE tried to argue this one too. Everyone wants to claim Shakespeare for themselves. That's how the Bacon "theory" came to light in the first place.

Delia Bacon from Ohio was a fairly mediocre Writer and in 1852 travelled to England with an eye on proving that her (unrelated) name sake Francis wrote the plays. She did no real research and a resultant book was panned. Yet, the theory continued. Mark Twain liked it. Henry James was a believer. Delia Bacon herself returned to the US and was later institutionalized as mentally unstable.

Edward de Vere, the Earl of Oxford:

By far the most popular candidate for Author, Oxford was a Courtier, playwright and favorite of Queen Elizabeth.

In 1918 J Thomas Looney published (eventually finding a Publisher) *Shakespeare Identified*. He claimed that Oxford was Worldly, connected and intelligent. An Aristocrat. Opinions vary a little on his personality. He was certainly accused by many of being an absolute Monster.

Oxford's own poetry and plays were not anything near Shakespeare. His fairly vile temperament, if most accounts hold true, would not suggest a capability for writing the Shakespeare canon. He has been accused of murdering a servant at seventeen, but we're getting into the kind of speculation one hopes to avoid.

Most concede that he was sexually desolate and lived a mad life of spending, bullying and self aggrandisement.

WHY would such a character bother to write anonymously? Then write bad plays as himself? Remember this is the favourite choice as Author. WHY would he give the plays to the Lord Chamberlains Men, the competition to his own Oxfords Men?

Finally and I would say conclusively....Oxford dies in 1604, twelve years before Shakespeare. Oxfordians say he stored up several plays for the future. Why?

Now we must also note that Macbeth has direct connotations and influence from the gun powder plot of 1605 and that The Tempest took inspiration from a Bermuda ship wreck of 1609.

Orson Welles, however, liked this theory. That may not be saying much. More desperate Oxfordians claim William Shakespeare was Oxford's illegitimate son and this was his way of looking after him. Oxford would have been a Father at the age of thirteen or fourteen and then, also, we have to disregard the registers of Williams's actual birth and parentage. Desperate. Atleast... far fetched.

Mary Sydney, Countess of Pembroke:

She was connected, bright and lived on the Avon. And?

Christopher Marlowe:

This theory has lingered on since Calvin Hoffman published *The Murder of the Man who was 'Shakespeare'* in 1956.

Marlowe was, in a sense the Writer that showed, perhaps, Shakespeare where the light switch was. They were both born in 1564. Both Grammar school boys. Marlowe also went to Cambridge, was connected (and a Spy) and stormed the London stage with *Tamburlaine the Great* in 1587, aged just Twenty Three.

Marlowe had a few hits and then, aged just twenty nine in 1593 was stabbed in the head in a house in Deptford. Many of us have longed for what he might have written had he lived.... But it would not have been the Shakespeare canon.

In 1593 Shakespeare was already established himself thanks to the Henry VI cycle.

Marlowe was clearly an influence on Shakespeare but not actually Shakespeare. Shakespeare took the techniques of iambic pentameter and the mode of Historical Drama but he made it distinctly his own.

Henry VI has high and low characters (unlike Marlowe's work). It has better form and scene construction. It's as if he took what Marlowe did and layered it, deepened it. Indeed, it's been said that Shakespeare took Marlowe's Edward II and gave us the superior Richard II. Dido, Queen of Carthage became Antony and Cleopatra. The Jew of Malta became The Merchant of Venice and to some extent Dr. Faustus became Macbeth.

Why would Marlowe write a few hit plays in one style and then much better plays in a different style under another name?

Then there's the language. Shakespeare's use of language is the basis of his genius. None of his contemporaries, including Marlowe came close to emulating it. Actors know this. The lines feel utterly different in performance. Let's not look over the fact that Marlowe died in 1593. The theory goes that because Marlowe was wanted by the Authorities, for being a public Atheist, that he had to fake his own death, move abroad and then write plays from Holland or Italy or who knows where. In the light of what I've already said this does not hold water and, again, there's no evidence what so ever.

Queen Elizabeth I:

Because the Engraving of Shakespeare on the first folio looks like Elizabeth in drag. Oh dear.

William Stanley, 6th Earl of Derby:

Stanley is often considered as the leader of a group of people that wrote Shakespeares plays together. Well, that would take some planning and serious collaborative power. Not to mention what an epic conspiracy it would have to be and..... why would they all bother?

Conclusion:

On and on the conspiracy's go and each candidate get's more bonkers. William Shakespeare wrote about all aspects of life. The high and the low. For the wealthy in the upper galleries of the Globe and for the poor Groundlings around the stage. He introduces the common Man Jack Cade into Henry VI. Later we'll get Falstaff and his Tavern comrades in Henry IV.

It makes sense that Shakespeare wrote the plays. A middle class boy from Stratford knew more variety of life as expressed in the plays than could any University wit or Aristocrat.

There are many references to Country life, leather works and uses of provincial pronunciations.

How did he know of Courtly affairs? He became famous in London and

performed for the Queen! He read. He was intelligent. He met all kinds of people.

How does he know so much about Italy? He just might have been there in his famous lost years. More likely, he read, he knew all types of people, he was intelligent. Italians did come to London as Traders or Visitors. A curious mind like Shakespeare's could have found things out.

Shakespeare's idiolect, his language was so distinct and superior to anyone else's. His vocabulary twice that of other Men.

There were only two hundred thousand people in London in Shakespeare's day. There would have had to of been a cover up of such luck and intricacy. Heminges, Condell, Jonson... endless people would have to of been in on it. Nothing would of leaked and still.... What on Earth would the motivation of been?

William Shakespeare was a genius. Beyond simple snobbery perhaps certain people just want ownership of this genius. Conspiracy theories some how (in their minds) make the genius their own.

Shakespeare was, shock horror, Shakespeare. No Scholars take the theories seriously because they don't merit it. There's no point re testing old theories over and over again. Once you discredit something... and in light of no new evidence... the job is done. Move on.