



**GUEST  
EDITORIAL**

## **Introduction to the Special Issue: The Shakespeare Authorship Question-Alternative Mappings**

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To be or not to be truthful. To be or not to be on the right side of history. To read and take seriously the research of others (even those you distrust) or to close your eyes to new discoveries and attack blindly those who might have an alternative view. To prefer an inspirational tale to historical fact or to do some of your own forensic examinations of tales you've been told.

These are the questions the scholarly world has always had to deal with. Think of Galileo and the Church. In Brecht's play about Galileo, this man of science was simply *shown* the instruments of torture and he himself quickly backed down from what he knew was scientific fact. And even with Galileo, it took the Church 500 years to acknowledge that he was right and they were wrong, to apologize to him. That is, a belief rooted in a preferred story was able to keep Truth at bay. Five hundred years is a long time to wait for an apology.

This special issue of the *Journal for Scientific Exploration* suggests that a similar evidentiary problem has existed for some four centuries in the field of literature given that the gatekeepers of that field – mostly literature scholars of high repute – have generally refused to look at the evidence. Such refusal would certainly suggest that respected scholars in other fields need to become involved if Truth is not to be victimized again.

The issue: because a high-ranking English aristocrat used a pseudonym for his literary work during his lifetime to protect himself and his family from social disapproval and political danger (a pseudonym that wound up enriching another man with a similar-sounding name) scholars today continue to refuse to examine 16<sup>th</sup> century reality and give the rightful author his due. If this were a relatively obscure author, we would no doubt say who cares and let it all slip into the historical waste bin. But because it concerns the greatest writer who ever lived – one William Shakespeare – it might seem incumbent upon the academy to lead the way here in correcting the story and demand that Truth be called by its name once again.

The argument here has been compromised and complicated by the fact that the town in England where the wrongly-credited man grew up -- Stratford-upon-Avon -- has now become one of the UK's largest and most lucrative tourist centers bringing millions of pounds into the town's coffers annually and allowing the charity that runs it all – the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust – to fund scholars who, wittingly or unwittingly, maintain the attractive rags to riches story they tell. They also argue that questioning the authorship in any way is heresy and a conspiracy theory, something aberrant and evil that could only be argued by people who are anti-Shakespeareans.

That is to say, rather than challenging the research, it is the researchers themselves who they attack. If one doubts this, check with your own favorite university and see whether what is called the Shakespeare Authorship Question (the SAQ) is even discussed in any detail in literature-based courses that include the works of Shakespeare.

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And woe to any young scholar publicly interested in the SAQ who seeks tenure at his or her institution. Even contributing to a book on the subject will unleash those devout believers who often without even reading the evidence call for the heretics to be excommunicated from the academy (denied tenure) and shunned by the community.

That just ain't nice. And it ain't a healthy situation for any intellectual community. Is there another area of knowledge so disallowed in academe?

A few facts: the author who writing under the pseudonymous name William Shakespeare was clearly extraordinarily well-educated. This is an author who knew law as intimately as a lawyer, knew theatre as if he had grown up with it, medical theory as a physician, music as a musician, the military as an officer, heraldry as a titled aristocrat, hawking as a man of means, Italy as one who lived there for an extended period of time and France as a royal visitor. He also spoke a wide range of languages including many not taught in 16<sup>th</sup> century provincial grammar schools.

On the other side of the coin, we know that the man still credited with the work came from an illiterate family, may not have been able to sign his own name on documents, never taught his own daughters to read or write, had at most a grade school education, and, as far as anyone knows, never studied any of the aforementioned subjects, never spoke a foreign language and never left England. Does this sound like he should even be a candidate for Greatest Writer in the World? Even a genius needs some real world experience.

But why does it even matter more than four centuries later? We have the works. Surely that's enough. But Truth does matter. And if we continue to get Shakespeare's truth wrong we run the risk of getting an important slice of history wrong; if we get Shakespeare wrong, we get the literary rock of the world totally wrong. Whatever our field, whatever our background, we all want to see Truth win out in the end.

Hence this special issue of *JSE* which dares to look at this centuries-old question that simply won't go away. The answer proposed here by this alternative mapping takes us from the land of What We Think We Know to the less-known land of What We Should Probably Know, from the stultifying life of Stratford's Will Shakspere (as he and his family pronounced and spelled the name) to the riveting life of England's ranking aristocrat, the 17<sup>th</sup> Earl of Oxford, Edward de Vere.

Is this all a new idea? Traditional Stratfordian scholars argue that the authorship question only emerged in the 19<sup>th</sup> century when the Romantics created a new interest in the biographies of artists. But authorship doubt-

ers like American Professors Roger Stritmatter and Brian Wildenthal and the brilliant British independent scholar Alexander Waugh have traced such allusions back to the same period in which the Shakespeare works were actually created. Indeed, most of these allusions were themselves carefully rooted in coded language, *double entendre* and even anagrams (all popular pastimes in the period), each offering credible deniability to the writers.

Indeed, there were real reasons for them to use pseudonyms. The court of Elizabeth I was deeply rooted in secrecy and spying because of religious issues and the royal succession. Anyone who dared to write about it ran the real risk of winding up in prison, being tortured, having one's hands literally cut off or, in some cases, even losing their lives. That court-- celebrated for its support of the arts -- has also been compared to the contemporary court of North Korea's Kim Jung-Un. It was not a court to mess with.

As one example of saying two things at the same time, there is the First Folio, that expensive volume which brought together 36 of the Bard's plays (18 for the first time). We all know what the Bard allegedly looked like from the full-page portrait found in that volume. But examined closely and combined with a close reading of Ben Jonson's poem of praise (an encomium) to Shakespeare, we find some credibility gaps. No laurels for the supposed poet, no identifying family crest, no birth and death dates. The portrait itself is also not flattering. A man with a bulbous head, wearing a jacket with two left sleeves and a curious thin line around the subject's neck looking suspiciously like the outline of a mask. Who is behind the mask? Then there are Jonson's words suggesting that this portrait -- though 'cut' for Shakespeare -- is not an image of the author. He goes on to say that we should look away from this strange portrait if we really wish to know who the author was. Jonson says we will only find him in his words. Is this then a put-down by Ben Jonson of the young artist who created the image? Or is it suggesting something larger, something more curious? Is there another author behind the peculiar public face?

Such an alternative reading of the encomium is, for many, nonsensical. But this is only one of very many such examples and oddities. Alexander Waugh notes many more in his powerful essay on the encomium included in this volume.

But again, who really cares? Does the true identity of someone long gone really matter? In the end, we will probably find just another dead white male. Or does it? Does it really matter who George Washington or Abraham Lincoln actually were? We know what they did. Does knowing about their lives really throw light on their historical actions? If we were to learn that a black man wrote

the plays of Arthur Miller, would it change the works, interpretations of those works?

Certainly this question of authorial identity mattered to other writers -- Walt Whitman, Henry James and Mark Twain, to name just three who all questioned the attribution. It mattered as well to Sigmund Freud, Charlie Chaplin and even Helen Keller. It mattered to artists such as Tyrone Guthrie (founding Artistic Director of Canada's Stratford Festival) and to Orson Welles. It matters still to actors such as Derek Jacobi and Mark Rylance (the first Artistic Director of the rebuilt Globe Theatre in London). And it seems to matter to some 5000 others who have signed an online document well-worth reading called The Declaration of Reasonable Doubt About the Identity of William Shakespeare ([doubtaboutwill.org](http://doubtaboutwill.org)) which asks for scholars to admit their doubt publicly and encourage academia to take up the question.

This special volume also asks anyone who thinks seriously -- indeed, anyone who merely thinks -- to take a dip into literary authorship doubt and ultimately make their own judgement into the validity of the question. Does the fact mean anything that Will of Stratford himself never once in his life claimed to be the author? Indeed, no one in his field or his family ever acknowledged him as an author either during his lifetime or after. Nor did he even make such a claim in his will. If he didn't say he was the author, why do we?

As former *Washington Post* journalist Bob Meyers notes in his opening essay for this volume, tradition and authority stood in the way of not only Galileo but in our own time scientists such as Alfred Wegener, Ignaz Semmelweis and J. Harlan Bretz in their attempts to speak truth about, respectively, tectonic plates, the impact of germs on childbirth, and land erosion, found themselves attacked and ridiculed. The fact that the 20th century scholar who first identified the real Shakespeare happened to have the last name Looney is surely good for a laugh but the fact is J. Thomas Looney's pioneering research has led the way in this contested field for more than a century.

For just the biographical facts and whether there are enough of them to link the Stratford man to the title, you are directed to Kevin Gilvary's provocative essay on what has come to be called *biografiction*. This is followed by Ramon Jimenez' forensic examination of people who should have known the Stratford man as an author both in Stratford (where Will returned a wealthy man in his 40s and apparently never again wrote a word) and in London. Unfortunately, no one during his lifetime seemed at all aware of him as a writer. And when he died, no one in either London or Stratford took any notice. This is odd indeed. Famous writers were almost always eulogized.

In another revealing essay, this one by independent scholar Bonner Miller Cutting, no connection can be found between the Stratford man and the 19-year-old aristocrat Henry Wriothesley who will become the 3<sup>rd</sup> Earl of Southampton when he turns 21. In 1593-'94, it turns out, William Shakespeare dedicated two sexually-soaked epic poems to him -- *Venus and Adonis* and a year later *The Rape of Lucrece*. Yet the two apparently never met. Interestingly, the Earl of Oxford met the Earl of Southampton on many occasions even discussing the possibility of Southampton marrying Oxford's daughter. So who is more likely to have written the dedications?

Elisabeth Waugaman's essay, "Shakespeare and the French Lens," continues the expansion of this authorial mapping; in this case, the author's extraordinary familiarity with the French court and political events going on across the Channel. Yet we know the man from Stratford neither studied French nor ever visited France. So how could plays such as *Love's Labour's Lost* be so *au courant* with events there and why are so many characters in the play that are recognizable portraits of real French aristocrats and royalty.

Greek philosophy and the influence of Greek drama on Shakespeare's plays is also discussed in this issue. The Earl of Oxford, we find out, knew the ancient plays and classic poetry -- his uncle was Henry Howard, the Earl of Surrey (1516/17-1547) who along with Sir Thomas Wyatt introduced the Petrarchan sonnet into English, establishing the form Shakespeare's sonnets are written in. His Latin master was Arthur Golding, the man credited with the first English translation of Ovid, a long-recognized source for much in the Shakespearean canon. Oxford's classical education included studies in languages such as Latin, Greek, Hebrew, French and Italian. Earl Showerman looks at why the author's Greek drama references have been generally ignored by Stratfordian scholars.

In another classically linked essay, the Canadian writer and scholar Sky Gilbert takes the question of Shakespeare's sources even further suggesting that the Bard's own epistemology was deeply influenced by the Greek philosopher Gorgias who put forth that art creates its own reality. Was Shakespeare ultimately following in that arcane philosophical tradition? Would the man from Stratford have even heard of Gorgias?

Another point. We know that the author William Shakespeare wrote at least 37 plays, two long poems of over a thousand lines each in iambic pentameter, 154 sonnets and a variety of other poems. This amount of work represents another credibility problem for those who wish to fit this vast quantity of creative work into the Stratford man's 17 years of supposed residence in London (1593-1610). As any playwright will admit, it is a virtual

impossibility to create that amount of work in such a limited amount of time. This is, of course, why Stratfordian scholars are forced once again to fall back on the notion of genius.

Scholar Katherine Chiljan, however, has been digging deeper and she suggests that the traditional dating of the plays is really not to be trusted. Supported by important work of Ramon Jimenez and Kevin Gilvary, Chiljan presents evidence that some of the plays date back to the 1560s when they were first produced in Elizabeth's court, sometimes under different names and in alternative versions. That is to say, if these researchers turn out to be correct, we will finally have documentation about Shakespeare's long missing juvenilia and even some early drafts to examine.

That said, it must also be noted that Will of Stratford was only born in 1564 and even geniuses probably need to get out of grade school before writing about history, love, marriage, and battles between the sexes. That is, Chiljan posits that Will of Stratford was simply too young to have written those earlier versions played before the Queen herself.

A final essay in this special collection is about what the works themselves reveal about the pseudonymous author William Shakespeare. Hank Whittemore – author of a volume called *100 Reasons Why Edward de Vere Was Shakespeare* as well as author of an extraordinary study of Shakespeare's Sonnets called *The Monument* – argues here that works of genuine art almost always stem from life experience and acquired knowledge. Yes, whoever

wrote the works was clearly a genius. But the author was also a flesh and blood person and for Whittemore, the alternative map points clearly to Edward de Vere as that person.

My hope is that this volume can be just a beginning of your own rethinking on the Shakespeare Authorship Question. But wherever you ultimately come down on the issue, it is in the end less important than that such alternative ideas are at least *considered* and that the research of fellow scholars is at least explored when an issue of importance is being so seriously contested.

## BIOGRAPHY

**Don Rubin** is Professor Emeritus of dramatic literature and theatre at Toronto's York University. A teacher for more than four decades, his fields of expertise include Theatre History, Modern Theatre, Aesthetics and Criticism, Shakespeare and the Authorship Question and specialties in both Canadian and African theatre and drama. Editor of Routledge's six-volume *World Encyclopedia of Contemporary Theatre* and the standard volume, *Canadian Theatre History: Selected Readings*, he served for many years as President of the Canadian Centre of UNESCO's International Theatre Institute, President of the Canadian Centre of the International Association of Theatre Critics, President of the Shakespeare Authorship Coalition and President of the African Theatre Ensemble of Toronto. He has edited some 60 volumes of theatre research and published more than 1500 articles and essays on theatre.