



ESSAY

Demythologizing Shakespeare: What We Really Know About the Man from Stratford

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HIGHLIGHTS

Unlike other noted authors and dramatists of the period, the Stratford man left no notes, journals, letters, or manuscripts, nor did he ever claim to be an author of any kind in his will.

ABSTRACT

The works of Shakespeare have been justly celebrated since they first appeared in print, especially with the publication of the First Folio in 1623. However, the contemporary records concerning Will Shakspeare of Stratford-upon-Avon -- the man credited with writing the works of William Shakespeare -- show that most of what is said or "known" about the man from Stratford is simply undocumented. Will left no notes, no journals, no letters, no manuscripts, no personal comments about anyone, and no literary or educational bequests in his will. The question arises: did he ever write anything? This essay surveys the records and finds that the sparsely documented records concerning William of Stratford make it difficult to accept that he was the true author of the great works.¹

KEYWORDS

Shakespeare, Shakespeare Authorship Question, Will Shakspeare, Biographical studies, Stratford-upon-Avon.

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INTRODUCTION

In 1910, George Bernard Shaw famously remarked: "Everything we know about Shakespeare can be put into a half-hour sketch."² Most biographers to some extent recognize this lack of documentation. Two eminent Oxford academics devote a chapter to the myth that "We don't know much about Shakespeare's life." For them, however, "it is not true to say that the records are scant" (Maguire & Smith 2012, p. 106). After a brief review of what is known, they state: "We lack comparable information for many of Shakespeare's Elizabethan and Jacobean contemporaries" (Maguire & Smith 2012, p. 107). This may be

true, but biographers of Shakespeare are not attempting a series of life studies about early modern dramatists, but one study of one particular writer. There exist contemporary records which are reviewed below, but they do not confirm that William of Stratford ever wrote anything.

Moreover, the comparison with Ben Jonson is instructive. According to his acclaimed biographer, Ian Donaldson, Ben Jonson wrote and received many letters which have survived; he had lengthy conversations on literary matters with William Drummond of Hawthornden, who kept detailed notes in his journal which survive; Jonson published poems and prose which were personal about himself, his family and his friends. He wrote introductions

in his own person to his published works. We know exact details about Jonson's patrons, his travels, his hosts, his library and his personal grief. Despite all this documentation, Ian Donaldson states that biographical materials for Jonson's life can only be known "imperfectly and in part." He adds that "Jonson's life is mainly a matter of gaps, interspersed by fragments of knowledge" (Donaldson 2011, 8-9).

Such wide-ranging documentation exists for Jonson but not for Shakespeare. American literary scholar David Bevington (2010) sums up the comparison:

A central problem is that Shakespeare wrote essentially nothing about himself. Unlike Ben Jonson (2010), his younger contemporary, who loudly proclaimed in prologues, manifestos, essays, and private conversations his opinions on the arts and writers from antiquity down to the Renaissance, and who has left us vivid testimonials of his feelings about the death of a son, about his wife, "a shrew, but honest", about his conversion to Catholicism, and much more, Shakespeare has left us his plays and poems (Bevington, 2010 p. 3).

Bevington and Donaldson are echoing the great Shakespearean scholar Samuel Schoenbaum who conducted a historical survey of Shakespearean biographies and concluded on a pessimistic note:

Perhaps we should despair of ever bridging the vertiginous expanse between the sublimity of the subject and the mundane inconsequence of the documentary record (Schoenbaum 1970, 767).

In an attempt to counteract this adverse judgment, Schoenbaum published his own account as *William Shakespeare: A Documentary Life* (1975). In this monumental volume, 218 documents are presented in facsimile, arranged around a cradle-to-grave account of his life. However, about a quarter, just 56 of the documents cited, are contemporary records alluding to Will Shakspeare of Stratford (Gilvary 2018, 121). These documents give a framework to the life but do not indicate a literary career. The remaining documents – ten pre-date Will's birth in 1564, 60 are contemporary but do not reference Will, and 92 come from after his death in 1616 – are contextual (Gilvary 2018, 120-128). Perhaps we are unable to discover any links between the great works and the meagre record because there were no links. We might frame this as a question: what evidence can we adduce that William of Stratford

was the author of the works attributed to the name of Shakespeare?

DID WILLIAM OF STRATFORD WRITE ANYTHING?

To answer this more fully, we must review the contemporary references to this man. Beginning with the entries in the Register of the Holy Trinity Church at Stratford, we find that the family name is usually spelt 'Shakspere' (on thirteen out of nineteen instances between 1562 and 1616 according to Chambers 1930, ii. 1-18). Furthermore, it is essential to distinguish references to 'Shakespeare' as a man from Stratford with the first name William and to 'Shakespeare' as a collection of great works of drama and poetry.

Many individual documents are available on websites, especially *Shakespeare Documented* www.shakespearedocumented.org. In general, this website provides immediate access to a wide range of materials. Most entries here offer an image and a transcription of the document. However, each entry begins with a reviewer's personal explanation of the record. That is to say, the reviewer is giving *interpretation* before showing *evidence*. Moreover, many of the documents (for example those cited by Schoenbaum in *William Shakespeare, a Documentary Life* (1975) turn out to be more context than document -- detailing topics such as the Shakspere family in Stratford or information about the theatres of the period in London. Because websites can be ephemeral, I generally refer to E. K. Chambers *William Shakespeare: A Study of Facts and Problems* (1930, 2 volumes). For the records at Stratford which mention William by name, about thirty in total, I refer to Robert Bearman (*Shakespeare in the Stratford Records* 1994) as SSR, and for the London records held at The National Archives at Kew, I refer to David Thomas (*Shakespeare in the Public Records* 1985) as PRO.³

SHAKESPEARE IN THE STRATFORD RECORDS

The documents in Stratford are listed below in Table 1 with references to Bearman's list which merely indicate William Shakespeare's growing prosperity in his purchase of property (SSR 2, SSR 8, SSR 14) and his standing as an affluent citizen of Stratford (SSR 29). There is no record of William from his baptism in 1564 (SSR 1a) until the issue of a marriage licence at the age of eighteen (Chambers 1930 ii. 41). Thus every reference to his childhood, youth or education is entirely speculative.⁴ William might even have spent his childhood elsewhere, as argued by Honigmann (1985).

More important is the absence of any personal records, such as letters, journals or notes, that would give

any indication of his thoughts or experiences of his life in Stratford (Gilvary 2018, 21-22). There are only passing references to him by his fellow townsmen concerning finance and property: a possible loan (SSR 3) the improvement of the highway (SSR 23), and the possible enclosure of land (SSR 29). There is no contemporary reference to William Shakespeare as a man. Independent scholar Ramón Jiménez (2013) describes in detail ten contemporaries who left journals and must have known Will or his family. These ten contemporary eye-witnesses never connect Will with the life of a writer or authoring the works of Shakespeare.⁵ The absence of any personal letters written by him or on his behalf is astonishing when one considers that the plays mention over 100 letters.⁶

The most significant gap in the Stratford records is the lack of any reference to him as a writer. The epitaphs in the Holy Trinity Church do not mention him as such (WS ii. 181-85). William does not claim to be a writer in his last will and testament (WS ii. 169-181). Nor does his will mention anything literary: no manuscripts of eighteen or so unpublished plays, no books owned, no books borrowed and no reference to any other literary figure. He did not remember the Stratford School in his will nor any of the Stratford schoolmasters. There is only one reference in the will to suggest involvement in the theatre: an interlinear addition mentioning the bequests to Hemmings, Burbage and Condell (WS ii. 172). This is also the only evidence among the Stratford documents that Shakespeare ever travelled outside Warwickshire and Worcestershire.

WILLIAM IN THE LONDON RECORDS

There are about 35 hand-written documents at The National Archives in London. David Thomas (1985) has presented transcriptions of public records in London which mention Will (see Table 2, where documents are cited as *PRO*). William is mentioned in the third of three documents (1596-1602) concerning his father's application for a coat of arms. These records are important for detailing John Shakspeare's career in Stratford and his family background, but add no knowledge to William's career. The third document dated 1602 cites a complaint against Sir William Dethick, the Garter King-of-Arms, and his associate William Camden (Clarenceux King-of-Arms). In this complaint, William is described as "ye player", not as a poet or playwright (WS ii. 18-31).

The account of Sir George Hume, Master of the Great Wardrobe records the issue of red cloth to over a thousand members of the royal household for the Coronation of King James on 15 March 1604 (*PRO* 17). Among those individuals listed were the nine "Players" of the king, including William Shakespeare as well as ten of the

Queen's Company, and nine of Prince Henry's Company (Chambers 1930, ii. 73). This record does not indicate that Shakspeare was a writer, merely that he was one of twenty eight players among three playing companies. The next record of William in London does not occur for another eight years. In 1612, William was mentioned as present in London in the lawsuit *Belott v Mountjoy* (*PRO* 25). Shakespeare was called as a witness to certain dowry arrangements. His name occurs eighteen times (Chambers 1930, ii. 90-95). The relevant documents have been transcribed and contextualised by Charles Nicholl (2007). He made his deposition on 11 May 1612 in Westminster Hall but was unable to recall any of the arrangements. David Thomas states that the case of *Bellott v. Mountjoy* show William involved in "pleasantly mundane domestic events and squabbles" (Thomas 1985, 30) but they do not give any indication that he was a poet or a playwright. In fact, none of the public records in London indicate that he was known as any kind of author (Gilvary 2018, 40-42).

ALLUSIONS IN PRINT

Another category of witness consists of literary allusions by writers in print. These references indicate no personal knowledge of the author known as "Shakespeare" but attest to his growing reputation as a printed poet. The earliest allusion in London is taken to be in Robert Greene's *Groats-worth of Wit* (1592, STC 12245), in which Shakespeare is assumed to be the object of Greene's abuse. However, the allusion is ambiguous: Shakespeare is not actually named. The reference might be to an actor, a writer, or a company member. The straightforward interpretation of the phrase an "upstart crow beautified by our feathers" (sig. F1v-F2r) is a complaint against a writer (Shakespeare) who has plagiarised the work of others.

Perhaps the most important allusion to William Shakespeare as author was made in print by Francis Meres in his 333-page commonplace book, *Palladis Tamia* (1598, STC 17834). In this guidebook, he compares about seventy contemporary writers with classical and European authors (Chambers 1930: ii. 193-5). Meres obviously could not have been acquainted with all of them as he only lived in London for about two years (Kathman, 2004). Meres refers to "Shakespeare" nine times but without stating a first name, suggesting that he was not personally acquainted with him. In his book, Meres names 12 plays, which indicate that these works were known although one of them, *Love's Labour's Won*, has not been identified with certainty. It is not clear whether he had seen these plays acted or, as if he only knew of these plays from written sources. Meres does tell us of the existence of Shakespeare's "sugred Sonnets among his priuate friends, &c,"

(pages 281-2, signatures Oo1 verso and Oo2 recto; Chambers 1930, vol. ii 193-195). *Shakespeare's Sonnets* were not published for another 11 years. That said, we hear nothing about who those friends were or about any sonnets from other sources. In short, Meres does not seem to have had any direct acquaintance with the author, only with his works.

Other printed allusions refer to Shakespeare as a published poet from 1593 (e.g. *Willobie his Avis*, 1594, STC 25755) and then to plays that were only published under his name from 1598 (See Table 4). In 1599, we find the poet John Weever in his published *Epigrams* (1599, STC 25224), paying homage to "Honie-tong'd Shakespeare" (book iv no. 22) but again, this is only a reference to the author, not the person. In this epigram Weever shows no special interest in or knowledge of the person Shakespeare and mentions him in one epigram out of 160. (Honigmann, 1987)

Ben Jonson (1572-1637) was a younger contemporary of William and makes more comments about Shakespeare than any other writer (Chambers 1930: ii. 202-11) but these amount to very little and are inconsequential. Out of the 133 epigrams in the 1616 folio edition of his *Works* (STC 14751), Jonson did not dedicate a single epigram to Shakespeare, implying that the two poet-playwrights did not have any kind of close relationship. The few opinions which Jonson expressed about Shakespeare were contradictory. Jonson was publicly fulsome in writing the commendatory verses in the First Folio of 1623 (Chambers 1930 ii. 207-209), but this may well have been feigned. Jonson began the practice of the literary puff, according to Franklyn B. Williams Jr. (1966). And Jonson became the most prolific writer of literary commendations in the Jacobean period, writing commendations for thirty printed works (not counting his own). So Jonson's commendatory verses to the First Folio amounts to a literary puff for which he was likely to have been paid (Gilvary 2018, 188-194).

But Jonson was privately dismissive when conversing with William Drummond on his visit to Scotland in 1619.⁷ According to Drummond:

- He said, Shakespear wanted Arte (Patterson 1923, 5).
- for in one of his Plays he brought in a Number of Men, saying they had suffered Ship-wrack in Bohemia, where there is no Sea near by 100 Miles (Patterson 1923, 20).

The reproach "that Shakespear wanted Arte" is usually linked with Jonson's more famous suggestion that

Shakespeare had "small Latine and lesse Greeke" in the commendatory poem to the First Folio (v. 31, Chambers 1930, ii. 208). These instances are only documented after Will's death in 1616. Perhaps the most surprising observation is how few comments Jonson makes about Shakespeare.

Overall, Chambers (1930: ii. 186-237) quotes and discusses 53 contemporary allusions to Shakespeare between 1590-1640 showing that an author called "Shakespeare" was well-known but these allusions are not personal adding nothing to our knowledge of the author. From the very limited testimony of contemporary witnesses, we gain no insight at all into Will's character or personality. Nor do we gain any understanding of Will's literary career beyond the fact that some plays and poems attributed to William Shakespeare were well-known and celebrated.

LITERARY AND THEATRICAL RECORDS 1593-1634

The literary and theatrical records which concern Shakespeare as an actor and sharer in the Lord Chamberlain's / King's Men and as the author the great works derive mainly from the title pages of plays and poems, the Stationers' Register (SR) and the Revels Accounts.⁸

A document of great importance for the Elizabethan theatre, misleadingly called *Henslowe's Diary*, sheds no light on Will's career.⁹ This is actually an account book maintained meticulously by the theatre owner, Philip Henslowe during the late 1580s and 1590s (see Foakes, 2002, intro. pp. xvi-xvii). In this book, which comprises 242 folio sheets, Henslowe records payments to playwrights, actors, costume makers, carpenters, and the Master of Revels. Henslowe also recorded his takings from individual performances at the Rose Theatre. Henslowe names 27 playwrights but never mentions Shakespeare as one of them (Carson, 2010: pp. 54-66). Henslowe lists seven plays with Shakespearean titles, but does not record any payments for them (Carson 2010, 67-79). This reveals much about the practices in the Elizabethan theatre but tells us nothing about Shakespeare. By contrast, Ben Jonson is frequently mentioned in the volume, e.g., for a loan of £4 in July 1597, which Henslowe paid to Jonson as a co-author of various plays (Carson 2010, p. 32).

The title pages of published poems (see Table 4) ascribe a name "William Shakespeare" (or a variant spelling) on fifteen different plays, two narrative poems and two collections of poems. The name "William Shakespeare" is first associated as the author of a literary work with the publication of the narrative poem *Venus & Adonis* in 1593. The name does not appear on the title page but

below a dedication to the Earl of Southampton. The same arrangement is used on all subsequent editions (1594, 1595 (?), 1596, 1599, 1602, and 1617). This pattern is repeated the following year with the publication of *Lucrece* and in subsequent editions (1598, 1600, 1607, and 1616). In 1599, a collection of poems published under the title *The Passionate Pilgrim* was ascribed to W. Shakespeare. In 1609, a collection of 154 sonnets was published entitled *Shake-speares Sonnets*, but the author is not named in the conventional manner.

ATTRIBUTION OF THE TITLE PAGES

The title pages of plays usually offer useful information about plays in the following arrangement: title (sometimes with an outline of the plot); playing company (but not always) and occasionally venues; author (increasingly during the 1590s); sometimes for a later edition whether the text was corrected or augmented; place, date and printer of the work. The name “William Shake-speare” (or a variant spelling) appears on the title page of fourteen different plays during his lifetime (see Table 4). At least two of these plays were falsely attributed to William of Stratford: *The London Prodigal* in 1605 (Sharpe 2013, 679-704) and *A Yorkshire Tragedy* in 1608 (Sharpe 2013, 704-10). The name was first used in 1598 for reprints of *Richard II* and *Richard III* and for the earliest version of *Love’s Labour’s Lost*. This name appeared on the title pages of fourteen plays published in his lifetime. In 1623, the massive First Folio (1623) was published, containing 36 plays set in double columns in about 900 pages.

Despite the fact that there is an ascription of an author, these title pages in print are not strictly primary sources as they have been mediated by the stationer who arranged for their publication. For many, the Folio edition is the strongest proof that the man from Stratford was the great author. However, as we have seen, there is nothing in contemporary records of his life that actually confirms his status as an author of any kind, and from at least the 19th century, many have come to doubt the Folio’s apparent literary attributions. Moreover, unlike the publications of Ben Jonson (especially his *Works* of 1616), there is no personal testimony either by William Shakespeare or about him (Bevington, 2010 p. 3). Thus these ascriptions give an initial indication of the author of the works, but not an absolute identification as to who composed them.

Some of these are widely considered to be false attributions. We may also note here that the name Shakespeare was attached to a poetry collection entitled *The Passionate Pilgrim* (1599; 1612) which contain poems known to have been composed by other writers (Chambers 1930.i. 547-48). After William’s death but before the

publication of the First Folio, two more plays were falsely attributed to William Shakespeare: *Sir John Oldcastle* in 1619 (Sharpe 2013, 725-727) and *The Troublesome Reign of King John* in 1622 (Vickers 2004; Forker 2011).¹⁰ Thus the name “William Shake-speare” (or a variant spelling) was a major selling point, a kind of brand from the 1590s through the rest of his life and beyond. How far it was used as a brand-name i.e. a pseudonym for other writers, remains to be established.¹¹

THE STATIONERS’ REGISTER

The Stationers’ Register is described in detail by Chambers (1930: i. 126-138). In total there are about thirty-four entries which refer to plays of Shakespeare but there are only four references to Shakespeare as an author in his lifetime. Edward Arber noted “the first time our great poet’s name appears in these Registers” on 23 August 1600 “Two bookes. the one called Muche a Doo about nothinge. Th[e] other the second parte of the history of kinge henry the iijth with the humours of Sir John Fallstaff: Wrytten by master Shakespere *xijd.* (Register C, f.63v; Arber iii. 170). The next entry refers to the publication of *King Lear*. “A booke called. Master william Shake-speare his historye of Kinge Lear as yt was played before the kinges maiestie at Whitehall vppon Sainct Stephens night [26 December] at Christmas Last [1607] by his maiesties servantes playinge vsually at the globe on the Banksyde *vjd.*” (Register C, f.161v; Arber: iii. 366). A second concerns the Sonnets in 1609: “a booke called Shake-speares sonnettes *vjd.*” (Register C, f.183v; Arber: iii. 410).

On 2 May 1608 the following erroneous entry was made: “A booke Called A yorkshire Tragedy written by Wyllyam Shakespere *vjd.*” (Register C, f.167r; Arber: iii. 377). Although the entry states that the play was written by Shakespeare, most scholars now accept the play was composed by Thomas Middleton (Sharpe 2013, 704-10).

On 8 November 1623, seven years after William’s death, there was a large entry concerning the publication of plays not previously published. The collection of thirty six plays is known as the First Folio (STC 22273). The entry was made in Register D of the Stationers’ Company as “Mr William Shakespears Comedyes Histories, and Tragedyes” listing sixteen plays as “not formerly entred to other men” (Register D, p. 69; Arber iv. 107). Overall, these entries in the Stationers’ Register say nothing personal about the author, simply the name attached to the publication of the works.

REVEL’S ACCOUNTS

Late in 1605, Edmund Tylney, Master of the Revels, submitted accounts for 1604–5 in a book which survives

(Chambers 1930: ii, 331-2; Thomas 1985, doc. 21). Other account books only survive as summaries. Tylney refers to 15 court performances, including two masques with music. Four of the plays performed were recorded as by "Shaxberd". The Revels Book of 1611-12 records that the court saw only two of Shakespeare's plays, without naming the author (Thomas 1985, doc. 22).

SHARES IN THE GLOBE

Shakespeare's role as a sharer in the Globe from 1599 onwards is described in detail by Chambers (1930: ii. 52-71). Wickham *et al.* (2000) provide useful transcriptions and discussion. The post-mortem inventory of Sir Thomas Brend, dated May 1599, states that the Globe theatre was *in occupacione Willielmi Shakespeare et aliorum* "occupied by William Shakespeare and others" (PRO 10; Chambers 1930: ii. 67). Further details emerge from an affidavit in the case Witter v. Heminges and Condell in 1619 (PRO 12), and affidavits by Cuthbert Burbage in 1635 (PRO 13; Chambers 1930: ii. 65-71). Since Shakspeare makes no specific mention of shares in the Globe or the Blackfriars in his will, he must have sold his shares by 1610 (Chambers 1930: ii. 64-5). David Thomas (PRO 17) has calculated that Will's income as a sharer in the Globe was £40 per annum over a decade from 1599, and a combined income from the Globe and the Blackfriars Theatre for two or three years in the 1610s at £80 - £90 p.a. Bearman states a slightly higher estimate for the combined income during the early 1600s at approximately £200 p.a. (Bearman 2016, 145).

Such income was not enough to cover the cost of purchasing property in Stratford. According to Chambers, Shakespeare spent £960 for property: £60 on New Place in 1597 (SSR 2), £320 on land at Old Stratford in 1602 (SSR 8), £440 on a share in the tithes in 1605 (SSR 14), and £140 on the Blackfriars gatehouse in 1613 (PRO 26). These disbursements indicate considerable outlays and well beyond any earnings that Will might have made as a playwright as the average payment for a play in Henslowe's Diary in the 1590s was no more than £7 (Bearman 2016, p. 50). Nor could he have derived such income from his position as a sharer in the Chamberlain's/King's Men (Bearman 2016, pp. 145-54). The mystery remains as to how he derived his income.

CONCLUSION

Due to a clear absence of documents, it is not possible to construct a literary biography of William of Stratford, that is, a narrative account of a life as a writer. Only a small number of townsmen refer to Will in letters or business notes and none of these offer the least suggestion as to the character, personality or appearance of the man.

The allusions to Shakespeare as a writer are to a name associated with printed texts, not to an author.

Moreover, there are three glaring sets of 'lost years' in the surviving records for Will:

1. regarding his childhood and youth from baptism in 1564 (SSR 1a) to the issue of a marriage licence when he was eighteen (Chambers 1930: ii. 41). During this period we have no idea of his education or literary influences.
2. his early adulthood from the birth of his twin children in 1585 when he was twenty (SSR 1c) until he was paid as a member of the Chamberlain's Men at the age of thirty (PRO 2). During this period, we have no idea how he could ever have become a writer.
3. his maturity in London (aged 40 to 48) from the issue of red cloth for the King's Coronation in 1604 (PRO 17) until he is summoned as a witness in the Bellott-Mountjoy case in 1612 (PRO 25). During this period he should have been at the peak of his powers and his fame. Yet there is no trace that he was even in London at this time.

The extant records simply do not indicate that Will Shakspeare of Stratford-upon-Avon was any kind of an author. The Stratford records indicate only that he was a provincial man of increasing affluence. The literary and theatrical records attest to Will's involvement with the Lord Chamberlain's Men (later the King's Men) and as a sharer at the Globe. But the allusions in print to "Shakespeare" as an author only indicate that the name had been associated with plays and poems. These allusions in print do not connect with the man from Stratford.

This realization that Will left no notes, no journals, no letters, no manuscripts, no personal comments about anyone, and no literary or educational bequests in his will, not only precludes the possibility of writing his life story but must also raise the larger question: did he ever actually write anything at all?

BIOGRAPHY

Kevin Gilvary has a BA and MA in Classics, an MA in Applied Linguistics (University of Southampton) and a PhD from Brunel University in London. His 2015 doctoral thesis entitled *Shakespearean Biografiction* was adapted and published by Routledge in 2018 as *The Fictional Lives of Shakespeare*. He was the editor of, and major contributor to, *Dating Shakespeare's Plays: A Critical Review of the Evidence* (2010, Parapress).

ENDNOTES

- 1 This essay is based on Chapter 2 of my *Fictional Lives of Shakespeare* (2018). Other critical accounts of the documentation for William Shaksper of Stratford include Diana Price *Shakespeare's Unorthodox Biography: New Evidence of an Authorship Problem*. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press (2001); David Ellis *That Man Shakespeare: Icon of Modern Culture*. Mountfield, East Sussex: Helm International (2005); David Ellis "Biographical Uncertainty and Shakespeare." *Essays in Criticism* 55, (2005) 193-208; David Ellis *The Truth about William Shakespeare: Fact, Fiction and Modern Biographies*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press (2012). Especially comprehensive is Tony Pointon *The Man who was NEVER Shakespeare*. Parapress. (2012).
- 2 G. B. Shaw's thorough and devastating review of Frank Harris's play (*Shakespeare and his Love*, 1910) appeared in *The Nation* 8, 24 December; repr. in *Bernard Shaw's Book Reviews*, ed. Brian Tyson (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1996 ii., 240-254)
- 3 References to documents concerning Will of Stratford are cited as WS with reference to E.K. Chambers's two-volume *William Shakespeare: A Study of Facts and Problems* (1930). This work remains lucid, accessible and comprehensive; modern scholars continue to refer to Chambers. Many individual records can be accessed online at the Shakespeare Documented website. Other documentary collections include a two volume study by B. Roland Lewis *The Shakespeare documents: Facsimiles, transliterations, translations & commentary*. Stanford (1940). Caroline Loomis *William Shakespeare: A documentary volume*. Gale Group (2002). Among encyclopedias, especially helpful is Oscar J. Campbell & E. G. Quinn *The Reader's Encyclopaedia of Shakespeare*. MJF Books (1964). Also noteworthy is Michael Dobson & Sir Stanley Wells *The Oxford Companion to Shakespeare*. Oxford (2001). However, none of these collections offer an overview of the documents such as is made herein.
- 4 Samuel Schoenbaum (1977) makes many unfounded assertions about Will's education: that Will spent his childhood in Stratford (no evidence), where "we need not doubt that Shakespeare received a grammar school education" (1977, p.63). The phrase "we need not doubt" simply indicates the absence of any direct evidence. He adds that Will "was lucky to have the King's School at Stratford-upon-Avon. It was an excellent institution of its kind, better than most rural grammar schools" (1977, p.65). By contrast Chambers mentions the school only briefly, just four times in the opening chapter (1930, i. pp. 3-11). Levi Fox (1984) outlines what little is known in a short pamphlet of 23 pages entitled "The Early History of King Edward VI School", Dugdale Society.
- 5 In his article, Ramón Jiménez (2013) describes the following ten contemporaries who did not link William to the great works: the historian William Camden, the poet Michael Drayton, the lawyer Thomas Greene, his son-in-law the doctor John Hall, James Cooke, the lawyer Sir Fulke Greville, Edward Pudsey, Queen Henrietta Maria, the theatre manager Philip Henslowe, and the famous actor Edward Alleyn.
- 6 Alan Stewart in *Shakespeare's Letters* Oxford (2008) analyzes 111 letters in over thirty plays which serve a wide variety of dramatic reasons.
- 7 Jonson's conversations were recorded by William Drummond in his notebook at their meetings in 1619. These notes were published as "Informations to William Drummond of Hawthornden" by John Sage & Thomas Ruddiman in *The Works of William Drummond of Hawthornden*: Scotland: James Watson (1711). The notebook appears in a modern edition by R. F. Patterson, ed. *Ben Jonson's conversations with William Drummond of Hawthornden*. London: Blackie & Sons (1923).
- 8 E. K. Chambers deals comprehensively with literary and theatrical records in volume II of *William Shakespeare: a Study of Facts and Problems* (1930). Transcriptions of documents concerning the Lord Chamberlain's Men/King's Men can be found in Wickham, Glynn, Herbert Berry & William Ingram, eds., *English Professional Theatre, 1530-1660*. Cambridge University Press (2000). The few records concerning Will as a member of these companies have been usefully collected in C. D., Wilson, F. P., Greg, W. W., & Jenkins, H. (1962) *Dramatic Records in the Declared Accounts of the Treasurer of the Chamber*. Malone Society. For a narrative, and at times speculative, account of the Lord Chamberlain's Men/King's Men, see Andrew Gurr's misleadingly titled, *The Shakespeare Company, 1594-1642*. Cambridge (2004).
- 9 There is a modern edition with very helpful notes by R. A. Foakes (ed.) (2002) *Henslowe's Diary*. Cambridge. There is interesting discussions in Neil Carson (2011). *Companion to Henslowe's Diary*. Cambridge.
- 10 Both Brian Vickers (in 'The Troublesome Reign, George Peele, and the Date of King John' in *Words that count*, ed. Brian Boyd, Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2004: 78-116) and Charles Forker (ed., *The Troublesome Reign of John, King of England* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2011) make the case that *The Troublesome Reign* was by another dramatist, George Peele, and was used as a source text for Shakespeare's *King John* and that it was not a variant or early version.
- 11 Peter Kirwan in *Shakespeare and the Idea of Apocrypha*

(Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015) has examined in detail the texts which are thought to have used the name "William Shakespeare" pseudonymously. He further deals with other plays which were published with initials suggestive of William Shakespeare but were also misattributions: *Lochrine* "by W.S." (1595, STC 21528), *Thomas Lord Cromwell* "by W.S." (1613, STC 21533), and *The Puritan* "by W.S." (1607, STC 21531).

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APPENDIX: THE RECORDS FOR WILLIAM OF STRATFORD

The following documents mention the name William Shakespeare in records dated between 1564 and 1616: in total there are about 80 contemporary manuscript references. There are also 18 printed references.

References:

- WS Chambers, E. K. *William Shakespeare: A Study of Facts and Problems*. 2 vols (1930)
 PRO Thomas, D. *Shakespeare in the Public Records*. Document Numbers (1964)
 SSR Bearman, Robert. 1994. *Shakespeare in the Stratford Records* (1994).

Table 1: Shakespeare in the Stratford Records

Robert Bearman (SSR) states that there are 30 or 31 documents in Stratford which refer by name to William Shakespeare up until his burial. There are also two allusions in the Worcester Diocesan Register.

1564	Baptism 'Gulielmus filius Johannes Shaksper' Holy Trinity Church, Stratford (SSR 1a).
1582	Licence for Marriage for 'Willelmum Shaxpere' to Anna Whately; Surety for Marriage for 'Willm Shagspere' to Anne Hathaway; Bishop of Worcester's Register (WS ii. 41).
1583	Baptism of Susanna 'daughter to William Shaksper' (SSR 1b)
1585	Baptism of Hamnet & Judeth 'sonne & daughter to William Shaksper' (SSR 1c)
1596	Burial, Hamnet filius 'William Shaksper'. Holy Trinity Church, Stratford (SSR 1d).
1597	Purchase of New Place for £60 from William Underhill (SSR 2).
1597	Stratford Corporation Payment for stone to 'Mr. Shakespere' [? father or son] (SSR 31)
1598	Letter from Abraham Sturley to Richard Quiney about 'Mr. Shaksper' (SSR 3)
1598	Stratforde Burrowghe, noate of corn and malt: 'Wm. Shackespere. x [10] quaerts' (SSR 4).
1598	Letter to 'Wm. Shackespere' from Richard Quiney requesting loan of £30 (SSR 5).
1598	Letter from Adrian Quiney to his son, Richard Quiney about 'M ^r Sha' (SSR 6).
1598	Letter from Abraham Sturley to Richard Quiney about our countriman 'M ^r Wm Shak' (SSR 7).
1601	Will of Thomas Whittington calls Anne Shaxpere, 'wyf unto Mr. Wyllyam Shaxspere' (WS ii. 42)
1602	conveyance of 107 acres of arable land and 20 acres of pasture to 'William Shakespeare' from William and John Combe (SSR 8).
1602	counterpart of document of conveyance of 107 acres of arable land (SSR 9)
1602	Transfer of cottage in Chapel Lane, Stratford from Walter Getley to Shakespeare (SSR 10)
1604	Survey of Rowington Manor confirms 'William Shakespere lykewise holdeth there one cottage' (WS ii. 112).
1604	Stratford Court of Record: 'Willielmus Shexpere' sued the apothecary Philip Rogers (SSR 11).
1605	Assignment of an interest in a lease of Tithe Lands to 'William Shakespear' from Ralph Hubaude (SSR 12).
1605	Ralph Hubaud's Bond of £80 with 'Willielmo Shakespear' (SSR 13).
1605	Draft of assignment of an interest in a lease of Tithe Lands from Ralph Hubaude (SSR 14).
1606	Inventory of Ralph Hubaud's property showing 'Mr. Shakspre' owed xxli (<i>Calendar of Worcester Wills</i>)
1606	Survey of Rowington shows 'Willielmus tenet . . . domum mansionalem' (WS ii. 112)
1608-9	Court of Record for Stratford (seven documents). Addenbrooke suit (SSR 15-21)
1609	Conveyance of a Property adjoining a property of Shakespeare in Henley Street (SSR 22)
1611	Shakespeare's name added to List of 71 Contributors to a Highways Bill (SSR 23).
1611	Draft Bill of Complaint confirms Shakespeare's lease of the tithes of Stratford (SSR 24).
1611	Inventory of goods of Robert Johnson states he held a barn of "Mr Shaxper" (WS ii. 32).
1612	Survey of Stratford Corporation records Shakespeare as tithe tenant (SSR 25)
1613	Conveyance of property in Henley Street, next to a property of Shakespeare (SSR 26).
1614	Thomas Greene notes M ^r Shakspeare among Freeholders in Oldstratford and Welcombe (SSR 27).
1614	Welcombe Enclosure: covenant with William Replingham (SSR 28).
1614	Thomas Greene refers four times in his notes to Shaksper (SSR 29).
1614	Grant for entertaining a preacher (WS ii. 153)
1603-16	Endorsement on lease of a barn beside Mr William Shaxpeare's property (SSR 30).
1616	Burial of 'Will. Shaksper, Gent' (SSR 1e).

Table 2: William of Stratford in Official London Records

There are about 25 documents in London which mention William Shakespeare in his lifetime. Thomas lists 28 documents held in the PRO (now The National Archives), but two of these do not mention him by name and four date from after his death.

1588-9	Court of King's Bench: William cited as legal heir in Bill of Complaint about Estate at Wilmecote: (PRO 1).
1595	15 April. Treasurer of the Queen's Chamber paid £20 to " Willm Kempe Willm Shakespeare & Richarde Burbage seruauntes to the Lord Chamberleyne" (PRO 2).
1596	Court of King's Bench: "William Shakspere" bound over in in Writ of Attachment made by Francis Langley (PRO 3).
1597	Purchase of New Place by "Willielmus Shakespeare" from Thomas Underhill (PRO 9).
1597	"William Shackspere" listed among tax defaulters in St. Helen's Parish, Bishopsgate (PRO 4).
1598	"Willelmus Shakespeare" listed as tax defaulter in St. Helen's Parish, Bishopsgate (PRO 5).
1599	"Willelmus Shakespeare" listed as tax defaulter in Bishopsgate (PRO 6).
1599	Shakespeare listed as tax defaulter in St. Helen's Parish, Bishopsgate (PRO 7).
1599	Thomas Brend's post-mortem inventory mentions "Shakespeare" at the Globe (PRO 10).
1600	"Willelmus Shakspeare" in Lord Treasurer's Remembrancer as tax defaulter (PRO 8).
1600	Stationers' Register: 'Henry iiii . . . written by Mr Shakespere' (WS i. 377).
1602	Confirmation that "Willielmum Shakespeare" purchased New Place in 1597 (PRO 14).
1602	York Herald mentions "Shakespear y ^e Player by Garter" in a complaint about issuing of arms (WS ii. 22).
1603	Warrant for Letters Patent: "Wilielmum Shakespeare" was listed as one of King's Men (PRO 15).
1603	Letters Patent: "Wilielmum Shakespeare" listed as one of King's Men (PRO 16).
1604	Master of the Great Wardrobe grants red cloth to "William Shakespeare" and others (PRO 17).
1604	Survey of Rowington lists "William Shakespere" as property holder (PRO 18).
1604-5	Revels's Accounts mentions "Shaxberd" as the author in connection with performance of four plays at court (PRO 21).
1605	Augustine Phillips bequeaths 30s. "to my ffellowe william Shakespeare" (WS ii. 73).
1606	Exchequer, Land Revenue lists Shakespeare as property holder in Stratford (PRO 19).
1607	Stationers' Register: "Master William Shakespeare his historye of Kynge Lear" (WS i. 463).
1608	Stationers' Register: "A Yorkshire Tragedy by Wylliam Shakespeare" (WS i. 535).
1609	Stationers' Register: "a booke called Shakespeares sonnettes" (WS i. 556).
1610	Confirmation of land purchase by "Shakespere" from William and John Combe in 1602 (PRO 24).
1611-2	Revels' Accounts mentions two plays of Shakespeare but not him by name (PRO 22).
1612	Bellott-Mountjoy Case: Shakespeare is mentioned 18 times in 25 documents (PRO 25).
1613	Payment for an Impresa to a Mr. Shakespeare (WS ii. 153).
1613	Purchase of Blackfriars Gatehouse for £140; mortgaged to Henry Walker (PRO 26).
1613	Bequest of five pounds by John Combe to M ^r William Shackspere (WS ii. 127)
1615	King's Bench. Shakespeare mentioned as Sharer in Globe in case Ostler v Heminges (PRO 11).
1615	Mentioned in Bill of Complaint by Sir Thomas Bendish regarding Blackfriars (PRO 27).
1616	Last will and testament of William Shackspeare (PRO 28).
1617	Court Roll of Rowington confirms transfer of property to Susanna and John Hall (PRO 20).
1619-20	Court of Requests mentions Shakespeare in case Witter v. Heminges and Condell (seven documents, PRO 12).
1632	Court of Requests: Cuthbert Burbage mentions Shakespeare as sharer in the Globe (WS ii. 67).
1635	Lord Chamberlain's Department. Cuthbert Burbage mentions Shakespeare (PRO 13).
1636-7	Warrants from Lord Chamberlain mentions three plays of Shakespeare, but not him by name (PRO 23).

Table 3: Unofficial, Manuscript References to Shakespeare

In addition to the six unofficial, manuscript references listed in the Stratford section, there are about ten unofficial, hand-written references to Shakespeare in his lifetime.

1593	H. B. in <i>Willobie His Avis</i> refers to Shakespeare (WS ii. 191).
1598-1603	Northumberland Manuscript contains unsigned scribbles, mentioning Shakespeare on various occasions (WS ii 196-7)
1598-1601	Gabriel Harvey in a manuscript note in a copy of Speght's translation of <i>Chaucer</i> (1598) mentions Shakespeare (WS ii. 196).
1599-1601	<i>The Returne from Parnassus</i> I and II mentions Shakspeare nine times (WS ii. 199-201).
1599-1605	"W. Shakespear" mentioned in an anonymous manuscript note in <i>The Pinner of Wakefield</i> , attributed to Robert Greene (WS ii. 201).
1601	Francis Davison's note in <i>Catalog of the Poems contayned in Englands Helicon</i> (WS i. 372).
1602	John Manningham in his diary reports an anecdote about Burbage and Shakespeare (WS ii. 212).
1613-35	Leonard Digges in a manuscript note in a copy of Lope de Vega's <i>Rimas</i> mentions Shakespeare (Morgan 1963, pp 118-120).
1614	William Drummond mentions Shakespeare (from notes published in 1711, WS ii. 220).
1615	F. B. [Francis Beaumont] in a poem to Ben Jonson mentions Shakespeare (WS ii. 222).
1618-21	Edmund Bolton lists Shakespeare in his manuscript for <i>Hypercritica</i> (WS ii. 225).
1616-33	William Basses's poem on the death of Wm Shakespeare (WS ii. 226).

Table 4: Printed References to Shakespeare

There are about 18 named references to Shakespeare in print until the end of 1616.

1592	Possible allusion by the name 'shake-scene' in Robert Greene's <i>Groatsworth of Wit</i> (WS ii. 188).
1595	Thomas Covell in <i>Polimanteia</i> refers to 'sweet Shak-speare' (WS ii. 193).
1598	Richard Barnfield in <i>A Remembrance of Some English Poets</i> mentions Shakespeare (WS ii. 195).
1598	Francis Meres in <i>Palladis Tamia</i> mentions Shakespeare among many other writers (WS ii. 193-195).
1599	John Weever dedicates one epigram (out of 160) to 'Honie-tong'd Shakespeare' (WS ii.199).
1600	John Bodenham mentions William Shakespeare once in his Epistle to <i>Bel-vedere</i> or <i>The Garden of the Muses</i> (WS ii, 211).
1600-4	Anthony Scoloker in <i>Daiphantus, or the Passions of Love</i> refers to 'friendly Shake-speare's tragedies' (WS ii 214).
1603	In <i>A Mourneful Dittie, entituled Elizabeths Losse</i> (by Henry Chettle?) 'Shakspeare, Johnson, Greene' are criticised for not lamenting the death of Elizabeth (WS ii.212-3).
1603-1625	I. C.[John Cooke] in <i>Epigrames</i> lists Shakespeare with Johnson and Greene (WS ii. 212).
1605	William Camden (1551-1623) in <i>Remaines of a greater Worke concerning Britaine</i> mentions William Shakespeare (WS ii. 215).
1607	William Barksted in <i>Myrrha</i> mentions 'Shakspeare' (WS ii. 216).
1612	John Webster in his <i>Epistle to The White Devil</i> mentions 'Shake-speare' among others (WS ii. 218).
1614	Richard Carew on the <i>Excellencie of the English Tongue</i> mentions 'Shakespeare' (WS ii. 219).
1614	Thomas Freeman in <i>Runne and a Great Cost</i> writes a sonnet to Shakespeare (WS ii. 220).
1615	Edmund Howes in his continuation of Stow's <i>Annals</i> mentions Shakespeare (WS ii. 221).
1615	Thomas Porter in his book of epigrams mentions Shakespeare (WS ii. 222).
1616	In <i>The workes of Benjamin Ionson</i> , 'Will. Shakespeare' is listed among the actors for <i>Every Man in his Humour</i> and 'Will. Shake-Speare' for <i>Sejanus</i> (WS ii. 71).
1620	John Taylor in <i>The Praise of Hemp-seed</i> mentions Shakespeare (WS ii. 226).

Table 5 List of Plays and Poems Attributed in Print to Shakespeare

Year	Edn	Title	Attribution	STC
STC	<i>A short-title catalogue of books printed in England, Scotland and Ireland, and of English books printed abroad 1475-1640. Second edition, revised and enlarged, begun by W. A. Jackson and F. S. Ferguson, completed by K. F. Pantzer. London: The Bibliographical Society. Vol. I (A-H). 1986. Vol. II (I-Z). 1976. Vol. III (Indexes, addenda, corrigenda). 1991.</i>			
1593	Q1	<i>Venus and Adonis</i>	William Shakespeare	22354
1594	Q2	<i>Venus and Adonis</i>	William Shakespeare	22355
	O1	<i>Lucrece</i>	William Shakespeare	22345
1595	-	-	-	-
1596	Q3	<i>Venus and Adonis</i>	William Shakespeare	22357
1597	-	-	-	-
1598	Q1	<i>Lucrece</i>	William Shakespeare	22346
	Q	<i>Love's Labours Lost</i>	W. Shakespere	22294
	Q2	<i>1 Henry IV</i>	W. Shake-speare	22280
	Q2, Q3	<i>Richard II</i>	William Shake-speare	222308/9
	Q2	<i>Richard III</i>	William Shake-speare	222315
1599	Q4	<i>Venus and Adonis</i>	William Shakespeare	22358
	Q3	<i>1 Henry IV</i>	W. Shakespeare	22280
	O1, O2	<i>Passionate Pilgrim</i>	W. Shakespere	22342
1600	Q2, Q3	<i>Lucrece</i>	William Shakespeare	22347/8
	Q1	<i>2 Henry IV,</i>	W. Shakespeare	22288
	Q1	<i>Midsummer Night's Dream,</i>	William Shakespeare	22302
	Q1	<i>Merchant of Venice</i>	William Shakespeare	22296
	Q	<i>Much Ado</i>	William Shakespeare	22304
1601	-	-	-	-
1602	Q5	<i>Venus and Adonis</i>	William Shakespeare	22359
	Q1	<i>Merry Wives,</i>	William Shakespeare	22299
	Q3	<i>Richard III</i>	William Shakespeare	22316
1603	Q1	<i>Hamlet</i>	William Shake-speare	22275
1604	Q2	<i>Hamlet</i>	William Shakespeare	22276
	Q3	<i>1 Henry IV</i>	W. Shake-speare	22282
1605	Q4	<i>Richard III</i>	William Shake-speare	22317
	Q	<i>The London Prodigal</i>	William Shakespeare	22333
1606	-	-	-	-
1607	Q6	<i>Venus and Adonis</i>	William Shakespeare	22360
	Q4	<i>Lucrece</i>	William Shakespeare	22349
1608	Q7	<i>Venus and Adonis</i>	William Shakespeare	22360a
	Q1	<i>History of King Lear</i>	William Shake-speare	22292
	Q4	<i>Richard II</i>	W. Shakespeare	22310
	Q5	<i>1 Henry IV</i>	W. Shake-speare	22283
	Q1	<i>A Yorkshire Tragedy</i>	W. Shakspeare	22340
1609	Q	<i>Sonnets</i>	Shake-speare	22353
	Q1	<i>Troilus,</i>	William Shakespeare	22232
	Q1, Q2	<i>Pericles</i>	William Shakespeare	22334
1610	Q8	<i>Venus and Adonis</i>	William Shakespeare	22360b
1611	Q3	<i>Hamlet,</i>	William Shakespeare	22277
	Q3	<i>Pericles</i>	William Shakespeare	22334
	Q2	<i>King John</i>	W. Sh.	14646
1612	Q5	<i>Richard III</i>	W. Shake-speare	22318
	Q3	<i>Passionate Pilgrim</i>	W. Shakespere	22343
1613	Q6	<i>1 Henry IV</i>	W. Shake-speare	22284
1614	-	-	-	-
1615	Q5	<i>Richard II</i>	William Shake-speare	22312
1616	Q5	<i>Lucrece</i>	William Shakespeare	22350
1617	Q9	<i>Venus and Adonis</i>	William Shakespeare	22361
1618	-	-	-	-
1619	Q3	<i>Contention</i>	William Shakespeare	26101
	Q3	<i>True Tragedie</i>	William Shakespeare	26101
	Q4	<i>Pericles</i>	William Shakespeare	22334
	Q2	<i>Merry Wives</i>	W. Shakespeare	22300
	Q2	<i>Merchant</i>	W. Shakespeare	22297
	Q2	<i>King Lear</i>	William Shake-speare	22293
	Q2	<i>MN Dream</i>	W. Shakespeare	22303
	Q2	<i>A Yorkshire Tragedy</i>	W. Shakespeare	22341
	Q2	<i>Sir John Oldcastle</i>	William Shakespeare	18796
1620	Q10	<i>Venus and Adonis</i>	William Shakespeare	22362
1621	-	-	-	-
1622	Q4	<i>Hamlet</i>	William Shakespeare	22278
	Q1	<i>Othello,</i>	William Shakespeare	22305
	Q6	<i>Richard III</i>	W. Shake-speare	22319
	Q7	<i>1 Henry IV</i>	W. Shake-speare	22285
	Q3	<i>King John</i>	W. Shakespeare	14647
1623	F1	<i>First Folio (36 plays)</i>	William Shakespeare	22273