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ESSAY

The Shakespeare Authorship Question: A Forensic Examination

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HIGHLIGHTS

The search for a link between the world's most famous writer, William Shakespeare, and the litigious businessman from Stratford-upon-Avon, Will Shakspere, has been ongoing for centuries, but no one has yet found any evidence that they were the same person.

ABSTRACT

Most authorship disputes are between rival authors, between two or more writers for whom there is conflicting evidence within the works themselves, or conflicting testimony from others about who exactly composed what. The Shakespeare Authorship Question, however, is quite different. It is based on assumptions about the supposed author's life, on a stunning absence of testimony by people who actually knew him, as well as silence by the author himself. That is, the traditional attribution is based on a *lack* of direct knowledge. Despite centuries of intense research and investigation, no credible evidence from his actual lifetime has emerged linking Will Shakspere of Stratford to the illustrious dramatic canon of the author who wrote under the pseudonym William Shakespeare. One major aspect of this search has been attempts by scholars to find individuals among Shakspere's family, friends, and co-workers who spoke of him as a writer. It turns out that no one who lived and worked during the Stratford man's dates ever did. Nor did he or any member of his family or his descendants ever claim that he was a writer. There is simply no contemporary record of anyone mentioning him in connection with playwriting. Even among the few literary men who were personally acquainted with him – poet and playwright Michael Drayton and historian William Camden to name two -- neither ever mentioned him as a writer in their accounts of prominent men from the county of Warwickshire. Other residents of the Stratford area -- some of whom were quite familiar with the London theatrical scene -- never referred to him at all, much less as a dramatist. This included the theatergoer Edward Pudsey and the poet and playwright Fulke Greville, also Warwickshire residents. Dr. John Hall, who married Shakspere's daughter Susanna in 1607, practiced medicine in Stratford for 30 years and wrote about his most interesting patients, never mentioned his father-in-law as a writer. This absence of direct knowledge and this absence of living testimony is unique in the history of authorship disputes. This article looks in detail at the silences of those around the Stratford man, people who should have mentioned his writing but didn't, and ask what part such silence should play in knowledge formation.

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INTRODUCTION

> Of all the immortal geniuses of literature, none is personally so elusive as William Shakespeare. It is exasperating and almost incredible that he should be so. After all, he lived in the full daylight of the English Renaissance, in the well-documented reigns of Queen Elizabeth and King James I. . . . He was connected with some of the best-known figures in the most conspicuous court in English history. Since his death, and particularly in the last century, he has been subjected to the greatest battery of organized research that has ever been directed upon a single person. And yet the greatest of all Englishmen, after this tremendous inquisition, still remains so close a mystery that even his identity can still be doubted.
>
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Authorship disputes typically involve two or more rival claimants to a work or body of work in which there is conflicting evidence of authorship, or about which there is conflicting testimony from others about who was the actual author. There is usually evidence of some kind on both sides of the dispute. However, the controversy about the authorship of the Shakespeare canon, now more than 400 years old, is quite different. It became a subject of public discussion in the 18th century and continues today because the traditional attribution to William Shakspere of Stratford-upon-Avon is not based on facts, testimony, or documentation but on assumptions about the supposed author that are unsupported by any credible evidence.

Despite centuries of intense research and investigation, no such evidence from Stratford, London, or elsewhere has emerged associating the provincial businessman with the plays and poems that were published under the pseudonym "William Shakespeare." In fact, the traditional attribution has prevailed despite the substantial evidence that the Stratford man had nothing to do with playwriting or poetry and that there is no documentation that he ever wrote anything.

No one who knew him associated him with writing, nor did he ever claim to be a writer. This absence of evidence, what amounts to total silence, is almost unique in the history of authorship disputes, and is highly unusual in serious controversies of any kind. Questions about the real identity of the author "Shakespeare" arose in the Elizabethan dramatic community as early as 1593 and 1594, when the name first appeared in print. Over the ensuing decades, numerous poets, playwrights, and others repeatedly hinted that there was an unknown writer behind the Shakespeare name who could not be revealed.[1] Although these questions continued to be asked over generations to come, and numerous different answers proposed, editors, scholars, and publishers have accepted and enforced a tradition that a businessman in Stratford-upon-Avon named William Shakspere was the author of the world's most illustrious dramatic canon.[2] The origin of this disputed tradition is unknown, but it seems to have developed as references to the Stratford man as the author began to appear in the 1620s and 1630s, years after his death. It was not until 1920 when J. Thomas Looney published '*Shakespeare' Identified in Edward de Vere the Seventeenth Earl of Oxford*, that the actual author was revealed.

Stratford-upon-Avon

The surviving records pertaining to William Shakspere of Stratford-upon-Avon (1564-1616) indicate that he was a grain dealer and moneylender who invested in real estate in his village in rural Warwickshire. At no time during his lifetime and for several years afterward were there any references to him as a playwright or a writer of any kind. Neither Shakspere nor any member of his family, nor any of his descendants, ever claimed that he was a writer, and there is no record of any of them mentioning plays or playwriting. Nor is there any evidence that William Shakspere of Stratford attended the court of Queen Elizabeth or consorted with the wealthy or the nobility, as the author of the plays obviously did.

The records of the Stratford grammar school during his school-age years are lost, but his biographers claim that he would have received an advanced grammar school education. There is no record that he attended any of the Inns of Court or universities in England, nor any evidence that he traveled beyond Stratford and London. He married at age 18 to a woman six years older who was already pregnant with their daughter, Susanna. Three years later, in 1585, his wife bore him twins, whom he named Hamnet and Judith, after neighbors of the family. It appears that about this time, he traveled to London, but his activities for the next six or seven years, the so-called "lost years," are unknown.

His parents, John and Mary, were unable to sign their names, and his daughter Judith signed with a mark. His eldest daughter, Susanna, was barely able to sign her name (Thompson, 1916; Price, 2000). The only handwriting alleged to be that of William Shakspere are six signatures on legal documents, all dated in the last four years of his

life, including three on his will. They are all written in a shaky script and all spelled differently. Several are not completely finished. The authenticity of all six signatures has come into question, the claim being made that some or all of them were written by a lawyer or a lawyer's clerk. More than one expert has concluded that those on the will were not written by the person who wrote the other three, most likely a law clerk (Thomas, 1985; Jenkinson, 1922). If any of them were actually written by Shakspere of Stratford, they indicate that he was, at best, unaccustomed to signing his name. At worst, they suggest that he was unable to write cursive script, and is therefore disqualified as the author of the Shakespeare works. It should be noted here that almost all major authors of the period used cursive script.

In this context, it is notable that Shakspere's friend and neighbor Richard Quiney, who was about seven years older than the alleged playwright, was the author of the only extant letter written to him—a letter of more than a hundred words that he wrote in October 1598. It is an appeal for a guarantee of a loan of £30, and is signed "Yowres in all kyndness Ryc. Quyney." In the words of paleographer Sir E. Maunde Thompson, " . . . one is struck with the excellence of the small but legible . . . handwriting in the English style."[3] A letter to this same Richard Quiney, sent to him in London by his father Adrian, dated January 1598, is also extant.

In his article on handwriting in 16th century England, Thompson (1916, pp. 295-296) also cited a Stratford deed of 1610 that "bears three admirable signatures of Shakespeare's fellow townsmen." These facts demonstrate that Shakspere's neighbors and fellow businessmen were able to sign their names, and even write competent letters, and that his parents and children were unable to do the same. On the other hand, Shakspere's younger brother, a haberdasher, signed his name "Gilbart Shakspere" in "a neat Italian hand" as a witness two years before his death in 1612, at the age of 45 (Eccles, 1963). These facts are further evidence that the claim that Shakspere of Stratford authored the Shakespeare works, or even a single play, is therefore almost impossible to believe.

In Shakspere's own will, which filled three pages and was most likely written by a clerk, he mentioned no books, papers, or manuscripts, nor did he refer to a theater, a playbook, or a play. The reference in his will to the actors Burbage, Heminges, and Condell of the King's Men seem to be a later interpolation. In any case, the will language only connects him to these men as an actor, and makes no mention of the writing of plays or poems. Although it is documented that he owned small fractions of shares in the Globe and Blackfriars theaters, his will mentions no such shares, and there is no record that his heirs received them or any payments for them. The legal records concerning the ownership of shares in the two theaters being incomplete and unclear, Shakespeare scholar E. K. Chambers (1930, Vol. 2, pp. 67-68) surmised that Shakspere must have sold his holdings in the decade before he died.

Biographers of Shakespeare assert that he made his living by selling his plays, but at the time of his death in 1616, at least 19 Shakespeare plays, over half the total, had never been published. Furthermore, there is no evidence that Shakspere of Stratford ever sold a play to an acting company or that he or his seven siblings—he had three brothers and four sisters—or any of his descendants ever sought payment for the publication of a play or poem. Documents in Stratford indicate that Shakspere most likely earned his living by trading in commodities and investing in real estate. He also loaned money to his fellow townsmen, several of whom he sued for repayment of small debts.

What is striking is the refusal of nearly all traditional Shakespeare scholars to acknowledge this total absence of evidence that the Stratford man wrote anything. Nor have they undertaken a serious search for the actual author. Those scholars and authorship skeptics who have engaged in such a search have failed to find anyone among Shakspere's family, friends, or acquaintances in Stratford who spoke or wrote of him as a writer. Nor did anyone in London or elsewhere who lived at the time he did ever refer to him as a writer. Nor did he or any member of his family or his descendants, ever claim that he was a writer. There is simply no contemporary record of anyone mentioning him in connection with any kind of writing. This is especially puzzling because several prominent literary men in Warwickshire must have known William Shakspere, who was one of Stratford's wealthiest residents.

Two contemporary writers, Michael Drayton and William Camden, failed to mention the alleged playwright in the descriptions of Warwickshire that they published in the decade after the death of Queen Elizabeth in 1603. Drayton was an important poet and dramatist who published *Poly-Olbion*, a cultural and geographical history of England, in a series of songs that included literary notes and stories about each county. In it were references to Chaucer, to Spenser, and to other English poets. But in his description of Warwickshire, Drayton failed to mention Shakespeare, even though by 1612, the name "William Shakespeare" was well-known as one of England's leading playwrights. Nor did Drayton's rough map (1961, Vol. 4, pp. 274-275) of the county include the town of Stratford. This is a perplexing omission, considering that Drayton lived only about 25 miles from Stratford, and is known to have regularly visited literary friends in the area. Some

critics have even found the influence of Shakespeare in Drayton's poetry (Campbell & Quinn, 1966).

In his lengthy history of England, *Britannia* (1586), the historian William Camden (1551-1623) described Stratford-upon-Avon as ". . . beholden for all the beauty that it hath to two men there bred and brought up, namely, John of Stratford Archbishop of Canterburie, who built the church, and Sir Hugh Clopton Maior of London, who over Avon made a stone bridge supported with foureteene arches . . ." In the same paragraph, Camden called attention to George Carew, Baron Clopton, who lived nearby and was active in the town's affairs (Vol. 2, p. 445). Elsewhere in *Britannia*, Camden noted that the poet Philip Sidney had a home in Kent. But there is no mention of the well-known poet and playwright, William Shakespeare, who had been born and raised in Stratford, whose family still lived there, and who by this date had returned there to live in one of the grandest houses in town. We know that Camden was familiar with literary and theatrical affairs because he was a friend of Michael Drayton (Newdigate, 1961), and he noted in his diary the deaths of the actor Richard Burbage and the poet and playwright Samuel Daniel in 1619. He made no such note on the death, in April 1616, of Shakspere of Stratford. This is an even more striking omission because Camden revered poets, had several poet friends, and wrote poetry himself.[4]

There is good evidence that Camden was familiar with the dramatic works and poetry of William Shakespeare. In 1605, he published *Remains Concerning Britain*, a series of essays on English history, English names, and the English language. In it, he listed 11 English poets and playwrights who he thought would be admired by future generations—in other words, the best writers of his time. Among the 11 were six playwrights, including Jonson, Chapman, Drayton, Daniel, Marston, and William Shakespeare (Camden, 1984, pp. 287, 294).

There is also good evidence that Camden was personally acquainted with William Shakspere and his father, John. In 1597, Queen Elizabeth appointed Camden to the post of Clarenceaux King of Arms, one of the two officials in the College of Arms who approved applications for coats of arms. In 1599, John Shakspere, applied to the College to have his existing coat of arms impaled, or joined, with the arms of his wife's family, the Ardens of Wilmcote (Chambers, 1930, Vol. 2, pp.18-32). Some scholars have asserted that Will Shakspere made this application for his father, but there is no evidence of that. What is likely is that William paid the substantial fee that accompanied the application.

The record shows that Camden and his colleague William Dethick approved the modification that John Shakspere sought. However, in 1602 another official in the College brought a complaint against Camden and Dethick that they had granted coats of arms improperly to 23 ineligible men, one of whom was John Shakspere. Camden and Dethick defended their actions, but there is no record of the outcome of the matter. John Shakspere's coat of arms, minus the Arden impalement, later appeared on the monument in Holy Trinity Church, discussed below. Because of this unusual complaint, Camden had good reason to remember John Shakspere's application.[5] Thus, it is very probable that Camden had met both father and son. At the least, he knew who they were and where they lived. This well-documented evidence indicates that even though Camden mentioned playwrights and poets in his books and in his diary, and was personally acquainted with Shakspere of Stratford, he never connected him with the writer on his list of the best English poets.

Drayton and Camden were not alone in their failure to recognize the Stratford man as a playwright. Several other residents of the village and its environs, some of whom were familiar with the London theatrical scene, never referred to him at all, much less as a dramatist. The theatergoer Edward Pudsey, who lived only 25 miles from Stratford, left to his heirs a commonplace book in which he had copied passages from 22 contemporary plays––four by Ben Jonson, three by Marston, seven by Dekker, Lyly, Nashe, Chapman, and Heywood, and eight by William Shakespeare. One English scholar who examined the manuscript asserted that the quotations from *Othello* and *Hamlet* were written in a section that she dated no later than 1600 (Rees, 1992). Thus, it is likely that Edward Pudsey had access to now-lost quartos of *Othello and Hamlet* or had seen the plays and written down the dialogue by that date. But nowhere in the hundreds of entries in what is now called "Edward Pudsey's Book" is there any indication that he was aware that the playwright whose words he copied so carefully lived in nearby Stratford-upon-Avon.

The dramatist and poet, Sir Fulke Greville, later Lord Brooke, whose family had lived at Beauchamp Court, less than ten miles from Stratford for more than 200 years, must also have known the Shakspere family. In 1592, he was appointed to a commission to report on those who refused to attend church. The commission reported to the Privy Council that nine men in the parish of Stratford-upon-Avon had not attended church at least once a month. Among the nine was John Shakspere, father of William (Eccles, 1963). On the death of his father in 1606, Greville was appointed to the office his father had held––Recorder of Warwick and Stratford-upon-Avon. In this position, he could hardly have been unaware of the Shakspere family. A number of letters both to and from Greville have survived. Yet, nowhere in any of his reminis-

cences, or in the letters he wrote or received, is there any mention of the well-known poet and playwright, William Shakespeare, who supposedly lived a few miles away. A leading Shakespeare scholar, Stopes (1907), wrote: "It is . . . considered strange that such a man should not have mentioned Shakespeare" (p. 171).

Another resident of Stratford, Dr. John Hall, married Shakspere's daughter Susanna in 1607 and practiced medicine in the borough for 30 years. On the death of his father-in-law in 1616, Dr. Hall, his wife, and their eight-year-old daughter, Elizabeth, moved into New Place with William Shakspere's widow, Anne. A few years after Dr. Hall's death in 1635, it came to light that he had kept hundreds of anecdotal records about his patients and their ailments––records that have excited the curiosity of both literary and medical scholars. In his notebooks, he described dozens of his patients and their illnesses, including his wife and daughter. He also mentioned the Vicar of Stratford and various noblemen and their families, as well as the poet Michael Drayton.

In his notes about one patient, Thomas Holyoak, Dr. Hall wrote that Thomas's father, Francis, had compiled a Latin-English dictionary. He described John Trapp, a minister and the schoolmaster of the Stratford Grammar School, as being noted for "his remarkable piety and learning, second to none" (Joseph, 1964, pp. 47, 94). Hall once treated Michael Drayton for a fever and even noted that he was an excellent poet (Lane, 1996). But nowhere in Dr. Hall's notebooks is there any mention of his father-in-law, William Shakspere. This, of course, has vexed and puzzled scholars. Dr. Hall surely treated his wife's father during the decade they lived within minutes of each other, a decade in which William Shakespeare was known as one of the leading playwrights in England. Why wouldn't he record any treatment of William Shakspere and mention his literary achievements as he had those of Michael Drayton and Francis Holyoake? It is reasonable to expect that Dr. John Hall would have noted his treatment of William Shakspere during the ten years he knew him––if he thought he had done something of note. It is indeed strange that he should have neglected to include any record of his treating his supposedly famous father-in-law. Ms. Stopes called it "the one great failure of his life" (1901, p. 82).

However, the most telling failure to mention Shakspere as a writer or playwright is that of Thomas Greene, the Town Clerk of Stratford, a published poet, and so close a friend of Shakspere's that he and his family lived in the Shakspere household at New Place for many months during 1609 and 1610 (Schoenbaum, 1991). More than that, Greene named two of his children, William and Anne, most likely after the Shaksperes. Greene and Shakspere were not only good friends, the two of them also made joint investments in real estate and once collaborated as plaintiffs in a lawsuit. In his personal records, Greene mentioned Shakspere several times, but only in connection with the Welcombe land enclosure matter, referring to him as "my Cosen Shakspeare" (Chambers, 1930, Vol. 2, pp. 142-143). As a frequent visitor to London and a published poet himself, Greene must have been aware of the celebrated poet William Shakespeare, but he never connected him with the man he knew so intimately in Stratford. It is hardly credible that none of the men mentioned here would have recognized the Shakspere they knew in Stratford as the famous playwright, if they had thought that he was the same person. Nor did any other resident of Stratford ever refer to their fellow townsman Shakspere as a writer of any kind.

Further evidence suggests that about the time that Shakespeare's plays began to appear in print in the 1590s, performances of plays were not only unwelcome in Stratford, they were actually prohibited throughout the borough. It is well-documented that between 1568 and 1597, numerous playing companies visited and performed there. But by the end of this period, the Puritan officeholders there finally attained their objective of banning all performances of plays and interludes.

In 1602, the Corporation of Stratford ordered that a fine of ten shillings be imposed on any official who gave permission for any type of play to be performed in any city building, or in any inn or house in the borough. This, in a year that at least six plays by Shakespeare, their alleged townsman, were being performed on public stages in London. In 1612, just four years before their neighbor's death, this fine was increased to £10. The last payment for a performance of a Shakespeare play in Stratford was made in 1597, just as the first Shakespeare plays were being published in London. Nearly 150 years would pass before another of his plays would be performed in the town (Fox, 1953, pp. 140-144).

Unlike other playwrights and poets, such as Philip Sidney and Francis Beaumont, who were widely mourned and given elaborate funerals, there were no public notices or eulogies of Shakspere of Stratford when he died in 1616.[6] The first eulogies of the playwright were published seven years later, in the *First Folio*, and were addressed to "William Shakespeare," the name that appeared on the title pages of his plays, not to the Stratford man. But by then, the hostility of Shakspere's fellow townsmen to performances of Shakespeare's plays, or any plays, had reached its acme. In 1622, when work on the First Folio was in progress, the Stratford Corporation paid the King's Players the sum of six shillings *not* to play in the Town Hall. Surely by 1622, nearly 30 years after his name had

first appeared in print, the people of Stratford would have been aware that one of England's greatest poets and playwrights had been born, raised, and then retired in their own town. That is, if such a thing were actually true.

Another example of the dearth of evidence connecting William Shakspere of Stratford with the Shakespeare works was noticed and deplored in 1821 by Edmond Malone, the first genuine scholar of Shakespeare and an early editor of his complete works. In a 2000-word preamble to his *The Life of Shakspeare*,[7] Malone expressed astonishment at the near-total absence of any facts, recollections, or other information about the alleged author of the Shakespeare works who had supposedly lived in Stratford. He cited more than a dozen poets, patrons, publishers, biographers, and other literary men, some of whom lived only a few miles from Stratford, who failed to visit the town, interview those who knew him, or otherwise conduct any investigation of his personal life or activities. Malone pointed out that several descendants of the Stratford man—his widow, his daughter, his son-in-law, and his granddaughter—all lived decades after his death, but no one ever sought them out for details about their supposedly famous relative.

Malone wrote that "the negligence and inattention of our English writers, after the Restoration, to the history of the celebrated men who preceded them, can never be mentioned without surprise and indignation. If Suetonius and Plutarch had been equally uncurious, some of the most valuable remains of the ancient world would have been lost to posterity" (Malone & Boswell, 1821, pp. 11-12). This lack of interest, or even curiosity, about the life of the Stratford businessman and alleged playwright by all but a pair of casual biographers, Nicholas Rowe and Thomas Fuller, suggests that none of them associated him with the playwright, William Shakespeare.

Attributes of the Playright

Numerous scholars have combed Shakespeare's works for evidence of the author's interests, knowledge, and experiences, resulting in several clear conclusions. These reveal a well-educated intellectual with wide-ranging interests and particular competence in a number of distinct areas. The historian Hugh Trevor-Roper (1962) described Shakespeare as a "cultured, sophisticated aristocrat, fascinated alike by the comedy and tragedy of human life, but unquestioning in his social and religious conservatism" (p. 42).

It is common knowledge that the author was fluent in French and conversant enough in Spanish, Italian, and Welsh to include words and dialogue in those languages frequently in his plays (Crystal & Crystal, 2002). In addition, his use of untranslated works in Latin and Greek, as well as his frequent use of words, and creation of words derived from those languages, attest to his competence in both (Theobald, 1909; Werth, 2002). There is not the slightest evidence that William Shakspere of Stratford was familiar with any foreign language.

An analysis of the legal terms, concepts, and procedures occurring in Shakespeare's works conclusively demonstrates that the author had an extensive and accurate knowledge of the law. He used more than 200 legal terms and legal concepts in numerous ways—as case references, as similes and metaphors, images, examples, and even puns—with an aptness and accuracy that cannot be questioned (Alexander, 2001). Again, there is no evidence that Shakspere of Stratford attended any of the Elizabethan law schools—the Inns of Court, or that he ever worked in a law office.

The author of the plays was also familiar with the latest medical theories and practices, as well as the processes and anatomy of the human body. Scholars have identified hundreds of medical references in his plays and poems, many of them major references in which he used an image or a metaphor. He was especially prolific in his use of imagery to describe illness (mental and physical), injury, and disease—far more so than his fellow dramatists. He was aware of the major medical controversy of the time between the adherents of Galen and those of Paracelsus, and referred to both authorities in *All's Well That Ends Well* (Act II. Scene iii. 12). Moreover, it appears that his medical references were not random, irrelevant or inappropriate, but reflected the most advanced opinions at the time (Showerman, 2012).

Another distinctive characteristic of the playwright was his obvious interest and competence in music. In the words of the music scholar W. Barclay Squire (1916), "In no author are musical allusions more frequent than in Shakespeare" (p. 32). In the plays and poems, there are hundreds of images, metaphors, and passages relating to music, as well as numerous ballads, love songs, folk songs, and drinking songs. The playwright demonstrated a clear technical knowledge of musical theory and practice, and alluded repeatedly to musicians, to instruments, to musical terms, and even to notes.

Shakespeare's intimate knowledge of military affairs was noticed in the mid-19th century, and has more recently been fully documented. According to the compiler of a dictionary of his military language, Shakespeare possessed "an extraordinarily detailed knowledge of warfare, both ancient and modern" (Edelman, 2000, p. 1). Nearly all the history plays, as well as *Othello*, *Antony and Cleopatra*, and *Troilus and Cressida*, are set in a place and time of armed conflict, and numerous obscure military analogies

and references appear throughout the canon. Several of Shakespeare's most enduring characters are soldiers or ex-soldiers, most notably the *faux* soldier, Sir John Falstaff. The author's knowledge of the sea and seamanship is just as striking and comprehensive. According to naval officer A. F. Falconer, there is a "surprisingly extensive and exact use of the technical terms belonging to sailing, anchor work, sounding, ship construction, navigation, gunnery, and swimming," adding that "Shakespeare does not invent sea terms and never misuses them" (1965, vii). There is no evidence that Shakspere of Stratford ever served in the military or that he undertook a sea voyage of any kind.

It is also well-known that the author displayed an extraordinary range of knowledge of such other subjects as botany, cosmology, jousting, hawking, religion, philosophy, and courtly manners. There is nothing in Shakspere of Stratford's biography that indicates any interest or experience in these subjects or how he might have acquired such detailed knowledge of them. The author was clearly a keen reader of poetry and prose, foreign and English, both contemporary and classical. Scholars have identified hundreds of plays, poems, novels, histories, etc., by dozens of authors that he referred to, quoted, or used as sources (Gillespie, 2001). In the lengthy will of Shakspere of Stratford, there are numerous bequests of personal possessions and household items, but no mention of a library, a bookcase, or a single book (Cutting, 2009).

One of the most striking features of Shakespeare's plays is the author's preoccupation with the language, literature, and social customs of Italy. It is well-known that Elizabethan imaginative literature, especially its drama, was heavily indebted to Italian sources and models, such as the commedia dell' arte, and made regular use of such devices from Italian drama as the chorus, ghosts of great men, the dumb show and the play within the play (Grillo, 1949). To no other writer does this apply more than Shakespeare. More than a dozen of his plays are partially or wholly set in contemporary or ancient Italy, and many are derived from Italian plays or novels.

Scholars have repeatedly documented Shakespeare's unexplained familiarity with the geography, social life, and local details of many places in Italy, especially northern Italy. "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" (Grillo, 1949). American Richard Roe, in his *The Shakespeare Guide To Italy* (2010, pp. 87-115), and Italian scholar Noemi Magri have identified the locales and documented the accuracy of numerous details in several plays, including *The Taming of the Shrew, Two Gentlemen of Verona* ("No Errors in Shakespeare, 1988, pp. 9-22") and *The Merchant of Venice* ("Places in Shakespeare, 2003, pp. 6-14").

Nor was Shakespeare's knowledge of Italy limited to details of geography and local custom. It is clear that he directly observed and was profoundly affected by Italian painting and sculpture, and used several specific works—murals, sculptures, and paintings—as the bases for incidents, characters, and imagery. For instance, the language and imagery in *The Winter's Tale*, *Love's Labour's Lost*, *Venus and Adonis* and *Lucrece* have been traced to the sculpture and murals of Giulio Romano in Mantua's Ducal Palace and Palazzo Te, and elsewhere in the same city (Hamill, 2003). But there is nothing in the biography of William Shakspere of Stratford that suggests an interest in or knowledge of anything in Italy, nor is there any evidence that he traveled to Italy or to any foreign country. Traditional scholars admit these facts, but speculate that he acquired his knowledge of the language and other details about the country from Italian merchant travelers in various London taverns. For Shakspere to have learned such details in casual conversation is clearly hard to believe.

The collection of poems titled *Shakespeare's Sonnets*, apparently written during the 1590s but not published until 1609, contains a story of a middle-aged man's affection for a younger man, whom he urges to marry and have a son. The young man is widely believed by scholars of all stripes to be Henry Wriothesley, third Earl of Southampton, a prominent nobleman less than ten years younger than the Stratford man. This same Henry Wriothesley was the object of the unusual and intensely ardent dedications of *Venus and Adonis* and *Lucrece* that appeared over the name William Shakespeare in 1593 and 1594. Stratfordian scholars have been unable to explain this alleged personal relationship between a commoner from the provinces and an Earl who spent most of his early life in and around the royal court, an exceptional rarity in class-conscious Elizabethan England. There is, in fact, no evidence that they ever met or corresponded, nor is there any record of anyone associating them with one another. The only conclusion to be drawn is that there was no such relationship because the Stratford man was clearly not the playwright who wrote under the pseudonym Shakespeare.

Although the name William Shakespeare first appeared in print in 1593 and on numerous printed plays during the next two decades, it was not until 1623, in the prefatory material to the First Folio, that an alleged connection between the dramatist Shakespeare and William Shakspere of Stratford appeared in print. In his short encomium to the playwright in the Folio, Leonard Digges alluded to "thy *Stratford* Moniment" [sic], the single in-

stance in the first collection of the Shakespeare plays in which the playwright was associated with the village of Stratford.[8] Digges was apparently referring to the marble monument in Stratford's Holy Trinity Church, in which a half-length limestone bust rests in a central arch flanked by Corinthian columns supporting a cornice. On a tablet below the bust, a cryptic eight-line inscription has been carved, in which the figure is associated with Nestor, Socrates, Vergil, and Mount Olympus.[9] Obviously, by 1623 the effort was underway to link the Stratford businessman to Shakespeare, the playwright.

The monument remains in place today, but its original appearance, the identity of the person depicted, and the meaning of the inscription have been the subjects of numerous conflicting claims and interpretations. Recent scholarship has confirmed that the bust in today's Holy Trinity Church in Stratford bears little relation to the original figure. "The edifice seems to have been repaired, modified, beautified, whitewashed, repainted or, in various ways, tampered with on at least eight occasions between 1649 and 1861" (Waugh, 2015, para. 2). Evidence of this is a sketch of the monument made in or about 1634 by Warwickshire antiquarian Sir William Dugdale, and now in the possession of his lineal descendant. The sketch depicts an ape-like figure of a man with melancholic features entirely unlike those of the present-day bust. He is shown clutching a sack of some kind, suggesting a commercial wool or grain broker, and not, as in the current monument, a benign and cheerful gentleman wielding a quill and a sheet of paper over a cushion. Considering these facts, it has been proposed that the bust originally depicted Shakspere's father, John (1537-1601), and was later modified to represent his son, a pillow being substituted for the sack, and a quill and a sheet of paper added to suggest a writer (Kennedy, 2005/2006).

But the fact remains that there is no record of anyone in Warwickshire linking Shakspere of Stratford to the canon of Shakespeare plays and poems until years after his death in 1616, and the monument in Holy Trinity Church, whenever it was constructed, and whomever it depicted, is questionable evidence that he was the playwright. This is obviously the reason that the bust and inscription have been ignored or dismissed as irrelevant by traditional Shakespeare scholars, including such prominent ones as Stephen Greenblatt, Michael Wood, Park Honan, and Stanley Wells (Whalen, 2005). Nevertheless, the ambiguities and contradictions surrounding the monument continue unresolved, and remain an integral part of the argument that the Stratford man had nothing to do with the creation of Shakespeare's works. That argument is even stronger in London.

London

Repeated examinations of the documents of the Elizabethan theater have unearthed nothing that supports the theory of the Stratford man's authorship of the Shakespeare plays and poems. We know that he lived in London because his name appears in delinquent tax records there, and in other documents as an actor and theater company shareholder, but not as a playwright. Notices and records of the actual playwright Shakespeare are absent. This is especially striking in the most comprehensive record of the public theater in Elizabethan London—Henslowe's Diary.

The successful theatrical entrepreneur Philip Henslowe and his business partner, Edward Alleyn, had operated the Rose Theater for about four years before he began, in 1592, making entries in a notebook about his theater and the acting companies that played in it, primarily the Admiral's Men (Foakes, 2002). The surviving 242-page manuscript, now called Henslowe's Diary, contains reports of performances of plays by all the major playwrights of the time, including more than half-a-dozen by Shakespeare.

Throughout the Diary, appear the names of dozens of actors and no less than 27 playwrights. In his Diary, Henslowe also kept records of the loans he made to playwrights, and of the amounts he paid them for manuscripts. Among those mentioned are the familiar names of Chapman, Dekker, Drayton, Jonson, Marston, and Webster. There are also some unfamiliar names, such as William Bird, Robert Daborne, and Wentworth Smith. But there is one familiar name that is missing. Nowhere in the list of dozens of actors and playwrights in Henslowe's Diary do we find the name of William Shakespeare. This is further evidence that the actual playwright successfully concealed his identity behind a pseudonym, and that he was not among the coterie of working playwrights who were dependent on their earnings for their livelihoods.

If the man from Stratford were really the playwright that he is alleged to be, he certainly would have met Edward Alleyn, the manager and leader of the Admiral's Men and the most distinguished actor on the Elizabethan stage. Alleyn was most famous for his roles in Marlowe's plays, but he also must have acted in several of the Shakespeare plays that were performed at the Rose, such as *Titus Andronicus* and *Henry VI* (Carson, 1988). Edward Alleyn also kept a diary that survives, along with many of his letters and papers. They reveal that he had a large circle of acquaintances throughout and beyond the theater world that included aristocrats, clergymen, and businessmen, as well as men in his own profession, such as John Heminges, one of the alleged editors of the First

Folio. But nowhere in Alleyn's diary or letters that have survived does the name William Shakespeare appear. It is impossible to believe that Edward Alleyn, who was at the center of the Elizabethan stage community for more than 35 years, would not have met and at least commented on the leading playwright of the period and made some allusion to him in his letters or diary. But the Stratford man makes no such appearance.

Another Elizabethan of note, Sir Henry Wotton (1568-1639), a diplomat and poet, was also a prolific writer of letters during the entire lifetime of Shakspere of Stratford. His many correspondents included his nephew, Sir Edmund Bacon, as well as Sir Francis Bacon and John Donne. Among his published works was *Reliquiae Wottonianae, or A Collection of Lives, Letters, Poems, with Characters of Sundry Personages*, which included extensive allusions to the wits and writers of his time. Yet, nowhere in Wotton's letters or in his allusions to contemporary writers do we find the name of William Shakespeare. Even in his detailed account of the burning of the Globe Theatre in 1613, during a performance of Shakespeare's *All is True* (*Henry VIII*), Wotton never mentions the playwright, an omission suggesting that the name Shakespeare was a pseudonym.

The failure of any of these men to refer to the celebrated and prolific playwright, whose poems and plays were selling in London's bookshops, and whose plays were repeatedly performed at court and on London stages, supports the hypothesis that "William Shakespeare" was the *nom de plume* that concealed the identity of the actual poet and dramatist, and that continued to hide it from readers, playgoers, and scholars for hundreds of years.

Personal links between the Shakspere of Stratford and playwrights and poets of his day are also entirely absent. A survey of literary and personal records left by 25 Elizabethan and Jacobean writers revealed that all but one of them had left records, including letters, manuscripts, payments for writing, etc., that evidenced their profession. The exception was William Shakspere of Stratford-upon-Avon, who left no records of any kind that indicated he was a writer of plays or anything at all (Price, 2000).

This lack of even a hint of any sort of writing led one leading Shakespeare biographer to write:

> Perhaps we should despair of ever bridging the vertiginous expanse between the sublimity of the subject and the mundane inconsequence of the documentary record. What would we not give for a single personal letter, one page of a diary! (Schoenbaum, 1991).

Another Stratfordian scholar and editor went even further: "Shakespeare . . . is authorial dark matter, absent from his writing and from historical record to an extraordinary degree . . ." but went on to assert that doubt about the Stratford man as the author Shakespeare was a "bizarrely widespread belief" (Bate et al., 2013, p. 641). Although this is true of the fake Shakspere of Stratford-upon-Avon, there is substantial evidence in the plays and poems, and documents from the period, to link the Shakespeare works to a now-identified aristocrat who concealed himself from the public behind a pseudonym.

Serious doubts about, and outright denials of, the Stratford man's authorship of the canon commenced even before his death and have continued to the present day. In the 18th and 19th centuries, several writers, such as Herbert Lawrence, Benjamin Disraeli, and W. H. Smith, published their suspicions about the traditional attribution (Ogburn, 1992). The Scottish antiquarian, George Chalmers, wrote: "What is known of Shakspeare in his private character, in his friendships, in his amusements, in his closet, in his family, *is nowhere before us*" (Hart, 1848, p .215).

American authors were hardly less doubtful. Ralph Waldo Emerson was one of the earliest to record his skepticism when he asserted, in 1854, that the Stratfordian narrative was improbable, and that the identity of the writer posed "the first of all literary problems" (Deese, 1986, p.114). Walt Whitman (1948) suggested that the author was an aristocrat—"one of the 'wolfish earls' so plenteous in the plays themselves, or some born descendant and knower . . ." (Vol. 2, p. 404). Henry James was " . . . 'sort of' haunted by the conviction that the divine William is the biggest and most successful fraud ever practised on a patient world" (Lubbock, 1920, Vol. 1, p. 424), and even wrote a short story about a couple who were put "in charge of the Shakespeare house," but after six months found that "they could not stand the 'humbug.'" [10]

Repeated remarks in his letters to friends and in his speeches leave no doubt that Sigmund Freud believed that "The name *William Shakespeare* is very certainly a pseudonym, behind which a great mysterious stranger [*ein grosser Unbekannter*] is hidden" (Freud et al., 1966-1974, Vol. 23; p. 192). Freud read Looney's '*Shakespeare' Identified* in 1923, and in 1938, after his emigration to London, he and Looney exchanged admiring letters. To the consternation of his biographer and fellow psychiatrists, Freud insisted on making these contrarian views public, and added references to his conviction in several of his books, including his autobiography (Holland, 1966, 56-58; Looney, 1920, Vol. 2, pp. 264-273).

One of the most fervent and persistent disparagers of the Stratford man was Mark Twain, who registered his

disbelief in him in several of his works, and published a satirical essay on the subject, *Is Shakespeare Dead?* the year before he died. He described the Shakespeare mythos as a "colossal skeleton brontosaur that stands fifty-seven feet long and sixteen feet high in the Natural History Museum . . . We had nine bones, and we built the rest of him out of plaster of paris. We ran short of plaster of paris, or we'd have built a brontosaur that could sit down beside the Stratford Shakespeare and none but an expert could tell which was biggest or contained the most plaster" (1909, Chap. IV).

The parade of authorship doubters has continued into the 21st century. Prominent authors, all lovers of Shakespeare, including Charles Dickens, John Greenleaf Whittier, Thomas Hardy, and John Buchan, could not believe that the Stratford businessman had anything to do with the Shakespeare canon. More recently, James Joyce, Orson Welles, John Galsworthy, Charlie Chaplin, John Gielgud, David McCullough, Michael York, Vanessa Redgrave, Derek Jacobi, Jeremy Irons, and Mark Rylance are among the many writers and actors who do not accept William Shakspere of Stratford as the dramatist. Since 1986, five Justices of the U.S. Supreme Court—Harry A. Blackmun, Sandra Day O'Connor, Lewis F. Powell Jr., Antonin Scalia, and John Paul Stevens—have also rejected the Stratfordian theory, of whom three (Blackmun, Scalia, and Stevens) have declared themselves supporters of Oxford. (Wildenthal, 2019)

Nevertheless, the Stratfordian myth persists, and is routinely perpetuated in the literature departments of universities, in academic journals, and in publishing houses all over the world. The significant research revealing that the man from Stratford was not the author has been consistently rejected, disparaged, or simply ignored by these keepers of a bogus tradition. Only when the veil of credulity and self-deception is lifted from the eyes of these scholars will Shakespeare's audience be assured of his rightful identity.

BIOGRAPHY

Ramon Jimenez is a California-based independent historian whose research focuses on Ancient Rome and Renaissance England. He is the author of *Caesar Against the Celts* (1996, Sarpedon) and *Caesar Against Rome: The Great Roman Civil War* (2000, Praeger 2000), both book club selections. He has published more than 20 articles and book reviews relating to the Shakespeare Authorship Question. His most recent book, *Shakespeare's Apprenticeship – Identifying the Real Playwright's Earliest Works* (2018, McFarland) demonstrates that several anonymous plays published between 1591 and 1605 were actually earlier versions of canonical Shakespeare plays written by, Edward de Vere, the 17th Earl of Oxford.

ENDNOTES

1 These are described in detail in Part IV in Wildenthal (2019).

2 On his christening and marriage documents, and other legal documents in Warwickshire, as well as in his almost illegible purported signatures, his name is spelled "Shakspere."

3 Thompson (1916, p. 295). The letter was never sent and was found among Quiney's papers. It is printed in Chambers (1930, Vol. 2, p. 102). Richard Quiney's son Thomas married Shakspere's daughter, Judith, in 1616.

4 Camden's Diary appeared in *Camdeni Vitae*, a life of Camden published in 1691 by Thomas Smith. The Diary is online at http://www.philological.bham.ac.uk/diary/contents.html where the entries can be seen in the months of March and October under the year 1619 [Accessed 5 June 2021].

5 The episode is fully covered in Schoenbaum (1991, pp. 227-232).

6 Mark Twain remarked that " . . . there wouldn't be any occasion to remember him after he had been dead a week" (2015, Vol. 3, p. 304).

7 The *Life* appeared in (Vol. 2, pp. 1-287) of *The Plays and Poems of William Shakspeare*, Edmond Malone and James Boswell, (Eds.), 1821.

8 In his 22-line poem, Digges used the hyphenated name Shake-speare three times, hinting at a pseudonym. The poem is printed in Chambers (1930, Vol. 2, pp. 231-232).

9 None of these references is particularly relevant to the playwright Shakespeare. See Waugh's explanation.

10 The story "The Birthplace" (1903) is described further in Ogburn (1987, p. 54).

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