Brian McClinton

The Shakespeare Conspiracies:

untangling a 400-year web of myth and deceit

Cover by Michael Waring and Timothy Lane

**" To the living we owe respect,
but to the dead we owe only the
truth"—Voltaire**

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Contents

Illustrations

To the memory of my mother Madge
who taught me the true meaning of life

Preface

My suspicions about the authorship of Shakespeare began in 1964 when I was studying *The Tempest* for A-Level Examination. Until then I had been fairly oblivious to any doubt on the subject, though I was uneasy about the incoherence between the Mind of the plays and the Life of the orthodox claimant. This sense of something not quite right about the miracle from Stratford suddenly became intensified by a close study of this play. As the teacher explained every classical reference, every topical allusion, every nuance of wordplay and every layer of meaning, the work began to assume the shape of a gigantic jigsaw puzzle devised by a grand designer whose mental universe was light years away from the mundane concerns of hoarding corn and malt. The author himself explicitly states that it is "as strange a maze as e'er men trod". That this colossus of literature, this man who was, in his own words, "for the liberal arts without a parallel", had supposedly no intellectual life outside such masterpieces become increasingly impossible to grasp. Surely he was so overbrimming with ideas and imagination that he would not have been content only with an indirect expression of them? Surely he would have said something worth recording or written something memorable—a letter, a poem to a wife, mistress or daughter, a prayer, marginalia in a book, a book list, an essay, a political statement, a religious credo or whatever—that would have been left to posterity? But no, there is instead a massive void outside the works. They stand alone, or apparently alone. Beyond their pages, the voice is silent as the grave.

Robert Browning reportedly said about one of his poems: "God and I both knew what it meant once; now only God knows". And indeed many poets and dramatists are essentially intuitive artists who find it difficult to express themselves lucidly and coherently outside their works. But, I thought, this most philosophical and self-conscious of artists was decidedly not one of them. Reading the various critical interpretations of and multifarious meanings ascribed to *The Tempest,* I felt that this man of all men was quite capable of intending and even explaining all of them, such was the depth and range of his astounding intellect.

Then in April of that year I was made more fully aware of the controversy. It was the 400th anniversary of the birth of the man whom I shall call William of Stratford, and an article appeared in the *Observer* newspaper under the headline: 'The anti-Shakespeare Movement hots up'. Here I discovered that there were other claimants to the mighty throne.

There was one in particular who seemed to possess all the necessary qualifications. Yet most of the media and the orthodox scholars treated the heretics with a certain sarcasm and disdain. This I considered unfair, because I was keen to know their arguments, and all I read were personal attacks on people labelled 'snobs', 'cranks' or 'fanatics' and on a movement allegedly rooted in Victorian or aristocratic values. But abuse is hardly a satisfactory way of disproving any viewpoint, however foolish it may seem. Nor is anyone a 'crank' or a 'lunatic' merely on the basis of one opinion, however mistaken.

This kind of relentless media abuse would normally be sufficient to smother debate and investigation. However, I was fortunate enough as an undergraduate to attend Trinity College, Dublin, which has a copyright library entitled to every book published in the UK. So I had access to many old works written on the subject. For the majority of people, of course, an effort to find the truth is extremely difficult because the heretics' case has been effectively buried, at least in Britain. As far as most orthodox British scholars are concerned, it was all sewn up long ago: the heretics had their go for a few decades on either side of 1900 but can now be regarded with not a little amusement. Yet I am convinced that in this conclusion these orthodox scholars have made a monumental blunder. They have collectively imbibed the Shakespeare myth, the very 'hoax', 'jest' or 'fraud'—call it what you will—that the mastermind set out deliberately to perpetrate.

But why would anyone want to do such a thing? Personal ambition in more worldly activities? To be sure, poetry and drama were scorned by many at the time. Fear of imprisonment or personal injury? Certainly, some writers were jailed and others had their hand cut off. A desire for intellectual freedom? Indeed, a mask would act as a cover which an author could use to say what he thought freely. These motives all sound valid enough in their own way, and yet somehow they don't seem to offer a totally satisfactory explanation. Was it necessary to maintain the cover right to the end?

And this brings me back to *The Tempest*. During that A-Level year, an idea kept buzzing in my brain and, especially after the April celebrations, it refused to go away. There is absolutely no doubt that Prospero is presented as a god-like figure. He is the "master of the island", the all-powerful force guiding and controlling it, who manipulates the elements to produce his desired effects. He claims that he possesses the power of mighty Zeus, for not only does he say that he can make lightning, but he also declares that he has actually used the god's own thunderbolt. And, like the Christian God, Prospero has supernatural powers. He can raise people from the dead: "Graves at my command have wak'd their sleepers".

Like God, he is a judge and saviour of humankind. He forgives people their sins—'the rarer action is in virtue than in vengeance... go release them, Ariel'—which only God can do.

Significantly, both Prospero and the Christian God are elusive, hidden figures who do not intervene personally in the world/island but act indirectly through agencies. Throughout the Old Testament God is the hidden one. So in Isaiah we read: "Verily thou art a God that hideth thyself" (45:15). Even Paul alludes to the shadowed nature of God in saying that "for now we see through a glass darkly" (1 Corinthians 13:12). Why would God do this? Why does anyone hide? One hides initially, of course, so as not to be found. Yet, even in the game of hide-and-seek a child initially hides so as not to be found in one place, only later to reveal himself in the safe goal, with a cry, "Here I am!" The game would have no point if remaining forever hidden were its goal. A Christian explanation is that God's game of hide-and-seek is not far different, though the 'game' in this case is a matter of life and death. God hides so as not to be found where people seek him, and reveals himself where he is not sought.

So here is a play that harks back to pagan and Christian myths of renaissance through the medium of the agents of hidden gods. Hermes or Mercury is the agent or messenger of Zeus or Jupiter. The Angel or Spirit of the Lord is the messenger of God. Here too is Ariel, the servant or agent of the hidden Prospero. But in his own story Prospero represents the author. Does he not regard himself as a kind of god? And in what way is he hidden? And whom does the agent Ariel represent? To answer the first question, Harold Bloom asserts in *Shakespeare: The Invention of the Human* (p3), and I concur, that if any author has become a mortal god, it must be Shakespeare, by whom he means of course the author, whoever he was. To answer the second requires us to believe that the real author is hidden behind a front man, an allonym by the name of Shakspere the actor, which is the argument of this book. Moreover, the Droeshout portrait in the First Folio does look suspiciously like a mask concealing the real author(s).

And, to answer the third question, if Prospero represents the hidden author, then Ariel has to represent 'Shakespeare'. The pagan parallel is actually made by Ben Jonson in the *First Folio* when he refers to Shakespeare as coming forth like Mercury to 'charm' his age. The play is therefore telling us that Shakespeare is not its author but the agent of its hidden author. Just as Zeus used Hermes as his messenger, Jupiter used Mercury and God used the Angel or Spirit of the Lord, so too has the god of literature used 'Shakespeare' to teach and thus redeem humankind. In short, the author of *The Tempest* is telling us that he too is creating a myth —the Shakespeare myth—to parallel the other myths alluded to in the play.

In Christian myth, God did make a major intervention in the world 2000 years ago. He used Jesus Christ as his mask, the very description offered by Joseph Campbell in *The Masks of God* (Campbell defines myths as "the masks of God through which men everywhere have sought to relate themselves to the wonders of existence"). Jesus was allegedly a miracle. So, too, according to orthodox scholars, was Shakespeare. Just as the divine word of God is said to have been presented to the world in the flesh of a humble carpenter, so has the divine word of the god of literature been presented to the world in the guise of a Stratford actor and maltster.

In Christian myth God lowered himself to the humblest of his creations; so too did the Shakespeare mastermind. Through the 'jester's mask' or motley of William he believed he was acting like a God in trying to teach the world that wisdom can be found in the least likely places and that ordinary people can rise towards his level if they are prepared to make the effort. Drama was to be the means of this universal education and enlightenment and the teacher was to be, not a king or a prince or a noble, but a humble actor, a 'wise fool'. Like Touchstone, Jaques, Falstaff, Feste or the Fool in *King Lear*, it is the fools or jesters in the plays who often tell the truth, however painful, where those who mean to be truthful cannot.

Of course, the truth lies not only in the dramatist's head but also in our own as we interpret the drama. The mask, I suggest, was also worn to protect the plays from facile judgment on the basis of superficial knowledge of their creator; in short, to make them immortal. Biography can restrict art and denude it of its potentiality for multiplicity of meaning. The inner life of the mind is more complex and comprehensive than our words and actions usually indicate. And since we know so little about the mind of William, perhaps because there is so little *to* know, we are, to some extent, free to interpret the plays as we like. We add our own thoughts to the thoughts of the author and together we create and recreate the work so that it does indeed remain potent 'for all time'. Art is thus expanded and opened out, as we ourselves know more and understand more, not confined and restricted, as it might be if we interpreted it in relation to the known thoughts of the author. Impersonality is thus a key to 400 years of Shakespearean pre-eminence. In sum, the first conspiracy outlined in this book was a secret plot to convey the truth of the human condition and expand our understanding of it through a myth.

Yet there is a danger here too, and we have now entered this phase. In the past, biographies of William told his story as much as it was known, and then imagined his thoughts in the works. What is happening now is that the works themselves are being reduced in meaning and significance in an attempt to make them cohere with the mundane and mercenary life of William of Stratford. The bard is being stripped bare to a possessive

individualist who is also an empty-headed bore. This attempted marriage of life with art has greatly simplified and distorted the extraordinary genius behind the works. Artistic truth is now dependent on factual truth, and so for this reason among others the real author deserves to be rescued from a false identification. We must discover the man in order to rediscover his art: as Prospero pleads at the end of the play, our indulgence must set him free.

There is a problem here as well. If the Shakespeare enterprise was not some narrow religio-political plot but a benign conspiracy to teach in the widest sense, then there is another conspiracy which is more malign. It is collective contempt as a substitute for investigation. Every time the issue of the authorship surfaces in Britain, a 'Shakespeare scholar' steps forward to bury it and debunk the sceptic. "None of the doubters is a literary scholar"; "no academic has ever doubted the overwhelming evidence that the man who wrote the plays was the actor from Stratford"; "denial of William's authorship is akin to Holocaust denial"; these are all common scornful dismissals of anything that smacks of heresy. As for us sceptics ourselves, we are systematically labelled as cranks, fanatics, idiots or snobs. That is the level of debate on the subject by scholars who belittle their profession every time they deny the importance of the issue or abuse an opponent.

This second conspiracy is akin to a religious faith in which the priests-scholars make a tacit assumption that part of their role is to propagate and protect the accepted belief. So, if the first conspiracy was a plan to convey the truth through a myth, the second is a collective effort to maintain the myth in preference to a genuine search for the truth. Although a scholar is supposed by definition to be a truth-seeker, it is highly ironic that on the Shakespeare authorship question so many scholars are guilty of betraying their very function. This is the *trahison des clercs de Shakespeare*—the treason of the Shakespeare scholars—and this work is both a challenge to them and an attempt to sow the seeds of genuine doubt about the greatest of literary problems.

Brian McClinton
August 2007

A NOTE ON STRUCTURE

The work is divided into two parts. The first part comprises chapters 1-10 and focuses largely on the external evidence. The first four chapters consider the negative case against William of Stratford as author and also draw a mental map of the Shakespeare mastermind. Chapter 5 discusses some of the major claimants for authorship and chapters 6-10 examine evidence for the chosen candidate.

Part Two comprises chapters 11-20 and tries to establish an identity of mind between this candidate and Shakespeare from the known works. Arguably, it is this internal identity which is the ultimate proof of authorship.

1. The Fact of Mystery

"*Modest doubt is called the beacon of the wise*"
—Shakespeare: *Troilus and Cressida*

"What a man had rather were true he more readily believes. Therefore he rejects difficult things from impatience of research"
—Francis Bacon, *Novum Organum*, Book I, 49

It is the doubt that will not die. Even orthodox believers know that it is futile to deny the existence of a Shakespeare problem. The books written on the subject would fill a huge library. And many great minds have questioned the orthodox claimant, the actor William of Stratford, including Bismarck, Gladstone, Asquith, Mark Twain, Emerson, Walt Whitman, Henry James, Sigmund Freud, Enoch Powell, Cyril Connolly and Hugh Trevor-Roper. Supporters of William often maintain that only an actor could have written the plays, yet an ever-expanding list of actors—Sir Cedric Hardwicke, Charles Chaplin, Leslie Howard, Orson Welles, Sir John Gielgud, Derek Jacobi, Michael York, Kenneth Branagh, Mark Rylance—doubt very much that he did.

So the heretics are in good company. The fact that few of the sceptics have been literary critics proves nothing, except perhaps that a settled opinion often inhibits free inquiry or even objectivity. This tradition is no criterion of truth, especially when it is so immersed in scorn and derision of opposing viewpoints. It is this smug and arrogant contempt which has clouded the whole authorship question, and the words attributed to Herbert Spencer are very apposite: "There is a principle which is a bar against all information, which is proof against all arguments, and which cannot fail to keep a man in everlasting ignorance; this principle is contempt prior to investigation". In the end, truth is not determined by numbers or personalities but by evidence and argument.

What, then, are the problems? On the negative side, it is of course William himself who is the problem, but there are a number of other puzzles sufficient to establish the presence of mystery. Although none in itself is conclusive proof that William Shakspere (I shall spell it thus to avoid confusion) did not write Shakespeare, when taken together they do engender a considerable degree of scepticism which cannot be so easily dismissed.

The Missing Manuscripts

First, there is the problem of the missing manuscripts. The orthodox riposte is that the plays were written primarily for the stage and not for posterity and William did not really care much what happened to them after performance. Yet this is not very convincing. After all, there are also poems including more than 150 sonnets to be considered. Was he also careless about them? What is more, there must have been more than one manuscript of several of the plays as there was more than one published edition of many. The editors of the *First Folio*, if such they were, claim to have received "papers" directly from the playwright, but they too apparently did not consider it worthwhile to hold the manuscripts in safe keeping. In his will William left these alleged editors rings, but makes no reference to manuscripts.

This dearth of manuscripts is not unique in the annals of literature, yet manuscripts exist of plays by most of the leading dramatists of the time. For example, Jonson's manuscript of the *Masque of Queens* is in the British Museum; two plays by Ford exist in manuscript; and there are the manuscripts of Beaumont in the Dyce Collection at Kensington. In view of the number of plays and poems ascribed to Shakespeare, the frequent revisions, and the reputation of the author, there ought to exist, on the law of averages, at least a few works in Shakespeare's handwriting. Instead, there is a strange vacuum, a strangeness enhanced by the complete silence of William and his relatives about the writings.

The Missing Books

William, as we said, left a will, in which he mentions his plates, jewels, swords, silver-gilt bowls and second-best bed, but of manuscripts there is no mention whatever (neither did his executors mention them, nor his two daughters). Indeed, William's will makes no mention of any writings at all. Is it possible that he died without a book in his possession? Surely not, if he were the author of Shakespeare, the playwright who tells us that ignorance is the only real darkness, the dramatist who, in the words of Prospero, tells us that he values his books above his dukedom? Surely he would have considered books more important than plates and bowls?

One theory is that the books were inherited by Susanna Hall, the elder daughter who married a doctor. Yet, although John Hall possessed a "study of books", none with William's inscription has been found. In the 1780s the Rev. James Wilmot, rector of Barton-on-the-Heath near Stratford, was asked by a London publisher to write a biography of Shakespeare. Believing that the bard must have had a large library and that some of the

books would have found their way into local collections, he examined every bookcase within a fifty mile radius of Stratford, but could not find a single volume belonging to William. Wilmot, for this and other reasons, concluded that William did not write the works. But even orthodox scholars are forced to concede the possibility that the Stratford man didn't have any books. Haliwell-Phillipps says that whether he "ever owned one at any time in his life is exceedingly improbable" (*Outlines of the life of Shakespeare*, 1887).

What are we to conclude from such an absence? That he disposed of a book after it had served its purpose? It is surely unlikely that all his books would have disappeared in this way. We are, after all, discussing a dramatist whose words are steeped in classical allusions, biblical references, plots from foreign authors, legal case studies, historical works, travel literature, philosophical treatises, and numerous other specialisms. The author of Shakespeare clearly read, studied and noted hundreds of books. Goethe was correct when he remarked that he drew "a sponge over the table of human knowledge". Surely he must have kept some of this vast literature? Did he never even write his name on a book before he sold it?

William The Silent

Another strange fact is that apparently William wrote nothing outside the works. For example, we would expect a great literary figure to have written letters to friends, relatives, admirers, patrons, fellows of his craft or publishers. Ben Jonson, Thomas Dekker, Michael Drayton, Thomas Heywood, John Webster, Francis Beaumont, John Fletcher, Thomas Nashe and other dramatists of the time wrote to one another and to friends, patrons, and so on, and these letters have been found. But not one single letter from Shakspere has been discovered, despite the persistent search of centuries. There is one letter *to* William, from his Stratford neighbour Richard Quiney in 1598 appealing for a loan of £30, but apparently it was never delivered.

We would also expect a great writer to frequent the company of other literary men and to have offered some praise of their works. In William's case, we find neither. Instead, the evidence suggests that while in London he frequented the company of other actors and that ultimately he preferred the humdrum life of a small provincial town to that of the literary capital. It is significant that in his will he mentions other actors but not Ben Jonson who, in the orthodox view, was supposedly one of his closest friends, nor John Fletcher with whom Shakespeare is named on the title-page as joint author of *Two Noble Kinsmen*. Nor does he mention any poet, dramatist or other writer whatsoever.

Again, William did not follow the universal custom of the time of obliging writers with commendatory verses to accompany their works. Ben Jonson took delight in praising the work of others and in being praised for his own. Michael Drayton wrote verses for Chapman's *Hesiod*, Tuke's *Discourse on Women*, Monday's *Primaleon of Greece*, and his own works were commended by various writers. So too were the works of Beaumont and Fletcher. If Shakspere was on familiar terms with any of these dramatists, then surely at least one of them would have solicited a few lines from him. But again we meet a complete void. William Shakspere wrote nothing in commendation of any contemporary person, writer or otherwise. Indeed, he wrote no lines at all to friends or patrons, no elegies on famous men or women of his day, no commendations, no epigrams, no epitaphs—in fact, nothing on anything. He wrote nothing when Queen Elizabeth died, nothing when Prince Henry died, nothing to or about his fellow poets, nothing from London to his wife or children informing them of his progress, nothing when his son died, nothing about any event that happened to him or in society during his whole life. Contrast this emptiness with Ben Jonson, a man of comparable culture and learning to the author Shakespeare, who wrote hundreds of poems and epigrams, lines to eminent people, poetical addresses to friends and patrons, and many lyrics and occasional pieces.

The Ben Jonson comparison is revealing in all these examples. We possess many of his private letters; we have a detailed record of his conversation; we have an extensive body of his personal poetry and prose. We know that, like William of Stratford, he suffered the early loss of a first-born son, and that he wrote a tender poem, '*On my First Son*', bidding farewell to the child. Indeed, we know much of Jonson's life story, including his friends and patrons, his travels and sojourns, and events like his prison sentences and the destruction by fire of his library. And we know what he thought of Shakespeare the author and apparently also the man. But of William's view of Jonson or his own son, or his travels and sojourns, or his avoidance of prison or his library, we know nothing.

The mind of Shakespeare the author was so overflowing with ideas that he would hardly have been satisfied with the indirect expression of them but would have surely been eager to convey them directly to others. Yet no one ever recorded anything of note that William even *said*. As far as the life of the mind is concerned, he was truly William the Silent.

The Unknown William

The silence of William is matched by that of others *about* him. Shakespeare, whoever he was, dedicated some of his works to Southampton, Pembroke and Montgomery, but they never refer to William Shakspere.

Nor do any other great men of the day, with the notable exception of Ben Jonson (though whether he refers to Shakspere or Shakespeare or both we shall have to examine later). He lived in a halcyon age of great writers but was apparently unknown to any of them. Prolific letter writers like John Chamberlain and Sir Henry Wotton, both of whom wrote about the cultural life of London at the time make no mention of Shakespeare or Shakspere. In 1879 C.M. Ingleby collected an anthology of allusions to Shakespeare between 1591 and 1693 which he called *Shakespeare's Centurie of Prayse*. He had to admit that as far as the man Shakspere was concerned, the allusions proved to be barren: 'It is plain for one thing that the bard of our admiration was unknown to the men of that age'.

Consider the silence of Michael Drayton. He was born in Warwickshire, the same county as William, the year before the Stratford man, and, like Shakespeare, he was a poet and dramatist. He wrote many letters to and about other literary figures and elegies celebrating the genius of Spenser and other poets. He ought to have known William, especially as we know that he often visited friends at Clifford Chambers, a village only two miles away. Yet he never once mentioned William during his lifetime. His *Poly-Olbion*, first published in 1612, contains detailed maps and an epic poem of all the interesting places in England, but his map of Warwickshire does not even include Stratford-on-Avon.

The presumption that William was a nobody as far as the literary world was concerned is also substantiated by the absence of any notice of his death in 1616. In Stratford itself he was buried in the parish church as 'Will Shakspere gent', and no name was put on the stone over his grave. The world of letters was also quite unconscious of any great loss. His death went completely unnoticed outside his own close circle. In his book *Is Shakespeare Dead?* (1909) Mark Twain wrote:

> "Nobody came down from London; there were no lamenting poems, no eulogies, no national tears—there was merely silence, and nothing more. A striking contrast with what happened when Ben Jonson, and Francis Bacon, and Spenser, and Raleigh and the other distinguished literary folk of Shakespeare's time passed from life! No praiseful voice was lifted for the lost Bard of Avon; even Ben Jonson waited seven years before he lifted his…" (*Is Shakespeare Dead?* 1909).

Twain is referring to Jonson's role in the *First Folio*, which is discussed below and later.

When Francis Beaumont died a few weeks before William, scores of verses appeared in his honour. The same was true when Fletcher, Chapman and Massinger died. When Ben Jonson died in 1637 a whole book of

eulogies written by renowned fellow poets appeared within months. Beaumont, Jonson, Spenser and Drayton were all buried with honour in Westminster Abbey. William, on the other hand, was not recognised as a poet and playwright during his lifetime or on his death either in his own town or in London where he allegedly made his reputation.

Stratfordians respond by arguing that Shakespeare was not recognised as an unparalleled genius until the 19th century. But this will not do. For the greatness of the writer was indeed acknowledged by many contemporaries, and not merely by Jonson in the Folio. In 1598, for example, Francis Meres described him as the "most excellent" English dramatist for both comedy and tragedy. Again, the nine editions of *Venus and Adonis* suggest that it was in fact the bestselling poem of the Elizabethan age. And even the orthodox are forced to argue that the frequent appropriation of the name 'Shakespeare' by other playwrights, of which more below, must have been the result of his popularity and esteem. If he was a nonentity, then there would hardly have been much point in trying to 'cash' in on his name.

Shakespeare's Name

The use of the name 'Shakespeare' itself is a mystery. How many plays did he write? Some say 36, the number contained in that First Folio collection which the editors, or whoever, claim to be "absolute in their numbers, as he conceived them". Other scholars will give the answer 37 by adding *Pericles*, which is included in the Third Folio of 1664. Yet others will say 38 by including *Two Noble Kinsmen.* Some also tell us that he wrote entirely on his own *The Booke of Sir Thomas More*. And yet others would suggest that we discard some of the plays in the *First Folio*, thus reducing the number to fewer than 36.

These disputes arise quite simply because they are based on one crucial point of general agreement, namely that Shakespeare did *not* write all the plays in which his name or initials appears on the title page. Apart from the 36 Folio plays, there are nine other plays extant and six more in the Stationer's Register which are lost. The nine extant are *Locrine, Sir John Oldcastle, Thomas Lord Cromwell, The London Prodigal, A Yorkshire Tragedy, Pericles, The Birth of Merlin* and *Two Noble Kinsmen*. The last two are interesting because Shakespeare is named as joint author, in the first case with William Rowley and in the second with John Fletcher. If we add together the 36 Folio plays, the nine just listed and the six lost, it might appear that Shakespeare wrote on his own or in collaboration 51 plays. But no Stratfordian scholar believes this. In refusing to do so, they

are implicitly accepting that on more than one occasion the name 'Shakespeare' was used by a person or persons unknown—in fact as a pseudonym.

As well as conceding that the name was appropriated by others, orthodox scholars also generally agree that the works were interpolated by others. Indeed, many reject *Titus Andronicus* altogether. Others find that there is little 'Shakespearean' in the first part of *Henry VI*, and there is considerable doubt about the second and third parts. The work of two or three hands has been detected in *Troilus and Cressida*, of which more anon. A large part of *Henry VIII* is often ascribed to Fletcher. *The Merry Wives of Windsor* has been said to have been interpolated by a botcher. A "hireling or journeyman" allegedly had a hand in Timon of Athens. Few would refuse to admit a doubt about the total authenticity of *The Taming of a Shrew*. Sir Sidney Lee believed that "a hack of the theatre" wrote one of the most striking scenes in *Macbeth* and that the vision of Posthumous in *Cymbeline* is a piece of pitiful mummery which must have been supplied by another hand (*A Life of William Shakespeare*, 1899). And, in *Shakespeare, Co-Author* (2002), Shakespeare scholar Brian Vickers argues for major contributions to five Shakespeare plays by writers like George Peele and John Fletcher.

Clearly, therefore, the name 'Shakespeare' was used rather carelessly and without any direct complaint by the Stratford man, who of course never did or said anything to show whether he was the author or not. This silence even prevailed when the plays were published anonymously, as indeed they were until 1598. If they were written by an unknown young provincial who would surely have needed all the publicity he could get, why this early anonymity, especially as Stratfordians maintain that it was the plays which brought him fame and fortune? Why was he so indifferent as to allow the earliest works to be published without his own name attached to them?

And why did he not directly protest later when plays were published with his name on the title page which he did not write? There is, however, a curious case where the author Shakespeare, whoever he was, did complain, though indirectly. In 1599 *The Passionate Pilgrim*, by 'William Shakespeare', appeared. It contained 20 pieces, though possibly only 5 are by that author. In 1612 the publisher issued a third edition, still under Shakespeare's name as the sole author, in which he included 2 new poems actually written by Thomas Heywood. Shakespeare did not protest to the publisher but Heywood did, both on his own and on Shakespeare's behalf (Thomas Heywood: *An Apology for Actors*, Epistle, 1612). Heywood

wrote that "the author, I know, was much offended with Mr Jaggard that (altogether unknown to him) presumed to make so bold with his name". The interesting point about this incident is that Shakespeare did not protest directly to Jaggard, the publisher, but instead did it through a fellow writer who speaks of him in deferential terms as "the author". This is understandable if 'Shakespeare' was a literary mask name but is puzzling if the author was William Shakspere. There is no reason why he, if he were the author, should not have interfered himself and set the record straight in 1599, let alone over 12 years later.

The Diary's Missing Name

This apparent indifference about the manuscripts and the use of his name also seems to apply to payments for the plays. No theatre owner or manager of the day records ever having received a play from William Shakspere. Two of the most notable have left us written documentation of their careers. Philip Henslowe and Edward Alleyn, Henslowe's stepson, were partners in the ownership of a number of theatres, including The Rose which, according to Sidney Lee, "was doubtless the earliest scene of Shakespeare's pronounced success alike as actor and dramatist". Haliwell-Phillipps even suggests that in the early years Shakespeare wrote all his plays for Henslowe's theatres. Both Henslowe and Alleyn kept papers in which they noted the names of every notable actor, poet and dramatist of the day and payments to them, yet the name of Shakespeare or Shakspere is absent.

Henslowe kept a diary,* discovered by Malone in Dulwich College (founded by Alleyn) about 1790, in which he set down the sums that he paid to various authors for their works. The names of nearly all the contemporary dramatists appear in this diary, including Drayton, Jonson, Dekker, Chettle, Marston, Wilson, Monday, Heywood, Middleton, Porter, Hathaway, Rankins, Webster, Day, Rowley and Haughton. Some of the entries, with their signatures, are actually written by the playwrights themselves, presumably in order to save Henslowe the trouble. The absence of Shakespeare is puzzling for at least two reasons. First, Henslowe would have recognised his talent and would have employed him like all the others.

The second reason is that Henslowe did purchase some of the Shakespeare plays, even though the playwright is not named, because they

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* Here I am indebted to J.H. Stotsenburg's *An Impartial Study of the Shakespeare Title* (1904) and George Greenwood's *The Shakespeare Problem Restated* (1908), both of whom discuss the diary in detail.

are entered in the diary. Thus an entry for 23rd January 1594 reads: "R'd at 'titus and andronicus'". Henslowe was a bad speller, but this is plainly *Titus Andronicus*. Again, for 6th April 1594 we read: "Re'd at King Leare". Yet again, *Henry V* was acted for the first time in the theatre on 14th May 1592. It was very popular, being acted nine times in the winter of 1595-6. The diary also shows that *Henry VI* was acted for the first time in the theatre on 3rd March 1592. Another entry for 11th June 1594 records: "R'd at the tamynge of a Shrewe ixs" (9 shillings). Again, the play called by Henslowe 'Burone' and also 'Berowne' is probably *Love's Labour's Lost,* and 'Richard the Confessor', bought by Henslowe on 31st December 1593, seems to be *Richard III*. *Hamlet* is entered in 1594 and *Troilus and Cressida* in 1600. Here, then, are at least 7 and probably 9 plays by Shakespeare bought by Philip Henslowe, but Shakespeare's name is never mentioned in connection with any payment for them. It is difficult to understand how he could have obtained these plays from William, by all accounts a tight-fisted individual, without having paid him.

Henslowe, it must be stressed, was a willing employer who recognised talent when he saw it. This is clearly seen in his diary. Drayton, Wilson, Monday and Hathaway received from him a monetary gift for one play in addition to their pay, as did John Day and Thomas Dekker for one of their efforts. So Shakespeare's talents and ability would surely have been appreciated by Henslowe. Why, then, did he not record having paid the author?

The strange mystery presented by the omission of Shakespeare from Henslowe's diary has forced Stratfordians to suggest that these nine plays were earlier works which were not written by Shakespeare at all. This bizarre conclusion is unnecessary, for there is no reason to assume other than that they were the Shakespeare plays, or at least early drafts of them. In any case, it is absurd to suggest that Henslowe obtained inferior plays from other writers when Shakespeare was available. And if Shakespeare did write plays for Henslowe, what are they if not these? If they were earlier plays, they cannot have been much earlier than the Shakespeare works, because Henslowe often wrote "ne" in the outer margin if a play was new, and he did so in the case of, for example, *Henry VI* in 1592 and *Titus Andronicus* in 1594.

There is a further mystery about Henslowe's Diary, namely that it records plays which were published under the name of Shakespeare but which were not in fact written by him. A case in point is *Sir John Oldcastle*, one of the nine extant 'false' plays noted earlier. The Diary informs us that it was written in 1599 by Monday, Drayton, Wilson and

Hathaway. A later entry makes it clear that Dekker made additions in 1602. Yet the published text went under the name of Shakespeare. There is a simple explanation, and it is that this name was known by whoever was responsible for publishing the play as a mask name which could be used for financial advantage without fear of comeback from the real author.

The Strange Case of Troilus and Cressida

Let us consider one more example from this Diary—the case of *Troilus and Cressida*. Here Henslowe does name authors. On page 147 he notes: "Lent unto Thomas Dounton, to lende unto Mr Dickers and Harey Cheattell, in earnest of ther booke called Troyelles and Cresseda the some of 3 pounds Aprell 7 day 1599" (1600). Later, he writes: "Lent unto Harey Cheattell and Mr Dickers, in prte of payment of ther booke called Troyelles and Cresseda the 16 of Aprell 1599, xxs". Now, this play was entered in the Stationer's Register a few years later: "7 Feb 1602-3, Mr Roberts the booke of Troilus and Cressida, as yt is acted by my lo Chamberlins men". In 1609 the play was eventually published under the name of William Shakespeare.

The frequent claim that the *Troilus and Cressida* of Thomas Dekker and Henry Chettle must be a rival play and not that of Shakespeare is a totally unwarranted assumption. If we examine the Shakespeare play, we shall discover at least three different styles. The oaths, exclamations and ejaculations were commonly used by Dekker and Chettle in other works. Dekker, as parodied by Jonson in *The Poetaster*, was renowned for his use of big, clumsy words and abusive phrases and the play has plenty of them. Yet there is also a solid philosophical input, and this case does support the view that 'Shakespeare' was at least partly a mask name for a reviser or polisher of other writers' works. And when a play was dressed up and revised, by Shakespeare or whoever, it was sometimes felt justified in using the Shakespeare name because it was widely known in that capacity.

The Post-1616 Revisions

The revisions and polishings did not apparently stop with William's death. In the seven years after 1616 before the publication of the *First Folio*, 10 quartos were published, containing in most cases numerous revisions to the earlier texts. One play, *Othello*, was in fact published for the first time in 1622. The *Folio* edition a year later has 160 new lines and 70 deleted. The *Folio* itself contains numerous other changes. Half the plays were published in it for the first time. Of the others, nearly all were

either rewritten or revised, in many cases quite extensively. *The Merry Wives of Windsor* has twice the number of lines it possessed in 1602. *Henry VI, Part Two*, has 1139 new lines and 2,000 amended. *King John* has 1,100 new lines and a new scene. Altogether, there are nearly 10,000 lines in the *Folio* absolutely unknown up to 1616. The additions include some of the finest passages in Shakespeare, the opening chorus to *Henry V* and the Prologue to *Troilus and Cressida* being among them.

One explanation of all these changes and additions is that they were done by William some time before the spring of 1616 and probably before 1610 or 1611 when it is said that he settled in Stratford. But this does not explain the curious case of *Richard III*. It was first published anonymously in 1597. In the following year another edition appeared, with 'William Shake-speare' on the title page. Further editions appeared in 1602, 1605, 1612 and 1622. The alterations in these various editions were minor, but when the Folio edition appeared in 1623 there were some noticeable changes from the 1622 quarto. 193 new lines were introduced and nearly 2,000 retouched.

There are also 12 printer's errors which appear in the 1622 quarto and which are repeated in the *Folio* edition. This would surely suggest that the author or editor worked on the quarto and overlooked the errors. If so, he cannot have been William, who died in 1616. At the very least, it points to the existence of someone alive in 1622-23 who 'polished up' the earlier editions. Certainly, this continuous revision does not square with the claim for the author made by the apparent editors of the *First Folio* that "what he thought, he uttered with that easiness, that we have scarce received from him a blot in his papers".

The First Folio

The *First Folio* is also an integral part of the puzzle. Its editors are given as John Heminge and Henry Condell, who were two of William's acting friends. Their names are given below the dedicatory epistle to the Earls of Pembroke and Montgomery and the address 'To the great variety of readers'. Of course, they are also mentioned in William's will where he leaves them rings but makes no mention of manuscripts. Yet they claim to have received them from him. This would have to have taken place at the latest by 1616. Why then the delay of at least seven years, especially if he wrote with such 'easiness' that so little actual editing was needed?

It has been shown conclusively from certain words and phrases in these two prefaces that Heminge and Condell did not in fact write them at all, even though their names are attached to them. The writer was Ben

Jonson, who of course composed the verse 'To the Reader' opposite the Droeshout portrait and the dedicatory poem 'To the memory of my beloved the author Mr William Shakespeare and what he has left us'. Jonson is thus clearly engaging in a deception, which in itself doesn't prove anything. After all, if the two fellow actors were not proficient at writing then Jonson might have been performing a simple act of courtesy on their behalf. Moreover, in his dedicatory poem Jonson refers to the 'Sweet Swan of Avon', and this surely ends all argument, for in these four words Jonson is unequivocally identifying the actor from Stratford-upon-Avon as the poet who was "not of an age, but for all time".

Yet it doesn't end the matter at all. It is inappropriate to compare a poet to a swan, which does not sing but makes hissing noises. Jonson indeed is not referring to the song of the swan in any case but to its movement: "What a sight it were to see thee in our waters yet appeare, and make those flights upon the bankes of Thames...". Sight and movement are here but there is no reference to sound. By his own choice of words Jonson is surely referring to an actor on the stage rather than a poet in his study. Moreover, in classical mythology swans rescued from oblivion—the river Lethe—individuals worthy of immortality. Swans did not gain it themselves but merely helped to secure it for someone else. We shall return to Ben Jonson, for he is a key figure in the maze. For the moment, let it be registered that he was fond of teasing his readers, and he may be doing it here.

The *First Folio* gives the definite impression that the author or polisher was presenting us with the final verdict on the works, which leads us to conclude that he must have planned such a collection and that the planning was done after most, if not all, of the quartos had been published. This view certainly presents insurmountable problems for the orthodox claimant. If William Shakspere planned it, then he would have to have taken much written material back and forward between London and Stratford, yet he has left not a trace behind in either place. He would also have been disappointed that, having passed it all on to Heminge and Condell some time before his death, his fellow actors delayed for so long before seeing it into print.

The Droeshout Hoax

In *Shakespeare: Truth and Tradition* (1928), J.S. Smart writes of the *First Folio* that it contains 'the author's portrait for all to see' and argues that this is pretty conclusive of authorship. But there is mystery here too. Of the engraving Gainsborough said: 'a stupider face I never beheld'. At its

bottom we are told that it was done by Martin Droeshout. In 1623 Droeshout was 22 years old. Since William had died in 1616, Droeshout would then have been 15 and is most unlikely to have seen the Stratford man. Moreover, as the portrait seems to indicate a man about 15-20 years younger than William at the time of his death, it could not possibly have been drawn from life—if indeed it is meant to represent him at all. How, then, was Droeshout in a position to achieve a true likeness?

The verse opposite the picture appears to suggest that somehow he succeeded:

"This figure, that thou here seest put,
It was for gentle Shakespeare cut;
Wherein the Graver had a strife
With nature, to out do the life:
O, could he but have drawn his wit
As well in brasse, as well as he hath hit
His face, the Print would then surpasse
All that was ever writ in brasse.
But, since he cannot, Reader, looke
Not on his Picture, but his Booke."

This verse, again written by Ben Jonson, is a puzzle. The 'for' in the second line could mean 'instead of', as it does in the line 'or for the laurel he may gain a scorn' in Jonson's dedicatory verse in memory of the author. Again, 'out do the life' could actually mean 'do out', i.e. hide or destroy the life. To suggest that the engraver has so well 'hit' the face is peculiar in view of the facts already outlined about Droeshout but would not be so strange if 'hit' really meant 'hid', which it often did in those times, 'hit' being the old past participle of 'hide'. And why the strange reference to 'all that was ever writ in brasse'? The word 'brasse' is curiously repeated two lines later. Brass gives us the adjective 'brazen' which means impudent or barefaced lying or cheating. Brass, we should note, is not a pure metal but an alloy of copper and zinc (the engraving itself was done in copper). There is definitely some kind of jest or hoax going on here. As Greenwood argues (*The Shakespeare Problem Restated*, p147), Jonson was writing tongue-in-cheek, outwardly commending the engraving while, by subtle ambiguities of phrase, actually mocking it. Whether we accept this interpretation or not, Jonson does finally tell us that if we want to find the real Shakespeare we must turn to the plays—"looke not on his picture, but his booke".

Nevertheless, we shall dwell further on Droeshout's puzzling portrait. What clearly supports a mocking interpretation of Jonson's verse is the

fact that absolutely nothing is right in this drawing. The head is out of all proportion, being as big as the body and, if a true likeness, would suggest that the man was a dwarf. It also seems deliberately drawn in the shape of an egg. Again, many years ago Lord Brain pointed out that it has two right eyes. In life the angle made by the lids of an eye where they meet nearest the nose is less acute than the angle at the outer end and the inner half of the upper lid itself is narrower than the outer half, but in this engraving the left eye is totally wrong in these respects. It is a duplicate right eye.

The nose is also misplaced because it is not in line with the curvature above the lip, which here runs into the left nostril. So, while the face is looking to its left, the nose is pointing to the right. The piece of the left ear that is shown is deformed and too low (no right ear is visible), the hair on the two sides fails to balance, the face is unshaven, and there is an abnormally high forehead with a bulbous protuberance in its middle. Sir Sidney Lee wrote: "The face is long and the forehead high; the one ear which is visible is shapeless; the top of the head is bald, but the hair falls in abundance over the ears". Now we know from his other portraits that Droeshout was competent enough to depict facial anatomy correctly—he did engravings of the Duke of Buckingham and the Bishop of Durham among others. Why, then, did he give this portrait an outsized egg head, an unusually high forehead, two right eyes, a misplaced nose, an exaggerated moustache, an unshaven jaw, and a deformed left ear? Was he actually asked to draw a caricature face? This is a serious question and does not deserve the derision levelled at it. In point of fact, there is evidence approaching proof that Droeshout was asked to do precisely what we are saying.

It lies in the tunic. True, it is ridiculously small with oversized shoulder-wings. But the point relates to the sleeves. The coat is composed of the front and back of the same left arm. This fact was indicated as long ago as 1911 in the *Tailor and Cutter* magazine. A month later, in April 1911, the *Gentleman's Tailor* magazine substantiated this claim by stating: "The tunic, coat, or whatever the garment may have been called at the time, is so strangely illustrated that the right-hand side of the forepart is obviously the left-hand side of the backpart; and so gives a harlequin appearance to the figure, which it is not unnatural to assume was intentional, and done with express object and purpose". Left-handedness signifies something dark, veiled or hidden and the purpose of engraving a left-handed tunic is not only to emphasise the intentional nature of the other deformities but also to communicate the existence of a secret. The man pictured has a substituted right arm. He is not the writer.

The puzzle may be solved if we look at the expression on the face. It has a vacant stare, or at best an expression of sheepish oafishness. In fact, it suggests a mask, and a clear indication of this purpose is the double line which runs from the left ear lobe to the chin. If this were meant to indicate that the man was putting on weight and had a double chin, the flesh would protrude most at the chin whereas here it widens as we approach the ear. The whole thing only makes sense if we imagine that the inner line represents the edge of a mask and the outer line represents the outline of a real person, whoever he was, hiding behind it. If so, the true meaning of "hit the face" in Jonson's lines becomes apparent. Apart from some doubtful and unauthenticated paintings, no other 'portrait' of Shakespeare has come to light. So we are left with the startling likelihood that the only representation of the immortal bard is a deliberate caricature. The same point applies to William of Stratford. We do know that he was an actor, a shareholder in theatres, a property owner, maltster and money lender. But we can find nothing to warm our hearts to him as the poet who was "not of an age, but for all time". As we shall later see, the life of William is a caricature of the life and mind of Shakespeare. That a man should be so different from his works is indeed a mystery.

The Concealed Poets

All these mysteries—the missing manuscripts, William's missing books, his complete silence about the works and outside of the works, the silence of others about him, the liberal use of the Shakespeare name, the absence of the author's name from Henslowe's Diary, the post-1616 revisions to the plays, the jesting Ben Jonson *Folio* lines and the hoax Droeshout portrait—can be rationally explained if we accept the proposition that Shakespeare was a mask name used by a concealed poet or poets. The manuscripts were deliberately destroyed or hidden; William did not possess any books because he was not interested in literature; he never claimed to be Shakespeare because he wasn't; the name is absent from Henslowe's Diary because the author was not known and these plays were only brokered by William; the revisions were indeed made by the real master mind after 1616; Ben Jonson was privy to the hoax and teased the readers of the *First Folio*; and the Droeshout engraving literally completes the picture. It is this explanation which makes sense and helps to throw light on several other conundrums.

One of them is the fact that there were concealed poets at the time, though their identity has not been revealed four hundred years later. We know of this concealment because contemporaries refer to it. Consider

this remark in *The Art of English Poesie* (1589), published anonymously but now generally accepted as the work of George Puttenham. He claims to have known "many gentlemen in the court that have written commendably and suppressed it again, or suffered it to be published without their own names to it, as if it were a discredit for a gentleman to seem learned and to show himself amorous of any good art". And Thomas Nashe writes in the preface to Robert Greene's *Menaphon* (1589): "Sundry other sweet gentlemen have vaunted their pens in private devices and tricked up a company of taffeta fools with their feathers". Greene himself writes in *A Farewell to Folly* (1591): "Others... if they come to write or publish anything in print... which for their calling and gravity being loth to have any profane pamphlets pass under their names, get some other Batillus to set his name to their verses. Thus is the ass made proud by this underhand brokery, and he that cannot write true English without the aid of clerks of parish churches, will need make himself the father of interludes". Batillus put his name to the works of Virgil, and interludes were plays. According to the testimony of these three writers, therefore, some literature of the time, including plays, was published anonymously or under the names of other people.

It might be supposed that they could not be referring to Shakespeare because the first printed work with this name was actually the long poem *Venus and Adonis*, published in 1593, and their remarks predate it. But the verb 'published' should not be taken too literally: manuscripts and printed copies of poems and plays were often circulated among friends and fellow writers before they were printed for a wider public. The Shakespeare plays were certainly being performed before 1593 and, as we shall see, there is even a reference to a *Hamlet* being on stage as early as 1586.

Anonymity, Allonymity And Pseudonymity

The problem of the authorship of texts is as old as literature itself. Many ancient writings are anonymous or written under another name—this is true of many parts of the Bible, for example. The controversy whether Paul wrote all the Epistles ascribed to him has raged for about two hundred years. Fictitious names have been adopted by writers from the earliest historic times in nearly all countries. Instances where the supposed authors are different from the actual authors are numerous throughout Greco-Roman literature. The two greatest early epic poems, *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, were probably originally anonymous and only later came to be associated with the name of Homer. The Chinese have a long tradition of pseudonymous writing.

Literary concealment can take many forms. Plato did it by pretending that he was merely reporting the ideas of someone else. Aristophanes initially did not produce his plays in his own name. The Roman playwright Terence, a liberated Carthaginian slave, was widely believed to be a front man or allonym for two aristocratic authors. As stated above, Batillus was a Roman actor and poet who falsely took credit for at least one anonymous epigram by Virgil. Leonardo da Vinci never published his writings and even wrote them from right to left so that they can only be read in a mirror. Sir Thomas More used the name of Guilielmus Rosseus (William Ross) for his 1523 attack on Martin Luther, Ross being a real person at the time. In the Shakespeare period a number of writers used other names. Thomas Nashe used the names Pierce Penniless and Cuthbert Curryknave. John Marston is an interesting case. He used the name W. Kinsayder for a couple of his poems, *The Metamorphosis of Pigmalion's Image and Certaine Satyres* and *The Scourge of Villanie*. In these poems, as we shall see, he actually calls Shakespeare by other names—Labeo, Mutius and Canaidos—and not by 'Shakespeare' at all.

Edmund Spenser is another intriguing instance. He used the pseudonyms Colin Clout and 'Immerito', and in Eclogue I in *The Shepherd's Calendar* (1579) he says that the use of pseudonyms or masks had always been a common practice for poets:

> "Colin Clout is a name not greatly used, and yet I have seen a Poesie of M. Skelton's under that title. But indeed the word Colin is French, and used of the French Poet Marot (if he be worthy of the name of a Poet) in a certain Eclogue. Under which name this Poet secretly shawdoweth himself, as sometimes did Virgil under the name of Tityrus, thinking it much fitter than such Latin names, for the greater unlikelyhoode of the language".

Molière, the 17th century French dramatist, was a nom-de-plume for Jean Baptiste Poquelin. François Marie Arouet used the pen name of Voltaire. Sir Walter Scott published his novels anonymously, and Marion Evans (George Eliot), Samuel Clements (Mark Twain) and many others invented other names for themselves. The Brontë sisters deceived their publishers into believing they were men when they began printing their work under the pseudonyms Currer, Ellis and Acton Bell. They also used their pen names to hide their 'hobby' from their dad, an Anglican preacher who didn't find out for years.

Writers use pen names for many reasons. Fear of economic or official retaliation, concern about social ostracism, the desire to preserve one's privacy as much as possible, or to differentiate between the kinds of books

they write, are obvious motives. The last motive applied to Lewis Carroll who under his real name of Charles Lutwidge Dodgson wrote mathematics papers. Agatha Christie wrote romantic novels as Mary Westmacott. Many writers are so prolific that they are forced to use pen names in order to sell their books to different publishers: this is the case, for instance, with John Dickson Carr who in the 1930s was publishing two detective stories a year under his own name and another two, through another publisher, under the pen name Carter Dickson.

Contemned Poetry

On a practical level, concealment is easily explained. Returning to *The Art of English Poesie*, Puttenham writes that:

> "But in these days (although some learned princes may take delight in them) yet universally it is not so. For as well poets, as poesie, are despised and the name become of honourable, infamous subject to scorn and derision, and rather a reproach than a prayse to any that useth it; for commonly whoso is studious in the Art or shows himself excellent in it, they call him in disdain a fantastical; and a light-hearted fantastical man (by conversion) they call a poet... Now also of such among the nobility or gentry as be very well seen in many laudable sciences, and especially in making or poesie, it is so come to pass that they have no courage to write and, if they have, yet are they loth to be known for their skill".

As quoted earlier, Puttenham then says that he has known many courtiers who have published their works without their own names attached to them. This suggests that they used other people's names rather than no name at all. The reason "proceeds through the barbarous ignorance of the time, and pride of many gentlemen and others, whose grosse heads not being brought up or acquainted with any excellent arte... they do deride and scorne it in others".

These sentiments were echoed by other writers. In his *Defence of Poesie*, written about 1580 but not published until 1595, Sir Philip Sidney laments "idle England which now can scarce endure the pain of a pen" and continued that "poor poetry... is fallen to be the laughing stock of children". None of Sidney's writings was published during his lifetime, and he ordered his poems to be burned after his death, which occurred in 1586, though some survived. In *The Tears of the Muses* (1591) Spenser, who himself used a pseudonym, endorses Sidney's lament:

> *"Ignorance the Muses doth oppress...*
> *And those sweet wits which wont the like to frame*
> *Are now despised and made a laughing stock..."*

In his *Discoveries* (1620-41) Ben Jonson writes that "he is upbraidingly called a poet as if it were a contemptible nickname". Philip Massinger in *The Emperor of East* (1631) says that "it being so rare in this age to meet with one noble name that, in fear to be censured for levity and weakness, dares express himself a friend or patron to contemned poetry". Even as late as 1689, John Selden was complaining that "'tis ridiculous for a lord to print verses; 'tis well enough to make them to please himself but to make them public is foolish".

In the manuscript play *Sir Thomas More* the Earl of Surrey states that "poets were ever thought unfit for state" (Act 3 Scene 2). This sentiment is repeated in Ben Jonson's play, *Epicene or the Silent Woman*, first acted in 1609. In Act 2 Scene 3 Cleremont says of Sir John Daw that he doesn't make a living as a poet because "he'll not hinder his rising in the state so much". We don't want to imply that writing poetry at all was discredited—after all, both Elizabeth I and James I tried their hand at poems. But too much dabbling might suggest a dreamer who wasn't fit for public office and there was always the danger that the poet might also write plays, and here there was much cause for official concern.

There is a class element in this official attitude in that Elizabethan aristocrats did not wish to be perceived as interested in earning money for professional work, including writing. That was the province of the commercial class. As J.W. Saunders argues, and as Diana Price corroborates,* there was a socially-imposed "stigma of print" covering certain genres considered commercial or frivolous, including satires, poetry or plays. For example, Sir John Harington (1561-1612) writes in the preface to his translation of Ariosto's *Orlando Furioso* (1591): "Some grave men misliked that I should spend so much good time on such a trifling worke as they deemed a Poeme to be". Indeed, although many members of the Tudor aristocracy had outstanding reputations as poets, *none* of them published their creative work. The Earl of Surrey's attributed poems were published in miscellanies after his death. So were Lord Vaux's. The Earl of Oxford published nothing during his lifetime. Sir Philip Sidney, Sir Walter Raleigh, Sir Edward Dyer, and Sir Fulke Greville were further down the social ladder, but none of them published their work either. All this is surely remarkable and has a direct bearing on the Shakespeare authorship.

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* J.W. Saunders: *The Stigma of Print*, in *Essays in Criticism 1*, 139-164 (1968. Reprint; Amsterdam: Swets and Zeitlinger N.V., 1951), see also his *From Manuscript to Print*, 1951; Diana Price: *Shakespeare's Unorthodox Biography*, Greenwood Press, 2001, esp. chapter 12).

Chapels of Satan

The stigma on drama was greater than that on poetry. Theatres were often regarded as centres of organised vice. An Act of 1572 classified common players among "rogues, vagabonds and sturdy beggars", unless they belonged to one of the private troupes of actors owned by noblemen. The author of *A Second and Third Blast of Retrait from Plays and Theatres* (1580) alludes to theatres as "chappels of Satan". In 1595 the Lord Mayor of London wrote to the Privy Council complaining of theatres that "evil disposed and ungodly people about this city have opportunity hereby to assemble together and make their matches for all their lewd and ungodly practices". Two years later he again complained that the theatres were the haunts of "thieves, horse-stealers, whoremongers, coney-catchers, contrivers of treason, and other idle and dangerous persons". So in the interests of 'order and decency' the City forbade the building of theatres within its precincts. For this reason the Globe at Southwark, the Curtain at Shoreditch, and other well known playhouses, were erected outside the city boundaries.

Opinions of playwrights themselves were often hardly more generous. Gabriel Harvey, writing of Greene, refers to his "villainous cogging and foisting, his monstrous swearing and horrible foreswearing, his impious profaning of sacred texts". He also described Lyly as "a mad lad as ever twang'd, never troubled with any substance of wit, or circumstance of honestie". A contemporary ballad about Marlowe calls him a man who consorted with "ruffians and cutpurses" and "led a life most foul and free". Ben Jonson described John Day and Thomas Middleton in the same terms as "base fellows" and Thomas Dekker he called a "rogue". An epitaph about Thomas Nashe claims that he "never in his life paid shoemaker or tailor". Meres wrote of George Peele: "As Anacreon died of the pot, so George Peele by the pox".

In many respects, the England of Elizabeth was a police state where everyone watched their back and their mouth. Marlowe was a case in point, being charged with treason because of his 'atheistic' views. Writing plays was actually a risky business and some dramatists fell foul of the law. Take the case of the lost play *The Isle of Dogs* (1597), started by Thomas Nashe but finished by Ben Jonson. Apparently it contained libellous matter and the players, including Jonson, were thrown into prison. Nashe, who claimed to have only written the prologue and first act, managed to escape arrest by fleeing London, but all of his papers were seized, examined, and destroyed. The authorities then closed all London theatres for two months. (It is interesting that all the Shakespeare plays in print up to that

year had been published anonymously, and it wasn't until 1598 that the name 'Shakespeare' appeared on a play's title page.) Jonson was made well aware of the possible consequences of openly identifying himself as the author of a play, because he found himself in trouble on two more occasions. In 1603 he was summoned to the Privy Council to answer for the treason and popery alleged to be contained in *Sejanus*. In 1605 he and George Chapman were imprisoned for a time as joint authors of *Eastward Ho* over a line sarcastic of the Scots (the King, James I, was a Scot).

Was 'Shakespeare' A Cover Name?

Clearly, then, there were a number of possible motives for literary concealment. Political ambition and the avoidance of trouble are sound, practical reasons. It must be remembered that 'Shakespeare' was left alone by the authorities, despite the fact that some of his plays were controversial. As the Dean of Ely suggested in 1897, "there were some things in Shakespeare that the author might have been burnt for had he been a theologian, just as certainly as there were some things about politics, about civil liberty, which, had he been a politician or a statesman, would have brought him to the block".

A case in point is *Richard II*. It was first published anonymously in 1597, the very same year as *The Isle of Dogs* affair. The play contains a scene of the deposition of Richard by Henry Bolingbroke, later Henry IV, but the scene was omitted in this first edition. In 1601 on the eve of the Essex Rebellion, the play was commissioned by Sir Gelly Meyrick, a member of the Essex household, in order to win the crowd over to Essex's cause. After Essex's arrest, when Queen Elizabeth heard of it, she remarked to William Lambarde, Keeper of the Rolls: "I am Richard II, know you not that?... He [i.e. Essex] that will forget God will also forget his benefactors; this tragedy was played 40 times in open streets and houses". In other words, the monarch viewed the play as a potential incitement to rebellion, yet its author was not apprehended. Here is an astonishing fact never explained by Stratfordians: Shakespeare wrote a potentially treasonable play but no attempt was apparently made, at the very least, to bring him before the Privy Council to explain himself, let alone throw him in prison. Why not?

There is, however, a plausible explanation. Jonson and Nashe, for example, were well known among the cultural elite, so that what they said in a play could have an impact on the wider world. 'Shakespeare', on the other hand, was a nobody as far as this elite and world were concerned. He was a provincial actor of no importance whose words would have no

influence, and so persecution was not worth the fuss. After all, *Richard II* did not stir the masses and the Essex rebellion was a miserable failure. In short, the cover worked to protect the mastermind from persecution and the plays from censorship.

> *"Invest me in my motley, give me leave*
> *To speak my mind, and I will through and through*
> *Cleanse the foul body of the infected world*
> *If they will patiently receive my medicine…"*

Thus Jaques in *As You Like It.* Is it possible that in order to speak the truth the mastermind donned a motley? But why the motley of a real person? Would not anonymity or a pseudonym not have succeeded just as well? Let us consider these two other possibilities. The weakness of anonymity is that it invites inquiry as to the real author's identity. To some extent, this may have been what happened over the case of *Richard II* in 1597. The use of a fictitious name might be even more dangerous, especially if the authorities discovered that the name was invented, for they would probably be all the more determined to discover the real identity and take appropriate action. No, the safest course would be an allonym —the use of someone living who was unimportant. The power and influence of opinion-makers is as important to the state as their opinions. We are even more aware of this truth today, in an age when issues are driven by celebrities rather than their own inherent merits.

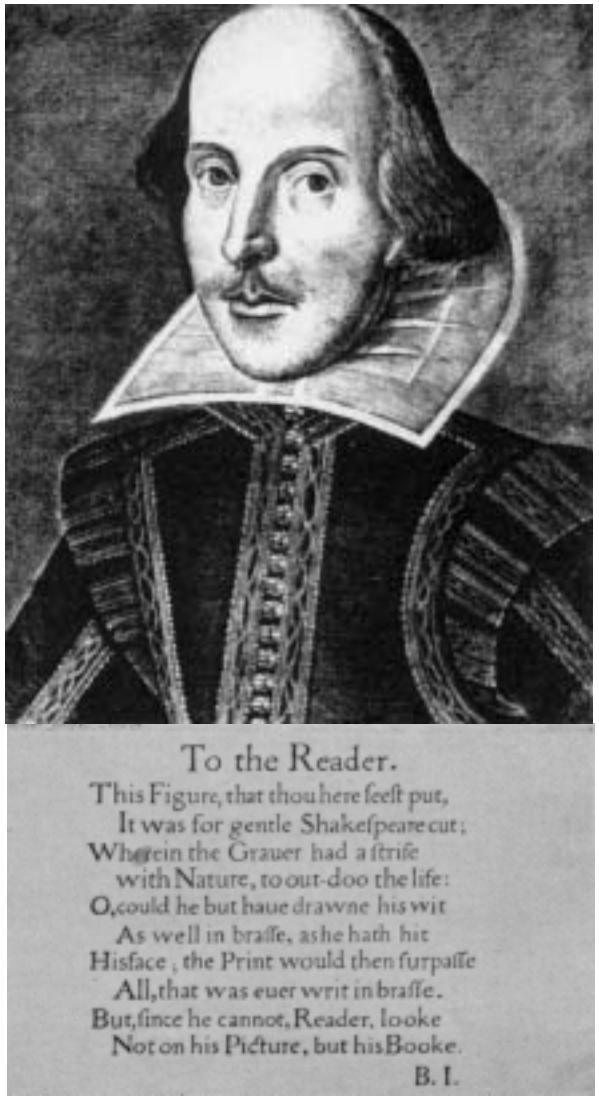
Stratfordians will say gleefully that the substitute would have to be, at least superficially, as brilliant as the real author, otherwise the cover would be seen through at once. But this misses the point, which is that the brilliance of such a substitute would attract attention, whereas ordinariness would not. Most people wouldn't get close enough to the real person to make the distinction. Moreover, Stratfordians overlook the undoubted fact that writers *did* use the names of real nonentities as covers, and we have the testimonies of Nashe and Greene, if not also Puttenham, to prove it. Recall that Nashe writes of "sweet gentlemen" having "vaunted their pens in private devices and tricked up a company of taffeta fools with their feathers"; Greene writes of "the ass" who "cannot write true English without the aid of clerks of parish churches", being "made proud by this underhand brokery"; and Puttenham refers to "many gentlemen in the court that have... suffered it to be published without their own names to it". Who are these 'sweet gentlemen' to whom they are referring? The success of the strategy is proved by the fact that 400 years later we still do not know their names.

These comments of Puttenham, Nashe and Greene were all made in the late 1580s before the name of Shakespeare really burst on the scene. So they may not have been referring to that name at all. But the point is that the use of another person's name was clearly a habit of the time: they do write in the plural, after all. And the question which demands an answer is: did these 'sweet gentlemen of the court' use the name of Shakspere as their front man? Could it be that the attraction of this man was twofold. Perhaps, as well as being an actor, he was a broker, just as Greene suggests. As such, he obtained plays from others for the theatre manager and received a double payment: from the manager and from the courtly author or his agent. Secondly, his name could be transformed for print into 'Shake-speare', the shaker of the spear, the man who, as Jonson later wrote, shook a lance at the eyes of ignorance. Fanciful? Well, we shall see.

CONCLUSION

To summarise what we have argued so far:

- There are no manuscripts, notes or prompt copies of the Shakespeare works;
- There are no letters, documents or prose works written by William Shakspere;
- Never once by recorded mouth nor any document did William Shakspere claim to be Shakespeare;
- The name 'Shakespeare' was used on several occasions as a pseudonym;
- The earliest plays before 1598 were published anonymously and Shakespeare the author never protested when the name was later used by others;
- Frequent revisions were made to the plays, many apparently during the strange 7-year gap between William's death and the publication of the First Folio;
- The Folio 'portrait' seems to be a mask or caricature;
- The life of William is a caricature of the life of Shakespeare;
- Literary disguise did occur during the period, but little of it has been exposed.
- The above points imply the possibility that Shakespeare was one of these literary disguises—the biggest literary hoax of them all. Or as Henry James put it: "I am sort of haunted by the conviction that the divine William is the biggest and most successful fraud ever practised on a patient world".



To the Reader.

This Figure, that thou here feeſt put,
It was for gentle Shakeſpeare cut;
Wherein the Grauer had a ſtriſe
with Nature, to out-doo the life:
O, could he but haue drawne his wit
As well in braſſe, as he hath hit
His face; the Print would then ſurpaſſe
All, that was euer writ in braſſe.
But, ſince he cannot, Reader, looke
Not on his Picture, but his Booke.

B. I.

The Droeshout 'Portrait' of Shakespeare,
with Ben Jonson's mysterious Foreword.
Martin Droeshout (1601-circa 1650) was only fifteen
when William died and is therefore unlikely to have seen him in person.

Ben Johnson
(1572-1637) advises us to look not on his picture but his book.

Robert Greene
(circa 1560-1592) refers to the 'under-hand brokery' of an 'upstart' crow 'beautified with our feathers'. This woodcut, which presents him as returning from death in his shroud to pen more 'poison', is from the title page of the pamphlet, 'Greene in Conceipte', 1598.

Thomas Nashe **(1567-1601) alludes to 'private devices' of concealed gentlemen poets. This malicious woodcut of circa 1597 suggests that Nashe is a jailbird in leg irons.**

Michael Drayton (1563-1631), a renowned poet of the period who was buried in Westminster Abbey, makes no references to his supposed fellow Worwickshire poet.

James Wilmot

Mark Twain

George Greenwood

Enoch Powell

A Quartet Of Doubters