

Shakespeare Authorship Argumentative Performance Task

Honors English II
DePalatis

Part 1

Issue:

There has been much debate in the past 100 years about whether William Shakespeare truly wrote his own plays and sonnets. Although the Royal Shakespeare Society has always maintained that Shakespeare is the true author of his works, they are going to be conducting a meeting in your area to examine the issue.

Before you attend the meeting, you do some initial research on this topic and uncover five sources (a website, a couple of articles, and two poems: one Shakespearean sonnet and one sonnet written by a leading contender for the authorship of Shakespeare's works) that provide information about the controversy.

After you have reviewed these sources, you will answer some questions about them. Briefly scan the sources and the three questions that follow. Then, go back and read the sources carefully to gain the information you will need to answer the questions and write an argumentative letter.

In Part 2, you will write an argumentative letter related to the sources.

Source Material

I. Declaration of Reasonable Doubt About the Identity of William Shakespeare –DoubtAboutWill.org

To Shakespeare lovers everywhere, as well as to those who are encountering him for the first time: know that a great mystery lies before you. How could William “Shakspeare” of Stratford have been the author, William Shakespeare, and leave no definitive evidence of it that dates from his lifetime? And why is there an enormous gulf between the alleged author's life and the contents of his works?

In the annals of world literature, William Shakespeare is an icon of towering greatness. **But who was he?** The following are among the many outstanding writers, thinkers, actors, directors and statesmen of the past who have expressed **doubt that Mr. “Shakspeare” wrote the works of William Shakespeare:** Mark Twain, Henry James, Walt Whitman, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Orson Welles, Leslie Howard, Tyrone Guthrie, Charlie Chaplin, Sir John Gielgud, William James, Sigmund Freud, Clifton Fadiman, John Galsworthy, Mortimer J. Adler, Paul H. Nitze, Lord Palmerston, William Y. Elliott, Harry A. Blackmun, and Lewis F. Powell, Jr.

Present-day doubters include many more prominent individuals, numerous leading Shakespearean actors, and growing numbers of English professors. Brunel University in West London, and Concordia University in Portland, Oregon, now offer degree programs in authorship studies. **Yet orthodox scholars claim that there is no room for doubt** that Mr. Shakspeare wrote the plays and poems traditionally attributed to him. Some say that it is not even an important question.

We, the undersigned, hereby declare our view that there *is* room for reasonable doubt about the identity of William Shakespeare, and that it is an important question for anyone seeking to understand the works, the formative literary culture in which they were produced, or the nature of literary creativity and genius.

The Problematic Case for Stratford's Mr. Shakspere

Many people think that Mr. Shakspere (a frequent spelling of his name, used here to distinguish him from the author) *claimed* to have written the works. No such record exists. The case for him as the author rests largely on testimony in the First Folio collection of the plays, published in 1623, seven years after he died. However, nothing in the contemporaneous documentary evidence of his life confirms the Folio testimony. If Mr. Shakspere was the author, there should be definitive evidence of it from his lifetime. There is none. Not that there are no reasons to think that Mr. Shakspere wrote the works, but we find them inconclusive.

There are four main reasons to identify Mr. Shakspere of Stratford with the author William Shakespeare. First, the name "William Shakespeare" (often "Shake-speare") appeared on the title pages of many of the poems and plays published during his lifetime. Second, Ben Jonson wrote a key phrase in the First Folio referring to the author as "Sweet Swan of Avon," and Leonard Digges refers to "thy Stratford monument." Third, fellow actors Heminges and Condell, mentioned in his will, point to him as the author in the Folio. Fourth, the effigy and inscription on his Stratford monument suggest that "Shakespeare" had been a writer. These four reasons would seem to amount to a prima facie case for Mr. Shakspere (evidence sufficient to establish a presumption of fact, unless rebutted by other evidence); however, each of them is problematic.

1. It is not certain from the title pages that the name printed on them necessarily refers to Mr. Shakspere. Mr. Shakspere's last name was spelled numerous ways, even after many of the works had been published. The name on the works was virtually always spelled one way, "Shakespeare;" but it was often hyphenated — a rarity for English names at the time. Scholars have no definitive explanation for the hyphenated name. Mr. Shakspere's name was *never* hyphenated in other contexts, such as his business dealings in Stratford. On his baptismal record, even on his monument, Mr. Shakspere's name was spelled with no "e" after "k." The same is true of its three appearances in his will, twice spelled "Shackspeare," and once "Shakspeare." Some think that it may have been pronounced with a short "a," like "Shack," as it was quite often spelled.
2. The First Folio testimony does point to Shakspere as the author, but should this be taken at face value? It is very unusual that the identity of such a great writer would depend so heavily on posthumous evidence. Neither Ben Jonson, nor Leonard Digges, ever wrote a personal reference to Mr. Shakspere while he lived. Not until the year Shakspere died did Jonson refer to "Shakespeare," and then only to list him as an actor. Other than their two brief allusions, neither Jonson nor Digges offered any further identifying information — not his dates of birth and death, or names of any family members, or any revealing episode from his life. Short on individualizing facts, they gave us generalized superlatives that describe the author, not the man.
3. Perhaps the strongest link to Mr. Shakspere is the apparent testimony of actors Heminges and Condell. Neither of them was a writer, however, and several scholars doubt that they wrote the passages attributed to them. Some think their Folio testimony sounds like a sales pitch, urging undecided readers to purchase. Most orthodox scholars are untroubled by the lack of corroboration, limited specifics, ambiguities, puffery and unclear role of Mr. Shakspere's fellow actors. Skeptics ask why the Folio is not more straightforward, and why such a great outpouring of eulogies only occurred following seven years of silence after his death.
4. Yes, today the Stratford monument effigy clearly depicts a writer; but it does not look the same as the one erected in the early 1600s. A sketch by a reputable antiquarian in 1634 shows a man with a drooping moustache holding a wool or grain sack, but no pen, no paper, no writing surface as in today's monument. Records show that the monument was "repaired." Apparently the effigy was also altered to depict a writer. The monument's strange inscription never states that Mr. Shakspere *was* the author William Shakespeare. For anybody living in Stratford, who may have known him, the epitaph could appear to say no such thing. It neither names, nor quotes from, any of the works; and it never mentions poetry, plays, acting or theater. Most orthodox biographers have little to say about the inscription, and some even describe it as enigmatic. Epitaphs of other writers of the time identify them clearly as writers, so why not Mr. Shakspere's epitaph?

Why We Say the Evidence Does Not Fit

If the case for Mr. Shakspere were otherwise sound, the problems in these four areas would hardly matter. Unfortunately, once one looks beyond them, one finds no contemporaneous evidence that Mr. Shakspere was even a professional writer, much less that he was the poet-playwright William Shakespeare.

Further, much contemporaneous evidence that has come to light seems at odds with his having been Shakespeare. Of a few great writers, like Homer, we know nothing at all; but there is only one great writer about whom the more we learn, the less he appears to have *been* a writer. How can this be for England's Shakespeare?

Not one play, not one poem, not one letter in Mr. Shakspeare's own hand has ever been found. He divided his time between London and Stratford, a situation conducive to correspondence. Early scholars naturally expected that at least some of his correspondence would have survived. Yet the only writings said to be in his own hand are six shaky, inconsistent signatures on legal documents, including three found on his will. If, in fact, these signatures are his, they reveal that Mr. Shakspeare experienced difficulty signing his name. Some document experts doubt that even these signatures are his and suggest they were done by law clerks. One letter addressed *to* Mr. Shakspeare survives. It requested a loan, and it was unopened and undelivered.

His detailed will, in which he famously left his wife "my second best bed with the furniture," contains no clearly Shakespearean turn of phrase and mentions no books, plays, poems, or literary effects of any kind. Nor does it mention any musical instruments, despite extensive evidence of the author's musical expertise. He did leave token bequests to three fellow actors (an interlineation, indicating it was an afterthought), but nothing to any writers. The actors' names connect him to the theater, but *nothing* implies a writing career. Why no mention of Stratford's Richard Field, who printed the poems that first made Shakespeare famous? If Mr. Shakspeare was widely known as William "Shakespeare," why spell his name otherwise in his will? Dying men are usually very aware of, and concerned about, what they are famous for. Why not this man?

Mr. Shakspeare grew up in an illiterate household in the remote agricultural town of Stratford-upon-Avon. There is no record that he traveled at all during his formative years, or that he ever left England. Both of his parents witnessed documents with a mark; but most surprisingly, neither of his daughters could write. One poorly-executed signature exists for his daughter, Susanna, but it only suggests a functional illiterate. His younger daughter, Judith, twice signed with a mark when witnessing a deed for a Stratford neighbor. Mr. Shakspeare may have attended the Stratford grammar school, but records to confirm this do not exist. Records do survive for England's two universities at the time, but no record places him at either of them. Most orthodox scholars make no claim that he ever attended any university, inside or outside of England.

Some say that the Stratford grammar school would have provided all the formal education Mr. Shakspeare would have needed to launch him on a trajectory consistent with the author's literary output. We disagree. The works show extensive knowledge of law, philosophy, classical literature, ancient and modern history, mathematics, astronomy, art, music, medicine, horticulture, heraldry, military and naval terminology and tactics; etiquette and manners of the nobility; English, French and Italian court life; Italy; and aristocratic pastimes such as falconry, equestrian sports and royal tennis. Nothing that we know about Mr. Shakspeare accounts for this. Much of the knowledge displayed in the works was the exclusive province of the upper classes, yet no record places Mr. Shakspeare among them for any length of time. The works are based on myriad ancient and modern sources, including works in French, Italian, Spanish, Latin and Greek not yet translated into English. How Mr. Shakspeare could have acquired knowledge of these sources is a mystery.

The gap between Mr. Shakspeare's youth in Stratford and the first record of him in London is known as the "lost years." But for a few church records, the first twenty-eight years of his life could be described as lost. Scholars know *nothing* about how he acquired the breadth and depth of knowledge displayed in the works. This is not to say that a commoner, even in the rigid, hierarchical social structure of Elizabethan England, could not have managed to do it somehow; but how could it have happened without leaving a single trace? Orthodox scholars attribute the miracle to his innate "genius," but even a genius must *acquire* knowledge. Books were expensive and difficult to obtain during those times, except at universities or private libraries. No book that Mr. Shakspeare owned, or that is known to have been in his possession, has ever been found. Academic experts on characteristics of geniuses see little reason to think that Mr. Shakspeare was a genius.

No record shows that any William Shakespeare ever received payment, or secured patronage, for writing. After dedicating his first two poems to the earl of Southampton, Shakespeare issued no more dedications. Why would any writer motivated by profit, as we are told Mr. Shakspeare was, not visibly seek patronage? Some scholars claim that the earl of Southampton was his patron, but no record shows that they ever met. A phrase in one of the dedications ("The warrant I have of your honourable disposition...")

suggests not. Not only did prominent patrons of other writers not support Mr. Shakspeare, they did not comment on him. Up until 1623, those who commented on the author, or on his works, never indicated that they knew him. Shakespeare, the author, wrote no commendatory verse, and nobody addressed any to him while he lived.

Contrary to the traditional view that the author became a prominent public figure, there is no record that he ever addressed the public directly, either in person or in writing (other than the two early dedications); and no record shows that either Elizabeth I, or James I, ever met Shakespeare, or spoke or wrote his name. Even after one of his plays was performed as part of the Essex rebellion, Shakespeare was not mentioned. Almost uniquely among Elizabethan poets, Shakespeare remained silent following the death of Elizabeth. Early in the reign of James I, records place Shakspeare in Stratford while plays were staged in London for the Court. Why was the popular playwright and leading actor of the King's Men not part of such events?

It is not that there are no documents for Mr. Shakspeare; there are close to seventy, but all are non-literary. They reveal a businessman of Stratford, plus a theater entrepreneur and sometime minor actor in London. A few records show him delinquent in paying taxes, and he was cited for hoarding grain during a famine. A William Wayte, evidently threatened by him, sought "sureties of the peace against William Shakspeare." In 1612, allegedly at the height of his fame, a London court called him simply a "gentleman of Stratford." He sued over small business matters, but never once objected to an unauthorized publication of the works. The orthodox see nothing unusual in the lack of documentation for Mr. Shakspeare's ostensible career, but he is the only presumed writer of his time for whom there is no contemporary evidence of a writing career.

Stranger still, this alleged prolific writer is said to have retired in his late-forties, with his faculties intact, and returned to the same market town from which he came, never to write a play, a poem, or even a letter. There is no record that he ever put on a play in Stratford, or that any of its residents viewed him as a poet. Several people who knew the man, or knew who he was, seem not to have associated him with the author, including his son-in-law, Dr. John Hall, poet Michael Drayton and prominent historian William Camden. Nobody, including literary contemporaries, ever recognized Mr. Shakspeare as a writer during his lifetime; and when he died in 1616, no one seemed to notice. Not so much as a letter refers to the author's passing. If Mr. Shakspeare was Shakespeare, surely *something* dating from 1616 should mention the author's death. Even Heminges, Condell and Richard Burbage, whom he mentioned in his will, had no recorded reaction. Nor did those who held rights to previously published editions of plays or poems rush new ones into print.

Scholars have found few, mostly dubious connections between the life of the alleged author and the works. Why are virtually all of the plays set among the upper classes, and how did the author learn of their ways? Why is only one play set in Mr. Shakspeare's Elizabethan or Jacobean England? Why are so many in Italy? How did he become so familiar with all things Italian that even obscure details in these plays are accurate? Why did he never mention Stratford, and never write a play that seems to reflect his own life experiences? While pouring out his heart in the Sonnets, why did he *not once* mention the death of his 11-year-old son? Perhaps a few apparent incongruities could be explained away, if taken in isolation; but there are so many! Sam Schoenbaum, among the most-quoted traditional Shakespeare biographers, after decades of research, wrote that, "Perhaps we should despair of ever bridging the vertiginous expanse between the sublimity of the subject and the mundane inconsequence of the documentary record." (Shakespeare's Lives, Second Edition)

Finally, Hugh R. Trevor-Roper, Regius Professor of History at Oxford University, found Shakespeare's elusiveness "exasperating and almost incredible ... After all, he lived in the full daylight of the English Renaissance in the well documented reigns of Queen Elizabeth and King James I and ... since his death has been subjected to the greatest battery of organised 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 to a mystery that **even his identity can still be doubted.**" ("What's in a Name?" Réalités, November 1962.)

We make no claim, in signing this declaration, to know exactly what happened, who wrote the works, nor even that Mr. Shakspeare definitely did not. Individual signatories will have their personal views about the author; but all we claim here is that there is "room for doubt," and other reasonable scenarios are possible. If writers and thinkers of the stature of Henry James, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Walt Whitman, Mark Twain and all the rest of the outstanding people named above, have expressed doubt that Mr. William Shakspeare of Stratford wrote the works attributed to him, why is it even necessary to *say* that there is room for doubt? There clearly *is* doubt, as a matter of empirical fact — *reasonable* doubt, expressed by very

credible people. Reasonable people may differ about whether a preponderance of the evidence supports Mr. Shakspere, but **it is simply not credible for anyone to claim, in 2007, that there is no room for doubt** about the author.

II. Edward De Vere Authorship Argument

The case for Edward De Vere, 17th Earl of Oxford.

Many Oxfordians believe that the true author of Shakespeare's plays was an aristocrat named Edward De Vere. The evidence for this is comprehensive, ranging from Edward de Vere's aristocratic knowledge of the upper classes through to his education and the structural similarities between his poetry and Shakespeare's. As regards authorship of Shakespeare's plays and sonnets, it has been suggested that Edward wrote these under the pseudonym of Shakespeare, both to avoid breaking a voluntary convention against aristocrats publishing poetry and plays and to escape the consequences of the subject matter he was writing about. George Puttenham's 1589 book, *The Arte of English Poesie* explains this further.

Below are the major reasons Oxfordians claim Edward De Vere was well qualified to write 37 plays and 154 sonnets.

• Edward De Vere and Elizabethan Theatre.

Edward De Vere, Earl of Oxford is known to have composed, directed and acted in plays around the same time as Shakespeare. Like Shakespeare he was part of an acting troupe but unlike Shakespeare, Edward managed his acting troupe called "Oxford's Boys". Furthermore, Edward De Vere was a leaseholder of the Blackfriars Theatre, a rival to The Globe.

• Edward De Vere's poetry and its similarities to Shakespeare.

Whilst most academics agree that Edward De Vere's poetry was better than Sir Francis Bacon's (the other contender for replacing Shakespeare), few believe it is of a standard necessary to prove De Vere wrote the 154 *sonnets claimed to have been authored by Shakespeare*.

Similarities in Edward De Vere's verse to Shakespeare's suggest however that such a leap in poetry composing was possible. Specifically six-line pentameter stanzas in *Venus and Adonis* reoccur only in Edward de Vere's early poems and yet are not repeated by other poets of Shakespeare's time. Both Joseph Sobran and J. Thomas Looney have noted the close similarities in form between Edward De Vere's work and that claimed to be Shakespeare's.

• Edward De Vere's knowledge of Elizabethan Courts and his superior education.

It is recognized by Oxfordians and Stratfordians alike that writing about royal courts, Italy and law required a certain prerequisite level of education. Edward De Vere fits the bill here since he is known to have graduated from Cambridge University at age 14, becoming master of arts at age of 16. Furthermore in view of plays like *The Merchant of Venice* which discussed law, De Vere studied law at Gray's Inn. Account books clearly showed that Edward De Vere had an extensive library underlining his qualifications to write as knowledgeably as Shakespeare.

Underlining this argument is the fact that Venus and Adonis, derived from Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, could only have been possible with Arthur Golding's translation of this work. Arthur Golding was Edward De Vere's uncle and his translation was said to be dedicated to Edward De Vere.

To further prove that Edward De Vere was qualified to write settings ascribed to Shakespeare, Edward De Vere is known to have traveled to Italy in the 1570s, putting him in an ideal position to write knowledgeably about Venice (*The Merchant of Venice* / *Othello*).

• Similarities between Edward's life and the character Hamlet.

Similarities between Edward De Vere's life and *Hamlet* suggest that Hamlet was almost an autobiographical play about the Earl's life. Notably Polonius' line of "*young men falling out at tennis*" is believed to refer autobiographically to Edward De Vere's notorious tennis court squabble with Sidney. Notably Edward De Vere's father-in-law, William Cecil, Lord Burghley is said to be have been parodied as the character Polonius. Only a person intimately knowledgeable of Lord Burghley's life could parody this man convincingly in Hamlet.

Furthermore only Edward De Vere fits the historical assertion in sonnet 125 that Shakespeare "*bore the canopy*" over Queen Elizabeth in her victory celebration over the defeat of the Spanish Armada.

The parallels continue between Edward De Vere's life and subject matter in Henry IV, Part One. It is known that in 1573 Edward De Vere and company did routinely play practical jokes on ill-fated travelers on the same stretch of road as Prince Hal does in the play.

The similarities between life and sonnets, continues as Edward De Vere's poem "*Anne Vavasor's Echo*", composed for Anne Vavasor is likely to have been the elusive "*dark lady*" of the Shakespeare's sonnets. Furthermore, *Anne Vavasor's Echo* has more than a passing resemblance to the echo verses in *Venus and Adonis*.

- **Edward de Vere's nickname resembles "Shakespeare."**

At court, Edward De Vere was nicknamed "*Spear-shaker*" due to of his ability both at tournaments and because his coat of arms featured a lion brandishing a spear. Perhaps coincidentally, Edward De Vere lived in the same area as Shakespeare, his Bilton Hall home being the Avon River and the Forest of Arden on another.

Problems for Edward De Vere...

- ***De Vere died too early to complete the later plays.***

A large problem for Edward De Vere authoring Shakespeare's work is the fact that he died in 1604. This was before roughly 12 plays ascribed to Shakespeare were composed. However even Sir Edmund K. Chambers, a noted Stratfordian, agrees that the standard dating of Shakespeare's play is sketchy at best.

- ***Tudor Aristocrats had no need to write under nom de plumes.***

A standard line for why Edward De Vere used the nom de plume of Shakespeare was to avoid breaking an aristocratic convention not to write. Unfortunately we now know that aristocrats such as Edward De Vere did publish and without fear of breaking convention. It appears that this convention was weakly enforced and that aristocratic publishing was frowned upon rather than punished, this convention weakening entirely in Elizabethan times to which Edward De Vere belonged.

III. The Simple Case for Shakespeare

by J. M. Pressley, SRC Editor

One of the biggest debates with which I'm involved is the authorship debate over Shakespeare's works. Many different people have engaged me with their theories on why Shakespeare couldn't have written his works and who they believe was the actual author behind them. I try to listen with an open mind, but I have always been a member of the Stratford camp. This is not out of blind loyalty to my own pet theories; I have no real stake in whether or not Shakespeare wrote the plays bearing his name.

Given this, I've felt no need to defend my opinions on the authorship debate, especially when there are scholars who have dedicated their professional lives to the subject and are in a better position to debate the evidence (or lack thereof). I treat other opinions with respect, I wait for the incontrovertible evidence that will put this argument to bed once and for all, and I wonder sometimes if any one writer could have been responsible for the ensuing effect on literature, language, and history. Besides, the burden of proof falls on the other claimants to the throne.

For those that ask me, ultimately, why I believe in Shakespeare as the author, I have a simple (if often frustrating to those who fervidly believe in another author) answer: it's the simplest explanation. The issue is complex, fraught with logic pitfalls even for those who defend the orthodoxy, but Shakespeare remains the easiest of any authorship candidate to defend. For elaboration, let me first introduce my friend, William of Occam, and his proposition that forms the basis of my stance.

Occam's Razor

"Pluralitas non est ponenda sine neccesitate"

—William of Occam, 1285-1349

Translated from the Latin: "Plurality should not be posited without necessity." Occam based this statement on the Aristotelian principle of logic that one should not increase, beyond what is necessary, the number of entities required to explain anything.

All things being equal, the simplest solution is usually the correct one.

In this case, we have propositions that four different men (Shakespeare, Bacon, Marlowe, and Oxford) can all lay claim to the authorship of nearly forty plays produced in Elizabethan England. The

plays had to have some sort of author; they didn't just write themselves. Hence, we have four competing theories for who could have authored the works. Assuming all claims are equal and valid, we can then apply Occam's Razor to their arguments.

Four Hypotheses in a Nutshell

- William Shakespeare of Stratford-upon-Avon wrote or predominantly authored works that bear his name.
- Francis Bacon, Elizabethan philosopher and writer, wrote the works under a pseudonym for reasons not readily apparent, but scattered ciphers throughout the work that pointed to himself as the author.
- Christopher Marlowe, Elizabethan playwright who died in 1593, was a spy in the service of the crown whose death was faked, and he went on writing plays under a pseudonym to conceal his real identity.
- Edward de Vere, 17th Earl of Oxford, who is acknowledged as a poet and playwright, wrote the works under a pseudonym because courtiers were barred from publishing poetry.

The Supporting Evidence for the Candidates

William Shakespeare

Tom Reedy and David Kathman do an excellent job of summing up the case for Shakespeare in their essay, [How We Know That Shakespeare Wrote Shakespeare: The Historical Facts](#). To begin with, it's hard to argue with the fact that for 400-plus years, the works have been attributed to a William Shakespeare. We know that a man by that name was born in Stratford-upon-Avon, and that Shakespeare also died in the town of his birth. The documentary evidence of the time suggests strongly that William Shakespeare left Stratford sometime after 1585 and appeared in London in approximately 1592. After 1594, William Shakespeare is noted as a member of the Lord Chamberlain's Men, an acting company that performed the plays attributed to William Shakespeare, and was also a shareholder in the Globe Theatre, the artistic home of the Lord Chamberlain's Men. At the end of William Shakespeare's career in London, he retired to Stratford-upon-Avon, where he died in 1616. Seven years later, John Heminges and Henry Condell, actors from Shakespeare's company who are also mentioned in Shakespeare's last will and testament, made arrangements for the First Folio of published works attributed to William Shakespeare, including the sonnets.

Francis Bacon

Francis Bacon was the definition of the Elizabethan Renaissance man. Philosopher, scientist, statesman, and sometimes poet, Bacon was arguably one of the most well educated men in England during his lifetime. His first major work, his *Essays*, appear circa 1597, at which point Bacon would have been about 36 years old. He entered college at Cambridge at 12, passed the bar at 21, and was a member of the House of Commons at 23. His career as a politician would not necessarily preclude him from having enough spare time to write, even though his greatest works came only after he had effectively left his political career. Supporters also point to potential clues within Bacon's memoirs and correspondence, and specifically point to Bacon's notebook, *Promus*, which contains nearly 2,000 sayings, phrases, and other such material that Bacon seems to have deemed useful. Bacon did not make much use of the *Promus* material in the works he published after 1605. Some similarities do, however, exist between passages in *Promus* and several of the works attributed to William Shakespeare. In addition, Bacon supporters have occasionally pointed to Bacon's fascination with ciphers and demonstrated what they believe to be ciphers contained within the works that attribute the work to Bacon.

Christopher Marlowe

Christopher Marlowe was an acknowledged playwright at the time of his alleged death, penning popular works such as *The Tragical History of Doctor Faustus*, *Tamburlaine*, and *The Jew of Malta*. He was also a spy in the employ of the crown. Allegedly stabbed to death in a bar brawl circa 1593, Marlowe's death was

faked, and the playwright fled England to Italy. The theory, most prominently championed by Calvin Hoffman, says that Marlowe's work flourished in Italy, at which point it was passed through contacts back to England, where the actor William Shakespeare served as a front man for the plays. Supporters of Marlowe point to similarities of phrasing in some of Marlowe's work and that of Shakespeare. And certainly, Marlowe was university educated, which most supporters of alternate candidates maintain must be a prerequisite for anyone to have written the plays. If, in fact, Marlowe lived beyond 1593, it also seems plausible that he would have written later works, being only about 29 years old at the time of the alleged death.

Edward de Vere

Edward de Vere was, in fact, an acknowledged poet during his lifetime. Supporters point to evidence such as the Oxford Bible, which contains a number of highlighted passages that correspond to various passages in the works attributed to Shakespeare. They also draw a remarkable number of parallels between the play *Hamlet* and people of de Vere's circle. Finally, much is made of de Vere's coat of arms, that of a lion brandishing (or "shaking") a spear. Certainly, de Vere appears to have been a well-educated man of his time that had published poetry and, ostensibly, plays (although no stage plays bearing the earl's name exist). Logic would dictate that his status as a well-educated, well-traveled member of Queen Elizabeth's court would qualify him as a potential candidate for authorship.

Motive, Plausibility, and Occam's Razor

Motive, in the case of alternative candidates, is often glossed over (or, in Bacon's case, ignored altogether). Instead, the majority of alternate authorship hypotheses start by invalidating Shakespeare entirely, searching for a candidate whose credentials please them, and then attempting to reconcile the candidate with the requisite history that proves their candidate was the true author of the works. The problem with this approach is that they often fail to show appropriate motive, means, and how the proposed candidate could have gained by publishing under the pseudonym of William Shakespeare.

Bacon was indeed a learned man, whose expression found markedly different outlets than drama. He seemed to have little enough time to concentrate on his acknowledged writing while in public office, publishing voluminously once he was free of official responsibilities. It is hard to imagine that the work of Shakespeare, both in prolificacy and in quality, could have been produced in what amounted to Bacon's "spare time." And the writing that we know of Bacon shows such stylistic difference from that of the works, sonnets, and poetry, that it all but rules out Bacon as a candidate on that basis alone. Bacon has traditionally been proposed only because his proponents say he was the only (or one of the few) men capable of such expression; I have yet to see an adequate expression of why Bacon would have chosen to write the works, how he could have actually done so, and what profit Bacon may have seen in it.

Marlowe can only be considered if one ignores his untimely death. Irregularities in the coroner's inquest only point to possible disputes in the cause of Marlowe's death; there is nothing to dispute that Marlowe was, in fact, dead. Even if the Marlowe supporters claim that Marlowe died and that the plays were posthumously parceled out, it makes little sense. All of the works attributed to Marlowe were done posthumously; and if Marlowe had actually found the time to write another 36-38 plays by the time he was merely twenty-nine years old, why not release them all and attribute them to him as well? Of course, stylistic variance between Marlowe's works and the works of Shakespeare all but rule out Marlowe as the author of the later plays, even if there are limited, coincidental similarities of expression. Ultimately, a dead man can have neither means nor motive.

De Vere is the current favorite among alternate author enthusiasts, but stylistic analysis of de Vere's poetry compared with that of Shakespeare finds the earl lacking as well. In addition, the majority of evidence presented by Oxford supporters is circumstantial at best, coincidental in some instances, and pure conjecture in other examples. In addition, there is an incongruity in the rationale posited by Oxfordians. Oxford, it is said, needed to publish under a pseudonym because courtiers were discouraged or forbidden from publishing poetry and drama. Yet, as part of their supporting evidence, Oxford supporters point out that Oxford was not only an acknowledged patron of the arts, but that he was a recognized poet and playwright (for whom no play titles are mentioned). If, in fact, Oxford was recognized and even praised by his contemporaries for his qualities as a poet and dramatist, what need then did Oxford have for publishing his work anonymously? In the bid to establish credibility for de Vere, Oxford supporters undermine de Vere's motive for maintaining anonymity.

William Shakespeare, on the other hand, has the requisite connections to the company that produced the works and to the men who acted the roles. Ironically, we know more about Shakespeare than we know about any other Elizabethan playwright; hence, there is more to question. No one ever seriously disputes Marlowe, Jonson, or Kyd in the authorship of the works that bear their names, in part because we have to trust that the attribution of their work is genuine. But where William Shakespeare is concerned, it has become fashionable to seize upon every discrepancy and mold them into a conglomeration of conspiracy that masks another hand at work. The more convoluted the alternate hypotheses must be made to fit, the less likely it is that the posited other candidates can remain viable. Is it simpler to believe that a man named William Shakespeare wrote the works that bear his name, or is it simpler to believe that:

- A. Francis Bacon had enough time and developed an entirely different writing style to write 36 or more plays, 154 sonnets, and two major poems while maintaining an active political career during the time in which these works were written?
- B. Christopher Marlowe did not die and continued writing plays in Italy that were credited to another man to protect Marlowe's identity?
- C. Edward de Vere had to maintain anonymity despite being acknowledged as a poet and playwright in his lifetime and despite other nobles being published under their own names when supposedly such activity was discouraged?

Occam's Razor, based on the above criteria, seems to favor Shakespeare. Ultimately, it is as simple as it is plausible to accept, without being introduced to hard evidence to the contrary, that William Shakespeare wrote the works attributed to him. And the plausibility, just as it has been argued for the other candidates, exists within the dramatic works themselves.

The Plausibility of Shakespeare

First, the works exhibit stylistic characteristics that demonstrate—with the exception of some of the latest works, ostensibly done in collaboration with Fletcher—the presence of one man's hand at work. Certainly, there is a growth of that style that one can definitely trace; the progression of ability from *The Comedy of Errors* to *The Tempest* is indisputable. Someone had to write the plays, as they don't appear to be a collective of differing styles. It has been implied that only the most educated level of society in Elizabethan times could produce such a talent. In defense of a man that definitely did not attend a university, I say that it is entirely plausible that such a man wrote the plays, developing in style and talent as he wrote them.

The plays of Shakespeare, first and foremost, were not in their day considered works of literary genius; they were considered public entertainment (in a society that also considered executions as public entertainment). And even by today's standards, the works still exhibit aspects that do not entirely reconcile with the idea of inspired genius. The plays are overwhelmingly influenced and based upon other material: the Bible, published histories, popular lore, Roman and Greek Classics, contemporary novellas, and even other Elizabethan plays. The basis of the plays, in every instance, is someone else's story, and many of the works, if today's copyright laws were to be applied, would be in serious danger of copyright infringement. That is as much the work of an opportunist as it is a genius.

If that weren't enough, the plays are rife with lowbrow humor, vulgar characters, and some very pointed anachronisms and outright mistakes (Milan is not a seaport, for instance, for those who think the author was intimately familiar with Italy). The author is as apt to make fun of authority as he is to affirm it, and takes delight in more than one instance in ridiculing learning. In short, it is just as easy to impose a commoner's point of view on the author of Shakespeare's works as it is to impose the view of a university man or a courtier. And doesn't such a man more easily fit the profile of an "upstart crow?"

So, we have William Shakespeare, son of a glover, who received no more than a public grammar school education of his time. This same William Shakespeare made enough of a living in a theatrical troupe to retire in Stratford having purchased multiple properties in the village (including the second-largest house in town). He has documented connections with the London theatre, he has earned money that is hard to explain any other way, he has contemporaries praise him both during his life and after his death, he has a folio of works posthumously published in his name. It doesn't seem that much of a stretch in contrast to other hypotheses.

Conclusion

Despite the legitimate (and understandable) questions that can be raised regarding gaps in our knowledge of Shakespeare the man, William Shakespeare remains the most viable candidate as the author of his works. The case for Shakespeare is defensible both on its own merit and relative to the merit of others posited as authorship candidates. It is at least as plausible as any other case that has been presented, and in the decades of questioning that have followed, there has been no hard, empirical evidence either to disprove William Shakespeare's claim or prove any other's claim to authorship. Until such definitive proof exists, Shakespeare is, in my opinion, the most plausible author we have.

Article from http://www.bardweb.net/content/ac/simple_case.html

IV. An Educated Renaissance Woman

WAS SHAKESPEARE A WOMAN?

BY ELIZABETH WINKLER FOR THE ATLANTIC MONTHLY

ON A SPRING NIGHT in 2018, I stood on a Manhattan sidewalk with friends, reading Shakespeare aloud. We were in line to see an adaptation of *Macbeth* and had decided to pass the time refreshing our memories of the play's best lines. I pulled up Lady Macbeth's soliloquy on my iPhone. "Come, you spirits / That tend on mortal thoughts, unsex me here," I read, thrilled once again by the incantatory power of the verse. I remembered where I was when I first heard those lines: in my 10th-grade English class, startled out of my adolescent stupor by this woman rebelling magnificently and malevolently against her submissive status. "Make thick my blood, / Stop up th' access and passage to remorse." Six months into the #MeToo movement, her fury and frustration felt newly resonant.

Pulled back into plays I'd studied in college and graduate school, I found myself mesmerized by Lady Macbeth and her sisters in the Shakespeare canon. Beatrice, in *Much Ado About Nothing*, raging at the limitations of her sex ("O God, that I were a man! I would eat his heart in the marketplace"). Rosalind, in *As You Like It*, affecting the swagger of masculine confidence to escape those limitations ("We'll have a swashing and a martial outside, / As many other mannish cowards have / That do outface it with their semblances"). Isabella, in *Measure for Measure*, fearing no one will believe her word against Angelo's, rapist though he is ("To whom should I complain? Did I tell this, / Who would believe me?"). Kate, in *The Taming of the Shrew*, refusing to be silenced by her husband ("My tongue will tell the anger of my heart, / Or else my heart concealing it will break"). Emilia, in one of her last speeches in *Othello* before Iago kills her, arguing for women's equality ("Let husbands know / Their wives have sense like them").

I was reminded of all the remarkable female friendships, too: Beatrice and Hero's allegiance; Emilia's devotion to her mistress, Desdemona; Paulina's brave loyalty to Hermione in *The Winter's Tale*; and plenty more. ("Let's consult together against this greasy knight," resolve the merry wives of Windsor, revenging themselves on Falstaff.) These intimate female alliances are fresh inventions—they don't exist in the literary sources from which many of the plays are drawn. And when the plays lean on historical sources (Plutarch, for instance), they feminize them, portraying legendary male figures through the eyes of mothers, wives, and lovers. "Why was Shakespeare able to see the woman's position, write entirely as if he were a woman, in a way that none of the other playwrights of the age were able to?" In her book about the plays' female characters, Tina Packer, the founding artistic director of Shakespeare & Company, asked the question very much on my mind.

Theories that others wrote the corpus of work attributed to William Shakespeare (who was born in Stratford-upon-Avon in 1564 and died in 1616) emerged in the mid-19th century. Assorted comments by his contemporaries have been interpreted by some as suggesting that the London actor claimed credit for writing that wasn't his. But more than two centuries passed before alternative contenders began to be promoted—Francis Bacon; Christopher Marlowe; and Edward de Vere, the 17th earl of Oxford, prominent among them.* They continue to have champions, whose fervor can sometimes border on fanaticism. In response, orthodox Shakespeare scholars have settled into dogmatism of their own. Even to dabble in authorship questions is considered a sign of bad faith, a blinkered failure to countenance genius in a

glover's son. The time had come, I felt, to tug at the blinkers of both camps and reconsider the authorship debate: Had anyone ever proposed that the creator of those extraordinary women might be a woman? Each of the male possibilities requires an elaborate theory to explain his use of another's name. None of the candidates has succeeded in dethroning the man from Stratford. Yet a simple reason would explain a playwright's need for a pseudonym in Elizabethan England: being female.

Who was this woman writing "immortal work" in the same year that Shakespeare's name first appeared in print?

Long before Tina Packer marveled at the bard's uncanny insight, others were no less awed by the empathy that pervades the work. "One would think that he had been Metamorphosed from a Man to a Woman," wrote Margaret Cavendish, the 17th-century philosopher and playwright. The critic John Ruskin said, "Shakespeare has no heroes—he has only heroines." A striking number of those heroines refuse to obey rules. At least 10 defy their fathers, bucking betrothals they don't like to find their own paths to love. Eight disguise themselves as men, outwitting patriarchal controls—more gender-swapping than can be found in the work of any previous English playwright. Six lead armies.

The prevailing view, however, has been that no women in Renaissance England wrote for the theater, because that was against the rules. Religious verse and translation were deemed suitable female literary pursuits; "closet dramas," meant only for private reading, were acceptable. The stage was off-limits. Yet scholars have lately established that women were involved in the business of acting companies as patrons, shareholders, suppliers of costumes, and gatherers of entrance fees. What's more, 80 percent of the plays printed in the 1580s were written anonymously, and that number didn't fall below 50 percent until the early 1600s. At least one eminent Shakespeare scholar, Phyllis Rackin, of the University of Pennsylvania, challenges the blanket assumption that the commercial drama pouring forth in the period bore no trace of a female hand. So did Virginia Woolf, even as she sighed over the obstacles that would have confronted a female Shakespeare: "Undoubtedly, I thought, looking at the shelf where there are no plays by women, her work would have gone unsigned."

A tantalizing nudge lies buried in the writings of Gabriel Harvey, a well-known Elizabethan literary critic. In 1593, he referred cryptically to an "excellent Gentlewoman" who had written three sonnets and a comedy. "I dare not Particularise her Description," he wrote, even as he heaped praise on her.

All her conceits are illuminate with the light of Reason; all her speeches beautified with the grace of Affability ... In her mind there appeareth a certain heavenly Logic; in her tongue & pen a divine Rhetoric ... I dare undertake with warrant, whatsoever she writeth must needs remain an immortal work, and will leave, in the activest world, an eternal memory of the silliest vermin that she should vouchsafe to grace with her beautiful and allective style, as ingenious as elegant.

Who was this woman writing "immortal work" in the same year that Shakespeare's name first appeared in print, on the poem "Venus and Adonis," a scandalous parody of masculine seduction tales (in which the woman forces herself on the man)? Harvey's tribute is extraordinary, yet orthodox Shakespeareans and anti-Stratfordians alike have almost entirely ignored it.

Until recently, that is, when a few bold outliers began to advance the case that Shakespeare might well have been a woman. One candidate is Mary Sidney, the countess of Pembroke (and beloved sister of the celebrated poet Philip Sidney)—one of the most educated women of her time, a translator and poet, and the doyenne of the Wilton Circle, a literary salon dedicated to galvanizing an English cultural renaissance. Clues beckon, not least that Sidney and her husband were the patrons of one of the first theater companies to perform Shakespeare's plays. Was Shakespeare's name useful camouflage, allowing her to publish what she otherwise couldn't?

But the candidate who intrigued me more was a woman as exotic and peripheral as Sidney was pedigreed and prominent. Not long after my *Macbeth* outing, I learned that Shakespeare's Globe, in London, had set out to explore this figure's input to the canon. The theater's summer 2018 season concluded with a new play, *Emilia*, about a contemporary of Shakespeare's named Emilia Bassano. Born in London in 1569 to a family of Venetian immigrants—musicians and instrument-makers who may have been Jewish—she was one of the first women in England to publish a volume of poetry (suitably religious yet startlingly feminist,

arguing for women's "Libertie" and against male oppression). Her existence was unearthed in 1973 by the Oxford historian A.L. Rowse, who speculated that she was Shakespeare's mistress, the "dark lady" described in the sonnets. In *Emilia*, the playwright Morgan Lloyd Malcolm goes a step further: Her Shakespeare is a plagiarist who uses Bassano's words for Emilia's famous defense of women in *Othello*.

Could Bassano have contributed even more widely and directly? The idea felt like a feminist fantasy about the past—but then, stories about women's lost and obscured achievements so often have a dreamlike quality, unveiling a history different from the one we've learned. Was I getting carried away, reinventing Shakespeare in the image of our age? Or was I seeing past gendered assumptions to the woman who—like Shakespeare's heroines—had fashioned herself a clever disguise? Perhaps the time was finally ripe for us to see her.

THE RANKS OF Shakespeare skeptics comprise a kind of literary underworld—a cross-disciplinary array of academics, actors (Derek Jacobi and Mark Rylance are perhaps the best known), writers, teachers, lawyers, a few Supreme Court justices (Sandra Day O'Connor, Antonin Scalia, John Paul Stevens). Look further back and you'll find such illustrious names as Ralph Waldo Emerson, Walt Whitman, Mark Twain, Henry James, Sigmund Freud, Helen Keller, and Charlie Chaplin. Their ideas about the authorship of the plays and poems differ, but they concur that Shakespeare is not the man who wrote them.

Their doubt is rooted in an empirical conundrum. Shakespeare's life is remarkably well documented, by the standards of the period—yet no records from his lifetime identify him unequivocally as a writer. The more than 70 documents that exist show him as an actor, a shareholder in a theater company, a moneylender, and a property investor. They show that he dodged taxes, was fined for hoarding grain during a shortage, pursued petty lawsuits, and was subject to a restraining order. The profile is remarkably coherent, adding up to a mercenary impresario of the Renaissance entertainment industry. What's missing is any sign that he wrote.

No such void exists for other major writers of the period, as a meticulous scholar named Diana Price has demonstrated. Many left fewer documents than Shakespeare did, but among them are manuscripts, letters, and payment records proving that writing was their profession. For example, court records show payment to Ben Jonson for "those services of his wit & pen." Desperate to come up with comparable material to round out Shakespeare, scholars in the 18th and 19th centuries forged evidence—later debunked—of a writerly life.

To be sure, Shakespeare's name can be found linked, during his lifetime, to written works. With *Love's Labour's Lost*, in 1598, it started appearing on the title pages of one-play editions called "quartos." (Several of the plays attributed to Shakespeare were first published anonymously.) Commentators at the time saluted him by name, praising "Shakespeare's fine filed phrase" and "honey-tongued Shakespeare." But such evidence proves attribution, not actual authorship—as even some orthodox Shakespeare scholars grant. "I would love to find a contemporary document that said William Shakespeare was the dramatist of Stratford-upon-Avon written during his lifetime," Stanley Wells, a professor emeritus at the University of Birmingham's Shakespeare Institute, has said. "That would shut the buggers up!"

By contrast, more than a few of Shakespeare's contemporaries are on record suggesting that his name got affixed to work that wasn't his. In 1591, the dramatist Robert Greene wrote of the practice of "underhand brokery"—of poets who "get some other Batillus to set his name to their verses." (Batillus was a mediocre Roman poet who claimed some of Virgil's verses as his own.) The following year, he warned fellow playwrights about an "upstart Crow, beautified with our feathers," who thinks he is the "onely Shake-scene in a country." Most scholars agree that the "Crow" is Shakespeare, then an actor in his late 20s, and conclude that the new-hatched playwright was starting to irk established figures. Anti-Stratfordians see something else: In Aesop's fables, the crow was a proud strutter who stole the feathers of others; Horace's crow, in his epistles, was a plagiarist. Shakespeare was being attacked, they say, not as a budding dramatist, but as a paymaster taking credit for others' work. "Seeke you better Maisters," Greene advised, urging his colleagues to cease writing for the Crow.

Ben Jonson, among others, got in his digs, too. Scholars agree that the character of Sogliardo in *Every Man Out of His Humour*—a country bumpkin “without brain, wit, anything, indeed, ramping to gentility”—is a parody of Shakespeare, a social climber whose pursuit of a coat of arms was common lore among his circle of actors. In a satirical poem called “On Poet-Ape,” Jonson was likely taking aim at Shakespeare the theater-world wheeler-dealer. This poet-ape, Jonson wrote, “from brokage is become so bold a thief,” At first he made low shifts, would pick and glean,
Buy the reversion of old plays; now grown
To a little wealth, and credit in the scene,
He takes up all, makes each man’s wit his own

What to make of the fact that Jonson changed his tune in the prefatory material that he contributed to the First Folio of plays when it appeared seven years after Shakespeare’s death? Jonson’s praise there did more than attribute the work to Shakespeare. It declared his art unmatched: “He was not of an age, but for all time!” The anti-Stratfordian response is to note the shameless hype at the heart of the Folio project. “Whatever you do, Buy,” the compilers urged in their dedication, intent on a hard sell for a dramatist who, doubters emphasize, was curiously unsung at his death. The Folio’s introductory effusions, they argue, contain double meanings. Jonson tells readers, for example, to find Shakespeare not in his portrait “but his Booke,” seeming to undercut the relation between the man and the work. And near the start of his over-the-top tribute, Jonson riffs on the unreliability of extravagant praise, “which doth ne’er advance / The truth.”

The authorship puzzles don’t end there. How did the man born in Stratford acquire the wide-ranging knowledge on display in the plays—of the Elizabethan court, as well as of multiple languages, the law, astronomy, music, the military, and foreign lands, especially northern Italian cities? The author’s linguistic brilliance shines in words and sayings imported from foreign vocabularies, but Shakespeare wasn’t educated past the age of 13. Perhaps he traveled, joined the army, worked as a tutor, or all three, scholars have proposed. Yet no proof exists of any of those experiences, despite, as the Oxford historian Hugh Trevor-Roper pointed out in an essay “the greatest battery of organized research that has ever been directed upon a single person.”

Emilia Bassano’s life encompassed the breadth of the Shakespeare canon: its low-class references and knowledge of the court; its Italian sources and Jewish allusions; its music and feminism.

In fact, a document that does exist—Shakespeare’s will—would seem to undercut such hypotheses. A wealthy man when he retired to Stratford, he was meticulous about bequeathing his properties and possessions (his silver, his second-best bed). Yet he left behind not a single book, though the plays draw on hundreds of texts, including some—in Italian and French—that hadn’t yet been translated into English. Nor did he leave any musical instruments, though the plays use at least 300 musical terms and refer to 26 instruments. He remembered three actor-owners in his company, but no one in the literary profession. Strangest of all, he made no mention of manuscripts or writing. Perhaps as startling as the gaps in his will, Shakespeare appears to have neglected his daughters’ education—an incongruity, given the erudition of so many of the playwright’s female characters. One signed with her mark, the other with a signature a scholar has called “painfully formed.”

“Weak and unconvincing” was Trevor-Roper’s verdict on the case for Shakespeare. My delving left me in agreement, not that the briefs for the male alternatives struck me as compelling either. Steeped in the plays, I felt their author would surely join me in bridling at the Stratfordians’ unquestioning worship at the shrine—their arrogant dismissal of skeptics as mere deluded “buggers,” or worse. (“Is there any more fanatic zealot than the priest-like defender of a challenged creed?” asked Richmond Crinkley, a former director of programs at the Folger Shakespeare Library who was nonetheless sympathetic to the anti-Stratfordian view.) To appreciate how belief blossoms into fact—how readily myths about someone get disseminated as truth—one can’t do better than to read Shakespeare. Just think of how obsessed the work is with mistaken identities, concealed women, forged and anonymous documents—with the error of trusting in outward appearances. What if searchers for the real Shakespeare simply haven’t set their sights on the right pool of candidates?

I MET EMILIA BASSANO'S most ardent champion at Alice's Tea Cup, which seemed unexpectedly apt: A teahouse on Manhattan's Upper West Side, it has quotes from *Alice in Wonderland* scrawled across the walls. ("OFF WITH THEIR HEADS!") John Hudson, an Englishman in his 60s who pursued a degree at the Shakespeare Institute in a mid-career swerve, had been on the Bassano case for years, he told me. In 2014, he published *Shakespeare's Dark Lady: Amelia Bassano Lanier, the Woman Behind Shakespeare's Plays?* His zeal can sometimes get the better of him, yet he emphasizes that his methods and findings are laid out "for anyone . . . to refute if they wish." Like Alice's rabbit hole, Bassano's case opened up new and richly disorienting perspectives—on the plays, on the ways we think about genius and gender, and on a fascinating life.

Hudson first learned of Bassano from A. L. Rowse, who discovered mention of her in the notebooks of an Elizabethan physician and astrologer named Simon Forman. In her teens, she became the mistress of Henry Carey, Lord Hunsdon, the master of court entertainment and patron of Shakespeare's acting company. And that is only the start. Whether or not Bassano was Shakespeare's lover (scholars now dismiss Rowse's claim), the discernible contours of her biography supply what the available material about Shakespeare's life doesn't: circumstantial evidence of opportunities to acquire an impressive expanse of knowledge.

Bassano lived, Hudson points out, "an existence on the boundaries of many different social worlds," encompassing the breadth of the Shakespeare canon: its coarse, low-class references and its intimate knowledge of the court; its Italian sources and its Jewish allusions; its music and its feminism. And her imprint, as Hudson reads the plays, extends over a long period. He notes the many uses of her name, citing several early on—for instance, an Emilia in *The Comedy of Errors*. (Emilia, the most common female name in the plays alongside Katherine, wasn't used in the 16th century by any other English playwright in an original work.) *Titus Andronicus* features a character named Bassianus, which was the original Roman name of Bassano del Grappa, her family's hometown before their move to Venice. Later, in *The Merchant of Venice*, the romantic hero is a Venetian named Bassanio, an indication that the author perhaps knew of the Bassanos' connection to Venice. (*Bassanio* is a spelling of their name in some records.)

Further on, in *Othello*, another Emilia appears—Iago's wife. Her famous speech against abusive husbands, Hudson notes, doesn't show up until 1623, in the First Folio, included among lines that hadn't appeared in an earlier version (lines that Stratfordians assume—without any proof—were written before Shakespeare's death). Bassano was still alive, and by then had known her share of hardship at the hands of men. More to the point, she had already spoken out, in her 1611 book of poetry, against men who "do like vipers deface the wombs wherein they were bred."

Prodded by Hudson, you can discern traces of Bassano's own life trajectory in particular works across the canon. In *All's Well That Ends Well*, a lowborn girl lives with a dowager countess and a general named Bertram. When Bassano's father, Baptista, died in 1576, Emilia, then 7, was taken in by Susan Bertie, the dowager countess of Kent. The countess's brother, Peregrine Bertie, was—like the fictional Bertram—a celebrated general. In the play, the countess tells how a father "famous . . . in his profession" left "his sole child . . . bequeathed to my overlooking. I have those hopes of her good that her education promises." Bassano received a remarkable humanist education with the countess. In her book of poetry, she praised her guardian as "the Mistris of my youth, / The noble guide of my ungovern'd dayes."

Bassano's life sheds possible light on the plays' preoccupation with women caught in forced or loveless marriages.

As for the celebrated general, Hudson seizes on the possibility that Bassano's ears, and perhaps eyes, were opened by Peregrine Bertie as well. In 1582, Bertie was named ambassador to Denmark by the queen and sent to the court at Elsinore—the setting of *Hamlet*. Records show that the trip included state dinners with Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, whose names appear in the play. Because emissaries from the same two families later visited the English court, the trip isn't decisive, but another encounter is telling: Bertie met with the Danish astronomer Tycho Brahe, whose astronomical theories influenced the play. Was Bassano (then just entering her teens) on the trip? Bertie was accompanied by a "whole traine," but only the names of important gentlemen are recorded. In any case, Hudson argues, she would have heard tales on his return.

Later, as the mistress of Henry Carey (43 years her senior), Bassano gained access to more than the theater world. Carey, the queen's cousin, held various legal and military positions. Bassano was "favoured much of

her Majesty and of many noblemen,” the physician Forman noted, indicating the kind of extensive aristocratic associations that only vague guesswork can accord to Shakespeare. His company didn’t perform at court until Christmas of 1594, after several of the plays informed by courtly life had already been written. Shakespeare’s history plays, concerned as they are with the interactions of the governing class, presume an insider perspective on aristocratic life. Yet mere court performances wouldn’t have enabled such familiarity, and no trace exists of Shakespeare’s presence in any upper-class household. And then, in late 1592, Bassano (now 23) was expelled from court. She was pregnant. Carey gave her money and jewels and, for appearance’s sake, married her off to Alphonso Lanier, a court musician. A few months later, she had a son. Despite the glittering dowry, Lanier must not have been pleased. “Her husband hath dealt hardly with her,” Forman wrote, “and spent and consumed her goods.”

Bassano was later employed in a noble household, probably as a music tutor, and roughly a decade after that opened a school. Whether she accompanied her male relatives—whose consort of recorder players at the English court lasted 90 years—on their trips back to northern Italy isn’t known. But the family link to the home country offers support for the fine-grained familiarity with the region that (along with in-depth musical knowledge) any plausible candidate for authorship would seem to need—just what scholars have had to strain to establish for Shakespeare. (Perhaps, theories go, he chatted with travelers or consulted books.) In *Othello*, for example, Iago gives a speech that precisely describes a fresco in Bassano del Grappa—also the location of a shop owned by Giovanni Otello, a likely source of the title character’s name.

Her Bassano lineage—some scholars suggest the family were conversos, converted or hidden Jews presenting as Christians—could also help account for the Jewish references that scholars of the plays have noted.** The plea in *The Merchant of Venice* for the equality and humanity of Jews, a radical departure from typical anti-Semitic portrayals of the period, is well known. “Hath not a Jew hands, organs, dimensions, senses, affections, passions?” Shylock asks. “If you prick us, do we not bleed?” *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* draws from a passage in the Talmud about marriage vows; spoken Hebrew is mixed into the nonsense language of *All’s Well That Ends Well*.

What’s more, the Bassano family’s background suggests a source close to home for the particular interest in dark figures in the sonnets, *Othello*, and elsewhere. A 1584 document about the arrest of two Bassano men records them as “black”—among Elizabethans, the term could apply to anyone darker than the fair-skinned English, including those with a Mediterranean complexion. (The fellows uttered lines that could come straight from a comic interlude in the plays: “We have as good friends in the court as thou hast and better too . . . Send us to ward? Thou wert as good kiss our arse.”) In *Love’s Labour’s Lost*, the noblemen derisively compare Rosaline, the princess’s attendant, to “chimney-sweepers” and “colliers” (coal miners). The king joins in, telling Berowne, who is infatuated with her, “Thy love is black as ebony,” to which the young lord responds, “O wood divine!”

Bassano’s life sheds possible light, too, on another outsider theme: the plays’ preoccupation with women caught in forced or loveless marriages. Hudson sees her misery reflected in the sonnets, thought to have been written from the early 1590s to the early 1600s. “When, in disgrace with fortune and men’s eyes, / I all alone beweep my outcast state, / And trouble deaf heaven with my bootless cries, / And look upon myself and curse my fate,” reads sonnet 29 (When Maya Angelou first encountered the poem as a child, she thought Shakespeare must have been a black girl who had been sexually abused: “How else could he know what I know?”) For Shakespeare, those years brought a rise in status: In 1596, he was granted a coat of arms, and by 1597, he was rich enough to buy the second-largest house in Stratford.

In what is considered an early or muddled version of *The Taming of the Shrew*, a man named Alphonso (as was Bassano’s husband) tries to marry off his three daughters, Emilia, Kate, and Philema. Emilia drops out in the later version, and the father is now called Baptista (the name of Bassano’s father). As a portrait of a husband dealing “hardly” with a wife, the play is horrifying. Yet Kate’s speech of submission, with its allusions to the Letters of Paul, is slippery: Even as she exaggeratedly parrots the Christian doctrine of womanly subjection, she is anything but dutifully silent.

Shakespeare's women repeatedly subvert such teachings, perhaps most radically in *The Winter's Tale*, another drama of male cruelty. There the noblewoman Paulina, scorned by King Leontes as "a most intelligencing bawd" with a "boundless tongue," bears fierce witness against him (no man dares to) when he wrongly accuses Queen Hermione of adultery and imprisons her. As in so many of the comedies, a more enlightened society emerges in the end because the women's values triumph.

I was stunned to realize that the year *The Winter's Tale* was likely completed, 1611, was the same year Bassano published her book of poetry, *Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum*. Her writing style bears no obvious resemblance to Shakespeare's in his plays, though Hudson strains to suggest similarities. The overlap lies in the feminist content. Bassano's poetry registers as more than conventional religious verse designed to win patronage (she dedicates it to nine women, Mary Sidney included, fashioning a female literary community). Scholars have observed that it reads as a "transgressive" defense of Eve and womankind. Like a cross-dressing Shakespearean heroine, Bassano refuses to play by the rules, heretically reinterpreting scripture. "If Eve did err, it was for knowledge sake," she writes. Arguing that the crucifixion, a crime committed by men, was a greater crime than Eve's, she challenges the basis of men's "tyranny" over women.

"I ALWAYS FEEL SOMETHING ITALIAN, something Jewish about Shakespeare," Jorge Luis Borges told *The Paris Review* in 1966. "Perhaps Englishmen admire him because of that, because it's so unlike them." Borges didn't mention feeling "something female" about the bard, yet that response has never ceased to be part of Shakespeare's allure—embodiment though he is of the patriarchal authority of the Western canon. What would the revelation of a woman's hand at work mean, aside from the loss of a prime tourist attraction in Stratford-upon-Avon? Would the effect be a blow to the cultural patriarchy, or the erosion of the canon's status? Would (male) myths of inexplicable genius take a hit? Would women at last claim their rightful authority as historical and intellectual forces?

I was curious to take the temperature of the combative authorship debate as women edge their way into it. Over more tea, I tested Hudson's room for flexibility. Could the plays' many connections to Bassano be explained by simply assuming the playwright knew her well? "Shakespeare would have had to run to her every few minutes for a musical reference or an Italian pun," he said. I caught up with Mark Rylance, the actor and former artistic director of the Globe, in the midst of rehearsals for *Othello* (whose plot, he noted, comes from an Italian text that didn't exist in English). A latitudinarian doubter—embracing the inquiry, not any single candidate—Rylance has lately observed that the once heretical notion of collaboration between Shakespeare and other writers "is now accepted, pursued and published by leading orthodox scholars. He told me that "Emilia should be studied by anyone interested in the creation of the plays." David Scott Kastan, a well-known Shakespeare scholar at Yale, urged further exploration too, though he wasn't ready to anoint her bard. "What's clear is that it's important to know more about her," he said, and even got playful with pronouns: "The more we know about her and the world she lived in, the more we'll know about Shakespeare, whoever she was

In the fall, I joined the annual meeting of the Shakespeare Authorship Trust—a gathering of skeptics at the Globe—feeling excited that gender would be at the top of the agenda. Some eyebrows were raised even in this company, but enthusiasm ran high. "People have been totally frustrated with authorship debates that go nowhere, but that's because there have been 200 years of bad candidates," one participant from the University of Toronto exclaimed. "They didn't want to see women in this," he reflected. "It's a tragedy of history."

He favored Sidney. Others were eager to learn about Bassano, and with collaboration in mind, I wondered whether the two women had perhaps worked together, or as part of a group. I thought of Bassano's *Salve Deus*, in which she writes that men have wrongly taken credit for knowledge: "Yet Men will boast of Knowledge, which he tooke / From Eve's faire hand, as from a learned Booke."

The night after the meeting, I went to a performance of *Antony and Cleopatra* at the National Theatre. I sat enthralled, still listening for the poet in her words, trying to catch her reflection in some forgotten bit of verse. "Give me my robe, put on my crown," cried the queen, "I have / Immortal longings in me." There she was, kissing her ladies goodbye, raising the serpent to her breast. "I am fire and air."

V. Sonnet by William Shakespeare

Shall I compare thee to a summer's day?
Thou art more lovely and more temperate.
Rough winds do shake the darling buds of May,
And summer's lease hath all too short a date.
Sometime too hot the eye of heaven shines,
And often is his gold complexion dimmed;
And every fair from fair sometime declines,
By chance, or nature's changing course, untrimmed;
But thy eternal summer shall not fade,
Nor lose possession of that fair thou ow'st,
Nor shall death brag thou wand'rest in his shade,
When in eternal lines to Time thou grow'st.
So long as men can breathe, or eyes can see,
So long lives this, and this gives life to thee.

VI. Sonnet by Earl of Oxford

LOVE THY CHOICE.

Who taught thee first to sigh, alas, my heart ?
Who taught thy tongue the woeful words of plaint ?
Who filled your eyes with tears of bitter smart ?
Who gave thee grief and made thy joys to faint ?
Who first did paint with colours pale thy face ?
Who first did break thy sleeps of quiet rest ?
Above the rest in court who gave thee grace ?
Who made thee strive in honour to be best ?
In constant truth to bide so firm and sure,
To scorn the world regarding but thy friends ?
With patient mind each passion to endure,
In one desire to settle to the end ?
Love then thy choice wherein such choice thou bind,
As nought but death may ever change thy mind.

Earle of Oxenforde.

Questions on the next page

Questions

Directions: Write or type the answers to the following questions on a separate piece of paper.

1. Source #1 identifies several reasons why the historical personage William Shakespeare might not have been the author of the plays and sonnets ascribed to him. One of these reasons is below:

“Some say that the Stratford grammar school would have provided all the formal education Mr. Shakspere would have needed to launch him on a trajectory consistent with the author's literary output. We disagree. The works show extensive knowledge of law, philosophy, classical literature, ancient and modern history, mathematics, astronomy, art, music, medicine, horticulture, heraldry, military and naval terminology and tactics; etiquette and manners of the nobility; English, French and Italian court life; Italy; and aristocratic pastimes such as falconry, equestrian sports and royal tennis. Nothing that we know about Mr. Shakspere accounts for this.”

Identify another source that makes this point and explain **two** ways that source supports the claim.

2. According to what you have learned from your review of the sources, what do you consider the three most compelling arguments that suggest William Shakespeare did not author his own works? Provide **three** arguments from at least two sources.

3. Using information from two different sources, provide two pieces of evidence that support the claim that Shakespeare did author his own works.