

# A Summary of the Shakespeare Problems

When William Shakespeare passes away on 23 April 1616, it is without any public notice. He disappears without anyone seeming to care about it, while the much younger dramatist Francis Beaumont, who passes away the same year, enjoys remarkable honours and is buried in Westminster Abbey, bewailed by the whole nation. After six years, Shakespeare's grave in Stratford is marked by some awkward monuments: a stupid bust which probably portrayed someone else, with some poor dilettantic lines and an epitaph which more resembles a rebus with double messages than anything natural and relevant. Ben Jonson is suspected of being the author of it, as he also completely dominates the preface to the first edition of the complete works of Shakespeare, which appear in 1623, seven years after his death. Before that, Ben Jonson himself has published his complete works, so it is understandable that he might have thought that the Shakespeare dramas also should have been published. The extolling poems of the preface know no bounds in their flattery of the poet, who thereby for the first time is made a personality cult.

There is no doubt that William Shakespeare meant a lot to the theatre life of London as actor and businessman in the theatre world, while the works raise many questions. The volume swarms with editorial mistakes although the editors had seven years to prepare it. The pagination is faulty, in some plays the characters are confused with each other, many text details remain inexplicable as they probably have been misinterpreted, and the editorial work is generally marked by some want of order. In the second edition some efforts have been made to remedy this by introducing seven new 'Shakespeare' plays, of which only *Pericles* was kept for further editions. The problem remains that several different editions of the plays existed to be considered, among which for instance the different versions of *Hamlet* and *Othello* contradict and complement each other, since none of them is complete in itself. In brief, 'Shakespeare' is a perfect mess from the beginning.

His first biography is by John Aubrey after about seventy years, which mostly consists of loose rumours. John Aubrey's gossip tales are notorious for their utter unreliability, in which for instance it is related how Ben Jonson murdered Christopher Marlowe, while in fact the fellow that Jonson killed was a totally different actor. Francis Bacon is here characterized for the first time as a queer with paedophilic, or at least homosexual, tendencies, and no one has ever been able to take John Aubrey's fragmental gossip tales more than 10% seriously.

The great giants of literature of the latter half of the 18th century who showed Shakespeare some interest, first of all Doctor Johnson, were nonplussed by the fact that there was no first hand clear and ready evidence confirming Shakespeare's authorship. Finally they established Robert Greene's versed

assaults on his colleagues, where a certain 'Shake-Scene' is abused, as the first clear 'evidence' of Shakespeare's authorship. There is actually no evidence at all that these lines are about William Shakespeare, but it's just a straw in the stream as a theoretic possibility that Doctor Johnson has found to cling to in the total absence of anything else.

During the 18th century Shakespeare and his plays remain practically unknown outside England. Voltaire knows about them but despises them for their coarseness. Not until the German romantics of the *Sturm und Drang* epoch headed by Goethe, does Europe discover him, and it's not until the great romantic era of the 1820s that Shakespeare is established internationally as a universal dramatist. By then the first doubts concerning his authorship have already appeared.

The Reverend James Wilmot, deceased in 1808, ransacked all Warwickshire searching for any trace of Shakespeare's literary activity, like anecdotes, letters, documents and other mementos, without finding anything at all, and he was the first to arrive at the conclusion that Shakespeare really must have been the protective name for Francis Bacon, whose education, experience and knowledgeablebness better corresponded with the authorship than the uneducated fortune hunter from Stratford, who never obtained any higher education and never, apparently, went abroad, while the authorship so clearly indicates experience collected from at least the Cambridge university, Italy, and France.

The key play in this context in the Shakespeare production is the early *Love's Labour's Lost*, which displays intimate knowledge of what went on at the court of Navarre at the time of the youth of Henri IV before he became king of France – all the characters of the play existed in real life and only in Navarre. Except Francis Bacon, who was there at an early stage. Also the son-in-law of his cousin the earl of Oxford, William Stanley, might have remained there for some time during his grand tour of Europe at the beginning of the 1580s. One of the more odd characters of the play, Holofernes, is in fact a caricature of William Stanley's tutor Richard Lloyd, who accompanied his noble pupil on his journeys as an undesirable chaperon, and who actually wrote the morality which is parodied in the play. In the company of Stanley is also mentioned a certain 'Christoffer Marron', who really could have been Christopher Marlowe, which is one of the forms in which Marlowe's name is written. He was at this time at Cambridge, from which he was frequently absent during longer periods, since he was engaged as an agent in the intelligence service of Sir Francis Walsingham.

In France he most probably also later appeared as the agent 'Le Doux' around Bordeaux together with Anthony Bacon, Francis Bacon's elder brother, who after Sir Francis Walsingham's death in 1590 partly took over the charge of Walsingham's intelligence. Walsingham's younger cousin Thomas Walsingham was Marlowe's sponsor and protector. Anthony Bacon almost got into trouble in France by the complications of homosexual relationships but was saved from prosecution by Henri IV of Navarre. As 'Le Doux', Marlowe

also appears later in England during the 1590s with a list of his library, which corresponds perfectly with the sources of most of the Shakespeare works.

The father of Ferdinando and William Stanley is the fourth Earl of Derby, one of the most wealthy and powerful men of England and a Catholic, but implicitly loyal to the Queen. The eldest son Ferdinando is the producer of Marlowe's plays. After the death of the father he becomes the fifth Earl of Derby but dies in April 1594, probably by poisoning through the intrigues of embittered Catholics, since Ferdinando refused to be their candidate for the throne. He (and his brother William) were as close as cousins to the Queen as James VI of Scotland, later James I of the United Kingdom. The brothers also had a cousin, another William Stanley, who had taken his Catholicism seriously and become a traitor living in exile in Spain. After his brother Ferdinando's violent death, in view of his cousin's treachery and as cousin of the Queen, William Stanley, the sixth Earl of Derby, had every reason to keep a very low profile. After his brother's death he was probably the one who continued to keep up the foremost theatre company of England, the Lord Chamberlain's Men, which was reorganized and reformed after the strange disappearance of Marlowe.

How this probably was arranged for his escape from the English inquisition, which was pursuing him for his free-thinking ('atheism', the worst and most criminal abomination you could apply yourself to in England at that time, the most subversive of all activities) has been treated and exposed in various articles.

The Shakespeare authorship is obviously a direct continuation of Marlowe's. In a series of seven dramatic theatre experiments, of which by the first one, *Tamburlaine*, he creates and establishes the English verse drama, he gradually develops the English drama into the form which subsequently and invariably becomes the Shakespeare standard. It's not likely that Shakespeare could master this form directly without preparatory work in such an accomplished professionalism which is already evident in the first Shakespeare dramas, especially not in view of his non-existent education and lack of experience of Cambridge, France, or Italy.

It is more likely that Marlowe went underground as a consequence of the political and religious harassment he was subjected to by authorities and Puritans. The powerful Puritans hated the theatre and persecuted it relentlessly from the beginning to the bitter end, and Marlowe had even been commissioned to make a theological career — that's why he was sent to Cambridge on scholarship, although he was only a shoemaker's son. He was involved in the inner conflicts of the Anglican Church, in the free-thinking circles that were launched by Giordano Bruno's visit in England in the 1580s to his friend Philip Sidney, (another key figure to English poetry, who creates the Shakespearean Sonnet, with friends around him like Walter Raleigh, Francis Bacon, Thomas Harriott the astronomer, Henry Wriothesley and others), and he was deep in British intelligence, to which from the start he had rendered vital service, according to their own written testimony. He consequently had every reason to get off all public life to avoid further trouble

and be able to continue working in peace with his poetry and secret service abroad to the nation, to Burghley and the Bacons. He was also involved in the Huguenot emigrant circles of refugees from France in Canterbury, his home town, in which circles also William Parr, the Queen's special favourite, younger brother of her last stepmother Catherine Parr, was deeply engaged.

After Anthony Bacon's retreat from France and decease, after the Essex crisis at the end of the Queen's reign, Francis Bacon is in all probability the one who takes over his brother's contacts and international network, which also includes continued co-operation with Christopher Marlowe ('Le Doux', but there are also other code names). At the same time Francis Bacon has to tend the businesses of his reckless cousin the Earl of Oxford (another key figure to the English dramatic art, and obviously portrayed in several of the Shakespeare plays), whose son-in-law was William Stanley. His affairs also were tended by Francis Bacon, who in addition was also deeply engaged in the theatre. We see here clearly a close inter-relationship and co-operation network concerning the theatre and other important business interests between Oxford, his cousins Anthony and Francis Bacon, his son-in-law William Stanley (with the elder brother Ferdinando, Marlowe's producer,) the families Walsingham and Sidney (related to the Oxford and Bacon clans by marriage) and Christopher Marlowe, the most extreme free-thinker of them all by his revolutionary atheism and dynamic dramatic art, with the creation of the English verse drama as his foremost contribution.

Many details in this web of coincidences we must let be and pass over here, but the Sonnets also play an important part in the mystery. Their predominantly homosensual contents, and the mass of concrete details which these 154 sonnets published in Shakespeare's name present, have nothing at all in common with the life of William Shakespeare. He was a family man from the country with three children and a wife, whom he faithfully returned to after having fulfilled his career in London. He had married her at only 18 years old as she then already was pregnant. The Sonnets are more fitting to the personality of Oxford but most of all to Marlowe. They are marked by a mysterious dedication to a certain 'Mr. W.H.' who has never been identified. It could neither have been Henry Wriothesly nor William Herbert, since they were nobles and could not be given the title of 'Mr'. (William Herbert was the son of Mary Sidney, sister to Sir Philip Sidney, who played such an important but unidentified part in the appearance of the Shakespeare poetry. The first edition of the Shakespeare works were dedicated to William Herbert and his brother, unknown by whom.

Another enigmatical figure in the shadows of this context is a never-identified confidence or publishing man called William Hall, a key figure in the distribution of plays, whose name occurs in the company of Oxford and Anthony Munday, Oxford's secretary, in whose hand we have the apocryphal 'Shakespeare' play *Sir Thomas More*, which shows evidence of the Shakespeare dramatic art – the play was suppressed as politically risky. In vain, efforts have been made to identify this evasive shadow, whom you never can get rid of in the Shakespeare research muddle, since he palpably pops up

in the background of every kind of activity in those days, for instance Raleigh's interests in the New World. But William Hall, which is as common a name as John Webster, might also have been another alias and protective name for Christopher Marlowe (who after 30<sup>th</sup> May 1593 and his official disappearance never more could use his name in public as a living man); and that the publisher Thomas Thorpe, who also published Marlowe's unfinished epic poem *Hero & Leander*, quite simply would have dedicated the Sonnets to their own author, 'mr. W.H.', which theory seems the most likely. Nothing in the Sonnets fits into William Shakespeare. Everything would fit perfectly into Christopher Marlowe.

Another important fact to constantly bear in mind is that the theatre industry in Queen Elizabeth's time was an unsurveyable community. The plays and the theatres were owned in common by the actors; and only as exceptions singular personal interests rise in the business, like William Shakespeare, who was an accomplished capitalist, whom the eight-year-younger Ben Jonson had his career to thank for. Not until Ben Jonson's preface to the first Shakespeare edition seven years after his older colleague's demise, a personality cult is introduced into the scenery. Neither Oxford, the Stanley brothers, the Bacon brothers, any Walsingham or any Sidney, Marlowe, nor even William Shakspere himself, had ever showed any inclination for anything such. It's the falseness of that personality cult which the Shakespeare issue suffers from still today as a most disturbing and confusing encumbrance, almost like a falsification of history aimed at darkening it.

So the Shakespeare authorship should be seen as a kind of collective work, even if Marlowe probably wrote most of it himself. Almost all the Shakespeare plays are more or less corrupt through eager treatment by actors and copyists, and the play which is regarded as best preserved and closest to the original is *Richard II*. Also Marlowe's plays are available in truncated and different versions, especially *Doctor Faustus* (his most famous, the prototype for Goethe's version,) and *The Massacre at Paris*. The most mishandled by careless treatment of the plays could be *King Lear*, which was probably the greatest tragedy of them all.

Nevertheless, all the Shakespeare plays remain unsurpassed in composition and in their dramatic and language quality. No Goethe, Schiller, Victor Hugo, Strindberg, or Ibsen arrived even close to their quality in beauty and richness of human versatility.

There are however a number of other probable 'pseudo-Shakespeare' plays, that should be included in the same top category, for instance *Arden of Faversham*, *The Spanish Tragedy*, *A Yorkshire Tragedy*, *Edward III*, *Sir Thomas More*, *The White Devil*, *The Duchess of Malfi*, and *Appius & Virginia*, just to mention a few that definitely must have had the same collective origin from the same workshop as Shakespeare.

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