
Who Is William Shakespeare For Real?

William Shakespeare is one of the most famous playwrights of all time. His tragedies and poems are still read and analyzed today by many scholars and students, but what if William Shakespeare wasn't the one to write these great works of literature? It was not William Shakespeare that wrote these works, but another scholar or playwright.

The most popular candidate is the Oxfordian Edward De Vere, 17th Earl of Oxford. Edward De Vere became an earl as a young man in 1562 and lived in Oxford for eight years as royalty. As he grew, he did many studies at many colleges such as Cambridge and Queen's College. He was a lyric poet and theatre patron which made him a good candidate for the identity of William Shakespeare. (The Editors of Encyclopedia Britannica) He commissioned many books and translations of some books. He donated to theatre troupes and even leased a theatre to one of the troupes. Vere was a known secret writer who never published under his name. He was said to be a great writer of comedy, but no comedies were written under his name. Vere could have used Shakespeare as a pseudonym to avoid being found out as a lowly playwright. As stated by the Oxford Fellowship, "[I]t was considered beneath their [nobility] dignity to publish poetry, which was deemed frivolous, or plays for the public theatres, which were scandalous places where thievery, prostitution, and gambling occurred." (Regnier) Pseudonyms were common during Vere's time and it wouldn't be outlandish if Vere also used one when writing. The name Shakespeare could have come from two sources for Vere. One would come from Gabriel Harvey, who said, "Vultus tela vibrat," which from Latin translates to "Thy Countenance Shakes Spears." (Regnier) The second source could be from Greek mythology itself. Athena, the goddess of poetry, is often shown with a spear and known as a spear shaker.

There are many references to Vere in Shakespeare's works as if they are clues to his real identity. Polonius in Hamlet has been known to reference and parody William Cecil or Lord Burghley. Vere had a rocky relationship with the Lord who began as his mentor then became his father-in-law. Polonius's advice to Laertes, his son, in Hamlet is very similar to the household rules of Lord Burghley, which was not made public until after Hamlet was published. Both Polonius and Lord Burghley sent spies to watch their sons when they are away as well as their motto is very similar. According to Oxford Fellowship, "Burghley's motto was "Cor unum, via una" ("One heart, one way"). In the First Quarto of Hamlet, the Polonius character is named "Corambis," ("double-hearted"), a parody of Burghley's motto." (Regnier) This shows another connection to Vere's father-in-law. Lord Burghley supported "fish days" which is why Polonius is called a fishmonger as an insult by Hamlet. Hamlet was also published after Burghley's death because Vere didn't want to provoke his father-in-law. Another reference is to Sir Philip Sidney and Vere's quarrel and rivalry. Sidney and Vere both wanted the hand of Burghley's daughter and they also disagreed on politics and literature. In Hamlet, Polonius mentions young men "falling out at tennis" which references Sidney and Vere's fight at a tennis match. Sidney didn't let Vere join in his tennis match which ignited an agreement. Other references to Sidney are Sir Andrew Aguecheek in Twelfth Night, Slender in Merry Wives, and the Dauphin in Henry V. Dauphin takes a shot at Sidney, who wrote a sonnet to a horse, by saying his mistress is a horse. (Regnier) These references and clues point to Vere being connected to the writings of Shakespeare.

Edward de Vere is not the only person that is suspected to be the author of the works. Francis Bacon the first Viscount of St Albans is another candidate for the authorship of Shakespeare's works. He was born into a wealthy and educated family and started in law soon moving into politics then retiring. That's when Bacon moved to science and developing his scientific method. Bacon was as good of a literary writer and philosopher as he was a scientist. His philosophy is very present in Shakespearian writings. Bacon believed As written by The Francis Bacon Society, "Francis Bacon was known to his circle, i.e. the nobility and certain university intellectuals, as a 'concealed poet'. He also described himself as such." (Shakespeare Authorship Concealed Poet Life and Name Bacon) Much like Vere, Bacon was known to work under a pseudonym much like many other writers of his age. They were also known to take someone else name when writing almost like identity theft to avert suspicion. ("History of the Baconian Shakespeare Authorship Theory.") Thomas Tenison published some of Bacon's literary works saying that Bacon wrote under other names that weren't his own. Thomas Bokenham is one of the reasons there is a case for Bacon as the author. Found on The Baconian Society, Bokenham wrote, "I believe that Francis Bacon wished to reveal his secrets after some time had passed and that he used a cipher to do this as the only effective way." (Hollenbach) He used his cipher on many of the works and ended up at the monument in Stratford that was made after Shakespeare's death. There he found the rest of his phrase which, as Bokenham wrote, "The words 'Francis Bacon Author' appeared as if by magic." (Hollenbach) This also supported by Bacon's eulogies which all describe Bacon in similar ways that only Shakespeare has been described. Even on the Shakespeare Monument, the description compares Shakespeare to "statesman and judge Nestor, the orator and philosopher Socrates, and the scholar-poet Virgil" which fits Bacon perfectly. (Hollenbach) Bacon is a strong candidate for Shakespeare's works with his strong mind and secret literary writings.

Lastly, Why William Shakespeare couldn't write his works? William Shakespeare did not leave anything to his family in his will. He left no manuscripts, books, or anything to note that he had any interest in the arts or writing. Any surviving books or documents to connect Shakespeare to any of his works have not come up or have been found. (Sof) The only examples of Shakespeare's writing that we do have are his almost illegible signatures. Knowledgeable and educated people had a very clean and neat handwriting to show their status. Shakespeare did not do this. This is just one example to show that William was not educated enough to know to write what commentary there is in the works. The Oxford Fellowship states about Shakespeare, "Conversely, the many documents which do exist relating to Shakespeare of Stratford fail to indicate that he was even literate. They depict the life of someone who was energetically engaged in business matters and moneylending, but does not refer to any literary career." (Sof) There is little evidence to show Shakespeare even wrote literally or even had an interest to. They also write, "The author of Shakespeare's works had to be familiar with a wide body of knowledge for his time.... The works derive from myriad classical and Renaissance sources, including in French, Italian, Spanish, Latin, and Greek, some not yet translated into English at the time. There is no documentation that Shakespeare of Stratford had access to such information or such very expensive books, and it is difficult to see how he might have." (Sof) William Shakespeare was just not knowledgeable enough to write the works he is created with.

William Shakespeare is one of the most famous playwrights of all time, but he didn't write his works, Edward De Vere or Bacon did. There are many references to Vere in Shakespeare's works as if they are clues to his real identity. Vere enjoyed and wrote many literary works under pseudonyms. Bacon was a great scientist and a great writer who also hid his identity. His involvement in Shakespeare's writing was found through clues and ciphers. Finally,

Shakespeare was not educated enough to write his works.

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