



## Who Wrote Shakespeare?

As the author of [The Marlowe-Shakespeare Connection](#), which took seven years to write, I have been very much involved in the Shakespeare authorship problem for quite a long time. Indeed, I first became aware that there was an authorship problem back in the early 1960s when Calvin Hoffman, author of *The Murder of the Man Who Was Shakespeare*, came to my office at Grosset & Dunlap in New York, in the hope of getting us to publish a paperback edition of his book.



Hoffman's claim was that the actual author of the works attributed to Shakespeare was the great poet-playwright Christopher Marlowe, who was supposedly killed in a barroom brawl in 1593. But Hoffman had read all of Marlowe and all of Shakespeare and had come to the conclusion that they were all written by the same person. But the problem of Marlowe's alleged death made that premise impossible, unless he was able to prove that Marlowe's death was faked, and that he actually survived to continue writing plays in exile.

Hoffman's premise raised many questions. Why was Marlowe's death faked? Who was Shakespeare? And how was this conspiracy kept secret for several hundred years?

At the time of Hoffman's visit, I was editor of The Universal Library, Grosset's quality paperback line, and I was always on the lookout for good recently published or out-of-print books to reprint in paperback at lower retail cost for new audiences. I scoured the backlists of the major publishers and always managed to come up with some very good titles for the line.

But Calvin Hoffman was different. It was unusual for an author to come directly to the office of a publisher and try to convince an editor of the importance of his book. Prior to Hoffman's visit, I had had no idea that there was a problem with Shakespeare's authorship. I assumed, like most college-educated English majors, that the Bard's authorship was well established by incontrovertible documentation. But Hoffman urged me to read the book, and I did.

It was a revelation, and I became an instant Marlovian, completely sold on Hoffman's thesis. The one fact that convinced me that the thesis made sense is that both Marlowe and Shakespeare were born in the same year, 1564, that Marlowe's brilliant career as a writer supposedly ended suddenly at the age of 29, in 1593, and that just as suddenly William Shakespeare's career began in 1593 at the age of 29, with a poetic masterpiece, "Venus and Adonis." That alone convinced me that Hoffman was on to something.

So we published his book in paperback, and I even tried, with Hoffman's assistance, to get a Marlowe-Shakespeare Authorship Society started, but we could not find the millionaire needed to finance it. Another interesting visitor to my office was a conservative attorney, Watson Washburn, who had just created the Reading Reform Foundation. He wanted me to join his National Advisory Council. I asked him what the purpose of the Foundation was, and he said it was to get phonics back in the schools. That surprised me. I was taught to read by phonics, and I wondered how the schools could possibly teach



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anyone to read without it. He advised me to read Rudolf Flesch's best-selling book, *Why Johnny Can't Read*, which I did. It led me to devote a great deal of effort and research into trying to restore proper phonics instruction in American schools.

While at Grosset & Dunlap, I was also able to meet the great libertarian novelist Ayn Rand, who turned me into a free-market conservative. I began to understand the meaning of economic and political freedom and the negative effects our Progressive government schools were having on American freedom.

In 1965, I moved to Boston to work for Robert Welch and The John Birch Society. I spent two years writing commentary for the society's magazine *The Review of the News*, but then went out on my own as a writer. In the next 30 years, I wrote about 10 books, mainly on the history of government education, and became a strong advocate of homeschooling. I developed a simple, easy-to-use phonics reading program so that parents could teach their children to read at home.

In 1999, after a bout with prostate cancer, which was cured by radiation treatment under the direction of a noted prostate specialist, I decided to write a book on the authorship controversy. I thought it would be an easy sell and provide me with retirement income for the coming years. It took seven years of research and reading to complete the manuscript. Unhappily, I could not find a trade publisher interested in the subject. So I tried the university presses. An editor at the University of Virginia Press loved the book, but the two scholars who read the manuscript advised against publishing it. I finally found a publisher who specialized in scholarly books for the library and university markets, McFarland & Co., of Jefferson, North Carolina. And so, *The Marlowe-Shakespeare Connection* was finally published in 2008. It got great reviews on Amazon.

As a result of the book's publication, a blog was created by my good friend Carlo diNota, who teaches at a prestigious prep school in Tampa, Florida. The blog has become a wonderful discussion center for participants around the world on the subject of Marlowe and the authorship controversy.

Questions about Shakespeare's authorship began to be raised in the late 18th century when a clergyman decided to write a biography of the great dramatist, whom he greatly admired. He searched throughout the Stratford region in the hope of finding some documents, including books which the Bard must have owned, to help him write the story. But he came up with nothing. And so, he reluctantly concluded that someone other than Shakespeare was the author of the works attributed to him.

More recently, Diana Price, in her 2001 book, [Shakespeare's Unorthodox Biography](#), examined all of the documents related to Shakespeare and came to the conclusion that he was not a writer. "These documents," wrote Price, "account for his activities as an actor, a theatre shareholder, a businessman, a moneylender, a property holder, a litigant, and a man with a family, but they do not account for his presumed life as a professional writer."

Also, there is nothing in Shakespeare's will, written just before he died in 1616, that makes mention of anything related to a writing career. About this will, Mark Twain wrote: "It named in minute detail every item of property he owned in the world — houses, lands, sword, silver-gilt bowl, and so on — all the way down to his 'second-best bed' and its furniture. It mentioned not a single book. Books were much more precious than swords and silver-gilt bowls and when a departing person owned one he gave it a high place in his will. The will mentioned not a play, not a poem, not an unfinished literary work, not a scrap of manuscript of any kind."

And so, for the last 150 years, the most crucial question has been: If William Shakespeare did not write



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the works attributed to him, who did?

There have been several contenders, including Sir Francis Bacon and Edward de Vere, the 17th Earl of Oxford. But the case for either man has been anything but conclusive. Bacon, a masterful essayist and philosopher, had no reason to hide his authorship, and Oxford was not a professional writer and did not have the genius to write the works of Shakespeare. He also died before many of the plays were written.

After spending seven years researching this controversy, it became obvious to me that the only writer capable of penning the 36 masterpieces in the First Folio was Christopher Marlowe, the literary genius and professional writer, who was not killed in a tavern brawl in May 1593 as reported, but was saved from possible execution by the archbishop's inquisition on charges of atheism and blasphemy by an ingeniously planned faked murder. Marlowe, a member of the Secret Service, was then given a new identity and sent into exile.

Also, in having read all of Marlowe, I found that Marlowe had inserted in the plays and poems published under Shakespeare's name all sorts of clues so that any future literary detective might uncover the truth. For example, Marlowe's father was a cobbler, and he honored his father in two plays, *Julius Caesar* and *Henry V*. But if you didn't know that Marlowe had written the plays you would have missed these fascinating clues. That is why one must read Marlowe before reading Shakespeare.

Equally fascinating are the faked deaths that Marlowe put in the plays: Juliet's in *Romeo and Juliet*; Hermione's in *The Winter's Tale*; Hero's in *Much Ado About Nothing*; and Helena's in *All's Well That Ends Well*. All of these women undergo faked deaths, which remind us of Marlowe's own faked death.

As for the man William Shakespeare, he was used as a very discreet front so that Marlowe's new plays could be performed at the Globe without giving away the secret that he had written them. For that role, Shakespeare was well compensated.

Of course, I had hoped that some movie producer would have used my book as the basis for a screenplay on the subject. Many of my readers have commented that it ought to be made into a movie. So, who knows? Maybe someday it will. In any case, start reading Marlowe now!



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