



Why Edward de Vere Could Not Have Written Shakespeare's Works

Roland Emmerich's new film, *Anonymous*, tries very hard to persuade us that Edward de Vere, the 17th Earl of Oxford, was the actual author of the works attributed to William Shakespeare. However, there are too many facts that make the Oxfordian thesis quite untenable. While I agree with Emmerich that Shakespeare did not write the plays and poems he is supposed to have written, we disagree on the identity of the person who did write the works we all admire. I believe they were written by Christopher Marlowe, the great poet-playwright who preceded Shakespeare. I wrote a book on the subject, *The Marlowe-Shakespeare Connection*.



Marlowe wrote such famous plays as *Tamburlaine I & II*, *Dr. Faustus*, *The Jew of Malta*, *Dido Queen of Carthage*, *The Massacre at Paris*, and *Edward II*. He was considered England's most successful dramatist until his untimely death in 1593, at the age of 29. But I believe that Marlowe did not die in 1593 as reported. He was the subject of a faked death to save him from execution for blasphemy and atheism. Since Marlowe was also a member of the Secret Service, he had the protection of Lord Burghley, his boss and Queen Elizabeth's right-hand man. Burghley considered Marlowe to be a very valuable asset and authorized the plan to save him. Marlowe was then sent into exile where he continued to write plays.

The most serious problem with the Earl of Oxford are the dates. Indeed, Diana Price, commenting on the Oxfordian theory in her book, *Shakespeare's Unorthodox Biography*, wrote:

Ultimately, the Oxfordian attempt to undermine chronology falls apart because they really offer nothing in its place. . . . In fact, Oxfordians offer no chronology at all and the dating of the plays turns out to be an issue in which they prove to be especially, one might say woefully, weak.

First, the Earl was born in 1550, which means that if he started writing the plays and poems at age 18, he would have produced his first work in 1568. No scholar believes that anything in the First Folio, the collection of 36 plays by Shakespeare, was written that far back

Both Marlowe and Shakespeare were born in 1564, and we know that Marlowe started writing while at Cambridge University from 1580 to 1587. He may have even started writing his translations of Ovid and his play, *Dido, Queen of Carthage*, while still at the King's School in Canterbury. In addition, Oxford died in 1604, before many of the great plays are believed to have been written.

In Emmerich's version of history, all of the plays had been written before Oxford's death in 1604 and were given to poet-playwright Ben Jonson for safekeeping with a promise never to divulge the name of the true author. Why didn't Oxford want the world to know that he was this great dramatist? We get



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some kind of muddled rationale, but nothing very convincing. Of course, all of that is pure fiction, a very unscholarly and unprofessional distortion of history that no respectable writer should ever indulge in, especially when writing for an audience in the millions in cinemas around the globe. Facts are facts, even if the events took place over 400 years ago.

Shakespeare, who died in 1616, said nothing about plays or poems in his will. Concerning that will, Mark Twain wrote:

It named in minute detail every item of property he owned in the world—houses, lands, swords, silver-gilt bowl, and so on. It mentioned not a single book. The will mentioned not a play, not a poem, not an unfinished literary work, and not a scrap of manuscript of any kind. 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.

Not even Shakespeare's son-in-law, John Hall, a respected physician and author of a medical book in Latin, knew that his wife's father was a writer of any kind. He and his wife Susanna were the chief beneficiaries of Shakespeare's will.

As for Marlowe, it is probable that he died after 1623 when the First Folio was published. There is good reason to believe that he did some of the editing of the plays chosen to be in the Folio painstakingly gathered by his executor and friend Edward Blount. And of course, he and his co-conspirators had good reason not to put the Marlowe name on the First Folio. He was supposed to be officially dead, and Sir Thomas Walsingham, Burghley's son Robert Cecil, and Ed Blount were very much alive in 1623.

Then there is the problem of de Vere the person. He was not a literary genius by a long shot. Twenty poems that he wrote in his youth are the only examples we have of the man's literary talent. C. S. Lewis said of Oxford's poetry: "Edward de Vere, Earl of Oxford, shows here and there, a faint talent, but is for the most part undistinguished and verbose." So there is no evidence that he had that supreme literary genius that we recognize in the works under the name Shakespeare. He left no indication of any kind that he was capable of writing the 36 plays in the First Folio or that he had the time or inclination to do so.

Oxford was a dilettante who patronized other writers. Also, he left no will, which is odd for a nobleman from such an illustrious family. His last years were lived in illness and seclusion. What is equally peculiar about de Vere is that there is no baptism record which establishes his exact age. An Oxfordian friend of mine believes that de Vere was born of Princess Elizabeth when she was fifteen, in 1548, ten years before she became Queen. The film makes much of this supposition. Which may explain why as Queen she later granted Oxford an annual royal income of 1000 Pounds, worth today about 5 million dollars. Very odd because Elizabeth was known to be a tightwad when it came to money. But, even if de Vere was her illegitimate son, what has that got to do with the authorship question?

I think the lack of genius is the most important critical point we can make of the man. Such genius is not common, and when it appears it makes waves. That is why the plays are still produced today and characters like Hamlet, King Lear, Macbeth, and others, seem to have as much reality as living historical figures. The plays are a product of an extraordinary mind, and we know Marlowe had an extraordinary mind and the literary talent to make good use of it. No one can dispute that.

Finally, Oxford had no compelling reason to deny that he wrote the greatest dramas in English literary history. Marlowe, however, had the most compelling reason of all to hide his identity: he was supposed to be dead!



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Why are there so many Oxfordians? It has a lot to do with the influence of Thomas J. Looney's book published in 1920 and subsequent books on Oxford, the latest written as recently as 2005 by Mark Anderson. Also, they all believed that Marlowe had been killed in 1593, so that left only Oxford and Bacon in the running. Hoffman's *The Murder of the Man Who Was Shakespeare*, published in 1955, was the first book to advance the thesis that Marlowe was not killed at Deptford, but was the subject of a faked death. It spurred the beginning of a Marlovian movement which has grown somewhat slowly since then. Mike Rubbo's film, *Much Ado About Something*, which was shown on public television, documented the movement right up to the present.

I have attended Oxfordian meetings, and there is a kind of group think among them. They have lived so long with Oxford, that to change their minds will require the kind of evidence they can't deny. But I think it will take time for my book, *The Marlowe-Shakespeare Connection*, and Daryl Pinksen's *Marlowe's Ghost*, both of which advance the Marlowe theory, to make their full impact on the authorship field of contention.

But what both Marlovians and Oxfordians have in common is an unshakeable belief that the actor-businessman William Shakespeare was not the author of the works attributed to him. That is why they have come together and formed the Shakespeare Authorship Coalition. Its website states:

The Shakespeare Authorship Coalition runs this website so anyone who cares about Shakespeare, as we do, can easily see why his identity has long been in doubt, and sign a definitive declaration addressing the issue — the Declaration of Reasonable Doubt About the Identity of William Shakespeare, located on this site. We have nothing against the man from Stratford-on-Avon, but we doubt that he was the author of the works.

Our goal is to legitimize the issue in academia so students, teachers and professors can feel free to pursue it. This is necessary because the issue is widely viewed as settled in academia and is treated as a taboo subject. We believe that an open-minded examination of the evidence shows that the issue should be taken seriously. Your signature on the Declaration will help us make the case that there is reasonable doubt about the author.

The Declaration already has a long list of signatories with impeccable credentials as writers, professors, actors, producers, and many ordinary lovers of Shakespeare's works. If the authorship controversy intrigues you, why not add your own name to the Declaration?



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