

The Case for Shakespeare: In defense of Shakespeare as the author of the Shakespeare works

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October 1991 Issue

Selected Quotations:

- Nowadays, those who dispute the authorship of the plays do concede that there was a "man from Stratford" named "Shakspere" in Elizabethan theater, probably an actor, though not a very good one. He was, they assert, paid off by confederates of the real playwright to go back to Stratford and leave behind the Shakespeare name for the exclusive use of the True Author.
- There is little that gets more attention from Oxfordians than the absence of autograph manuscripts, which they insist must have had some value to the author. However, there is no evidence that Shakespeare's contemporaries attached any more importance to their manuscripts than he did.
- To put Shakespeare into the perspective of his age, one must recognize that stage plays were considered things of slight literary merit.
- In the search for the dramatist with this singular ability, the singularity of Shakespeare's experience of theater has been overlooked. Virtually throughout his known career he was a member of the greatest and most stable acting organization of his day.
- What the authorship partisans have failed to demonstrate is how any of their candidates had the intimate knowledge and experience of theater and drama to create plays that remain the standard by which all other stage works are measured. Those qualifications are possessed uniquely by the man who was an active member of an extraordinary theatrical ensemble—William Shakespeare, gentleman of Stratford.

Section 1: Matus invokes a painting in the reading room of the Folger Shakespeare Library and connects it with the phenomenon of "Bardolatry," the cult of Shakespeare. (Cicero would call this the "exordium.")

Section 2: Describes the origins of the cult of Shakespeare with the publication of Samuel Johnson's edition of the plays in 1765 and a Shakespeare Jubilee in Stratford in 1769. Makes a distinction between the "actor's Shakespeare" and the "scholar's Shakespeare," "a highly educated man versed in law and classical literature, fluent in several languages, equally at home at court and on the Continent." In the 1780's, a minister went looking for evidence of this sort of man in Stratford, but found none. There clearly was a man in Stratford named Shakspere who was probably an actor, but more of a businessman. This began the controversy. More than 58 possible authors have been proposed. The leading candidate is Edward de Vere, the seventeenth Earl of Oxford. He thus divides the camps into "Stratfordians" and "Oxfordians," though other candidates are possible. (Cicero would call this the "narrativo.")

Section 3: The questions that the article will address: Is the contemporary record of Shakespeare suspect? Was Shakespeare the "Soul of the Age"? And was the man from Stratford "a man of the theater"? (In Cicero's terms, this is the *divisio*.)

Section 4: THE MISSING RECORDS CANARD. Describes documents that establish that Shakespeare was a member of the acting company under the patronage of the Lord Chamberlain and that plays by Shakespeare were performed. Discusses so-called "missing" documents, such as any indication that Shakespeare attended school, but argues that such documents are commonly missing for other playwrights. Discusses various lists of actors, some in which Shakespeare's name appears, and some in which it doesn't, but notes that other famous actors are

also missing. Discuss the absence of manuscripts, but argues that playwrights of the day did not value notes or drafts of plays. Argues repeatedly that “straightforward evidence is manhandled by the Oxfordians.” (In Cicero’s terms, this section, and the next two, would be called the “refutatio,” in that the author is refuting arguments made by the Oxfordians. There is no real “confirmatio,” as the arguments in favor of Shakespeare as author are assumed.)

Section 5: Discusses the lack of Elizabethan recognition of Shakespeare’s greatness. Notes that stage plays were not considered to be of literary merit (though Ben Jonson was honored for his 1616 folio, *The Works of Ben Jonson*). Shakespeare was criticized for insufficiently following classical principles, especially Aristotle’s three unities (Time, Space, and Action). Shakespeare’s reputation increased after edited volumes of the plays appeared, by Rowe, then Pope, and finally Johnson.

Section 6: A MAN OF THE THEATER. This section returns to the idea introduced in the first of a distinction between an “actor’s” and a “scholar’s” Shakespeare. Notes that Shakespeare was closely associated with the theater, while the Earl of Oxford was not. To introduce the scholar’s camp, quotes Swinburne, who argues that Shakespeare wrote for the studious future reader who would “appreciate what his audience and fellow actors could not,” and Hazlitt, who believed the opposite. Discuss the lifelike qualities of Shakespeare’s characters and states “At the height of his powers, no role was so small that Shakespeare could not give a special life to it.” This section rhapsodizes Shakespeare’s greatness, but does little to support the case that the man from Stratford is the author of the plays.

Section 7: The conclusion. Argues that “there is, after all, really very little in Shakespeare’s plays that required knowledge beyond materials that were publicly available,” and that the Oxfordians have failed “to demonstrate . . . how any of their candidates had the intimate knowledge and experience of theater and drama to create plays that remain the standard by which all other stage works are measured.” (Cicero would call this the “peroratio.”)

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