

Brenda James and
William D. Rubinstein

UNMASKING
THE REAL SHAKESPEARE
THE TRUTH
WILL OUT

ROUTLEDGE



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Unmasking the Real Shakespeare

Brenda James and
William D. Rubinstein

 **Routledge**
Taylor & Francis Group
LONDON AND NEW YORK

First published 2005 by Pearson Education Limited

First paperback edition published in 2006

Published 2013 by Routledge

2 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxfordshire OX14 4RN

711 Third Avenue, New York, NY 10017, USA

First issued in hardback 2017

Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, an informa business

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ISBN 13: 978-1-138-16469-7 (hbk)

ISBN 13: 978-1-4058-4086-6 (pbk)

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

A CIP catalogue record for this book can be obtained from the British Library

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data

James, Brenda, 1944–

The truth will out : unmasking the real Shakespeare / Brenda James and William D. Rubinstein.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN-13: 978-1-4058-4086-6 (pbk.)

ISBN-10: 1-4058-4086-2 (pbk.)

1. Shakespeare, William 1546–1616--Authorship. I. Rubinstein, W. D. II. Title.

PR2937.J36 2006b

822.3'3--dc22

2006050656

Set by 3

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Note on Calendar Discrepancies and Dating



During the period covered in this book, the English year started on 25 March. This means that in citing some primary sources, we have occasionally given two years – 1600/01, for example.

The situation is further complicated by the fact that the then continental calendar was ten days ahead of our own. Neville and Winwood (being diplomats) would often specify which calendar they were using, but this information was not always available to researchers. So confusing was the situation that many letter-writers of the time simply omitted the actual year. Discrepancies in the dating of some events and letters cited in this book may therefore occur. (These problems are in addition to the general uncertainties regarding the dating of Shakespeare's plays.)

Foreword



Theatre artists hide themselves to reveal themselves. We use an indirect communication in order to be more direct. We speak or write through the mask of a character in an imagined situation. We, ourselves, appear to be at a remove, while actually sharing the most intimate secrets and fears and foolish behaviour imaginable. We pretend to be someone else in order to be ourselves. Other people don't feel the need to do this, they speak or write directly as themselves.

Whoever Shakespeare the writer actually was, he seems, from his plays, to have known very well the advantages and dangers of hiding oneself: Imogen, Rosalind, Celia, Julia, Portia, the Duke of Vienna in *Measure for Measure*, Henry V on the eve of the battle of Agincourt, Kent to protect his beloved Lear, Hamlet to protect himself and, of course, Viola. They all use disguise to protect themselves, discover, test, and prove truths about others, or just get closer to people without being discovered. Shakespeare is the master of hiding and revealing. He's obsessed with it as a theme and device and one of the great delights of his plays is the recurring experience of things not being as they seem. I include his obsession with punning on an apparent and resonant meaning out of one word. He loves to display the Achilles heel of our minds: that we are susceptible to and very often deceived by appearances. The mystery of his own apparently secretive life and identity might just be no more than an elaborate practical and philosophic joke!

In a very real sense, all the authorship candidates have been secretive about their identity for one reason or another. I include William Shakespeare of Stratford in this thought, as there must be a reason for the lack of any letters to or from him, the lack of any indication of books in his ownership, or access to the kind of book learning he clearly demonstrates in

his work, not to mention the lack of any indication of his access to the kind of life experience which he clearly demonstrates in his work. All possible answers to these aspects of the little we know about him imply someone who was extremely private. But, how did such an unparalleled genius inspire others not to remark on him in his youth, as he moved among the learned courtiers he wrote about so searchingly, and even when he died? Indeed Ben Jonson's Dedication of the First Folio implores us to focus on the *wit* not the *picture* of the man. The other authorship candidates necessarily have a wish to be secretive, hidden behind the mask of Shake-speare. 'Why?', is the question most asked about them. 'How?', follows close behind.

Like famous victories in sport, or heroic self-sacrifice in battle, great works in the theatre are born of a great need and an equivalent, and therefore refining, obstacle to that need. Something forces the expression into the secret channels of theatrical characterization and imagined situation. Also, in any artist, there may be something given at birth, a genius in the unknown atom, be your science mystic or genetic, but the experience of life provides the matter, and the learning of the mind moulds the artist's ability to express their need.

As would be expected, the works of Shakespeare have a distinctive and recognizable character, and an apparent age and growth. They cannot be attributed to anyone. They have dates, not necessarily of birth, but first known performance, first mention, publication, registration; the implications of these dates are debated, but cannot be ignored. What is undeniable is a development in the writing style, particularly the verse.

There are patterns in the use of genre, histories, comedies, tragedies; also, in the depth and quality of the subject matter. As this book rightly points out, these developments should correspond with the author's life and learning, and we should weigh that correspondence when considering any authorship candidate. The Sonnets are clearly attributed to the author and must be owned, philosophically and personally by any candidate. Their images and date of publication must have had a cause. Their dedication to Southampton must be possible and likely. The reason and ability to conceal oneself as the author of these works must be tackled, not just during life but for hundreds of years after life as well. For those proposing that the author was not the actor, the connection to the actor Shakespeare, the Burbage brothers, and the workings of the professional theatres, must be possible. The incredible knowledge from books, from travel, in Italy particularly, via

five or more languages, and of matters legal and courtly, all of this must be possible in a candidate.

As this book rightly suggests, if the plays had not been attributed to Shakespeare in 1623, he would be the last person you would imagine able to write such matter. It would be like searching for the author of John Steinbeck's *Grapes of Wrath* among the green light gazers of the East Coast of America, or the author of Charles Dickens' work walking on the lonely moors of Yorkshire. But, of course, they were attributed to William Shakespeare and so Ms James and Professor Rubinstein must establish the need for their candidate. This they do with some force, and some may feel at times perhaps unnecessary force, given the strength of their case, but this is to be expected in a book where they must open their biographical case, like lawyers in an academic courtroom, expectant of a vigorous defence.

This is a pioneering book. No one has considered this candidate before as the author of the works attributed to Shakespeare, so you will not be alone in having your image of the author shaken by these pages, as I have. If Brenda James has found the true author, and she certainly appears to have found a person who could have done it – his learning, his life experience and the dates of his life are as good as they could be; if Professor Rubinstein has been as careful as I imagine he has, given his extensive knowledge and experience of history and this controversial question; if the authors have not avoided any difficult aspects of his biography in relation to the plays, then this is an historic book. It must certainly be a major piece in the puzzle of the creation of the Shakespeare works and potentially a central piece which will unblock many other pieces. For those of us approaching this puzzle with an open mind it provides countless new paths of enquiry. I long to read more examples of this man's writing, his account of his meeting with the King of France, for example, but especially the notebook that Ms James has discovered. I long to study his tutor's commonplace of their travels in Europe. I can't imagine that any scholar or student, actor or enthusiast of Shakespeare will be able to ignore this book. I can't imagine they won't find the life of this man, the new document discovered, and the detailed links to the Shakespeare works a compelling window into the cause and possible authorship.

It was in the late eighties, while I was playing Hamlet and Romeo for the RSC in Stratford upon Avon, that I became sceptical that my hero, the actor known as William Shakespeare, could have written the plays and

especially the poems, attributed to him. This was, at first, a big surprise to me. Then for a while I was on fire with all the implications of my new understanding, and amazed by the reaction of friends and strangers, who treated me like some sort of religious heretic! I was even named so in *The Times* newspaper, no less. Gradually I stepped back from any need to contradict other people's story. It's enough for me that my scepticism has led me to a much wider awareness of the works of Shakespeare, a much deeper appreciation of their beauty, their wit, and their mystery than I possessed before. I have become aware of the context of their creation and not been limited by one theory of creation, so to speak.

Just lately I compare the biographical perspective to any number of perspectives via which we encounter the Shakespeare plays and poems: Historical, Linguistic, Political, etc. Within each perspective there are different interpretations. These perspectives and interpretations are only windows into something. They will each yield a view of the plays and poems. That is perhaps their real value. One of the windows will be more familiar than the others because it will be the closest to your imagination of the author, but each will only yield a view of the author's works. I prefer many windows into a house. This book opens up a new one but doesn't board up the others. They also have their light.

I will never regret the fact that I believed at one time that the Stratford actor wrote the plays. I know what it is to travel from a small town to the big city, pursuing a life in the theatre. I was inspired and encouraged by the story of William Shakespeare, when I arrived obscure and far from home in London.

If your language is English, the primary 'author' of how you express your life, how you question your actions, how you ask for what you want in speech and writing is arguably the man we know as William Shakespeare. Some would go further and say he is also a huge influence on how we live our lives. I believe he is the major influence on how I live mine.

Perhaps this is why the perfectly reasonable doubt about his identity – a doubt that flourishes within the university grounds of orthodox Shakespearean biography just as much as beyond where the name changes and is replaced by other names – perhaps this is why the topic of his persona, the topic of this book, seems to enflame so many intelligent people into quite uncharacteristic behaviour: repression of debate, denial of evidence, lack of objectivity, personal slander, wild conspiracy theory and paranoia, death threats, and threats of unemployment in academia, as one American

professor was warned when he shared his scepticism about the authorship of the works attributed to Shakespeare.

I for one welcome and celebrate this book not only for its discoveries and clear style of expression, but for the wonderful partnership of a professional academic and an independent scholar which gave it birth. Surely, this is the way forward, and a momentous publication in the history of authorship studies. How many wild authorship discoveries outside accepted academia would have been helped to expression by a trained scholar like Professor Rubinstein? How many professors would have found their studies enriched by new evidence away from the petty repetitive squabbling over the agreed subject matter that seems sometimes to define the concept of a university? We must move away from the harmful idea that university-based knowledge is the only knowledge, and also accept that a university-trained mind is a marvellous instrument for gathering, weighing and communicating knowledge.

If I had never doubted the authorship, I would never have received this little Penguin book of Great Ideas, which lies in front of me next to my computer; sent to me by my sister, just the other day. Its cover provides a good quote on which to exit the page and make way for the lead players:

*Read not to contradict and confute;
nor to believe and take for granted;
nor to find talk and discourse;
but to weigh and consider.*

*Mark Rylance
Actor*

*Artistic Director Shakespeare's Globe 1996–2005
and Chairman of the Shakespearean Authorship Trust*

Preface to the paperback edition



From the moment I first discovered the name of Sir Henry Neville and its association with the works of Shakespeare I knew there would be difficulties to face in the process of bringing his identity into the public arena. He had, after all, been hitherto presented as a mere marginal figure in English History. Even my own first encounter with his name came completely out of the blue. I cracked the Code within the Dedication to the *Sonnets* and there was Sir Henry – named as the ‘hidden’ poet. In order to test the truth of the statement I had just uncovered, I set out to investigate and document this shadowy figure.

Although everything I found substantiated the statements I had discovered within the many layers of the Dedication Code, I realised that the first difficulty was going to be attempting to present the *known* life of this virtually unknown man while at the same time asserting that his *hidden* life had been of such extraordinary importance. I was thus faced with the problem of producing a biography of the very secretive, complex Sir Henry *and* saying he was Shakespeare – in one fell swoop. To add to my difficulties, the more years I spent on painstaking secondary and primary research into his background, the more problems arose. Secondary sources often disagreed with each other on matters of fact as well as opinion, while the primary sources regularly revealed information that was either at variance with, or completely absent from, most secondary sources. It was as if those few historians who had encountered Sir Henry in their research had found it extraordinarily tricky to tie things together. To begin with, there were several men of note bearing the same name at the same time, so quite a few

researchers had, understandably, become confused as to which ‘Henry Neville’ contemporaries were writing about. Secondly, this energetic gentleman seemed to be leading several lives simultaneously. For instance, at the same time as being a Keeper of Windsor Forest, he was a manufacturer of cannons in East Sussex. Then he was also a Member of Parliament and businessman, conducting negotiations for the sale of his ordnance from an inn right next to the Globe Theatre. His main office in London through all this time was based at his father in law’s house in Lothbury, from which the theatres, printers and booksellers were only a stone’s throw, and from which he could also travel easily to oversee his estate in Berkshire, and his Windsor Parks.

Then there were the seeming conflicts within the very nature of the man, which would-be biographers might well find difficulty in resolving. Sir Henry was born to a staunch Protestant family and (outwardly) professed that persuasion all his life. Yet he had Catholic friends too, and was also interested in pre-Christian, ancient Greek wisdom and theology. This interest in the Greek language inevitably led to his studying Eastern Orthodoxy, and he also knew men who had studied Judaism. To the highly intelligent, vigorous Sir Henry there was probably no contradiction in connecting his secret writing with the many facets of the rest of his life, yet for us mere mortals, the intricacies remain. As John Milton was to write about Shakespeare in 1630, [thou] ‘Dost make us Marble with too much conceiving;’. But as far as Sir Henry Neville himself was concerned, complexity nourished his life and his artistic output. Like ‘Marble’, his works and his life blend together to form beautiful, complex, seemingly random, yet at the same time inter-connected, patterns.

During the whole time I was researching and writing about Sir Henry, however, the joys outweighed the problems. His personal and diplomatic letters were a delight to read, displaying the lively style and linguistic constructions reminiscent of Shakespeare’s language. The texts of, and knowledge encapsulated within the plays and poems of Shakespeare constantly overlapped with the knowledge and interests of Sir Henry. Even the purely *documentary* evidence that remained after four hundred years was confirmatory of his secret authorship. The mysterious Tower Notebook contained references to the deposition of Richard II and notes towards directions for the Coronation Scene in *Henry VIII* – a play produced eleven years after the date of these preliminary notes. Then came the realization

that the relatively well-known Northumberland Manuscript, had Neville's name at its head, Neville's family motto and poem beneath it, and Shakespeare's signature being practiced at the foot of that document. One manuscript owned and annotated by Sir Henry even hinted at a hitherto unexpected source for some of Shakespeare's History Plays. Within that same document, were indications that the character of Hamlet may have been partly based on the personality and life-experiences of Neville's admired nobleman, the Earl of Essex.

Eventually, I presented my case and the first manuscript of my book to Professor William D. Rubinstein, who had long studied and written about the Authorship Question. He procured a number of additional specialist, academic secondary sources I had tracked down, and we were both further convinced that Sir Henry Neville had secretly written the plays and poems which passed under the name of William Shakespeare. Professor Rubinstein also cleverly steered his way through my over-long manuscript, re-focusing my work and cutting it down to size. His skill and new framework formed an improved outline and structure for the work.

Following the initial publication of *The Truth Will Out*, the most noticeable reaction was the lack of informed academic response. However, emotional academic response in plenty followed the mere announcement of its publication. Stratfordian scholars were up in arms at the fact that any non-Stratfordian argument at all had been allowed to declare itself.

Some lay critics shared this initial emotional response, but overall the general reading public were split between the open-minded, the mildly sceptical, and the completely prejudiced. Professor Rubinstein's opening chapter on the background to the Authorship Question either delighted or inflamed: there were no half-measured responses to his strong proclamations. I too had once had to open my own mind to the material he presented, and to the discoveries I myself was making, so I can understand the initial resistance which Professor Rubinstein's summary, followed by my own revelations, encountered in some quarters. Yet the open-minded or mildly sceptical read the book, and many of them communicated their genuine surprise and delight at finding in Sir Henry Neville the first credible candidate that they had ever heard of.

Since the publication of *The Truth Will Out*, I've found myself pondering on the nature of some of the prejudiced responses we received. What an interesting social phenomenon – the image of William Shakespeare had

transcended fact and become an immovable component of English literature's belief-system. The story of the poor, under-educated boy who was nevertheless able to rise above his station and write far more eloquently and exquisitely than the privileged members of the very class-based 16th century society is just the stuff that myths are made of. When these myths become unified and widely-known, they trigger a collective response, thus greatly enhancing their power. Young William Shakespeare emerges as the Dick Whittington of Literature, the epitome of every 'rags to riches' story, the Santa Claus whose plentiful store of treasures can be accessed all year round. The fact that even less is really known about his life than that of Dick Whittington or Saint Nicholas makes him all the more appealing, on a psychological level. He remains so open to fantasy that he has become the very nexus of fantasization itself, the tabula rasa on which every individual can project an image that best pleases him or her. Shakespeare is the man from whose pen consummate beauty, emotion, knowledge, intellect and wisdom flow in such abundance that everyone can always find at least one of his sayings to fit almost every human experience. He communicates specific and universal matters simultaneously, and thus is so all-encompassing that he seems at once both human and divine.

Hardly any wonder, then, that so many people throughout the UK and the wider world have relied on his words to express their own joy or sorrow. He speaks to old and young, mother and father, children and statesmen. His monumental image touches everyone who has ever known, or even peripherally brushed against his works, allowing him to pervade the collective conscious and sub-conscious mind. The misty young William of the rural idyll has developed into the apotheosis of 'back to the land' wish fulfilment. The older, more mystical, neo-platonic Shakespeare glides effortlessly into the ether and ultimately shines forth as a bright star, guiding every Englishman to glory. It is not surprising, therefore, that any attempt to turn this demi-god into a believable, flesh and blood human being should initially arouse such a ground-swell of emotion.

Given the long and varied history of the authorship debate itself, as well as the perpetual reluctance of many in academia to consider the possibility of Shakespeare's alternative identity, I think it is now high time to attempt to overcome the emotion (from whatever cause) generated by the authorship debate and promote a campaign of looking toward the facts. When we all have the humility to admit that we may be able to learn something from

each other then we will at last bring new light and true insight to the works, which should be everyone's ultimate aim. As Sir Henry Neville was related to Bacon and (distantly) to William Shakespeare, the actor, he is uniquely placed to begin a reconciliation of all these factions. In order to let in the new illumination which such a reconciliation could provide we should all also have the honesty to admit when an aspect of our own theories may fly in the face of logic. After all, with such an old case to research, none of us can expect to discover the type and strength of evidence which might be recovered from a five-hour-old scene of crime investigation. We should all ask ourselves what kind of evidence we would, in any case, find finally and convincingly conclusive. Palaeographic evidence, for instance, is even weaker than finger-printing, which has in recent years also been revealed not to provide such conclusive evidence as was once thought. Moreover, even if we were to find a manuscript supposedly written by Sir Henry Neville stating 'I am Shakespeare' then we could not take it at face value. To begin with, we would have no way of knowing whether it was truly Henry Neville who wrote it. This therefore makes it absolutely necessary to assess every case on the total evidence available, and then weigh the logical probabilities. We must stop simply examining each point alone through a microscope, and instead we must widen our perceptions to observe the microscopic and macroscopic evidence simultaneously. Only then will we be able to incorporate the *total weight of evidence* produced for each candidate.

The weight of evidence in favour of Sir Henry Neville's authorship of Shakespeare's works indeed continues to grow – on an almost daily basis. For example, two significant discoveries turned up recently. First of all, my co-author, Professor Rubinstein, noticed a reference to the work of a certain Thomas Vicars (1589–1638). This reference occurred first in 'An Unnoticed Early Reference to Shakespeare' – an article by Dr. Fred Schurink of Newcastle University, which was published in *Notes and Queries*, Vol. 53, no.1, 2006. Schurink observed that when writing about English poets (in his 1628 manual of rhetoric), Vicars listed "that famous poet who takes his name from 'shaking' and 'spear,'." This is a rather strange reference, since Vicars named all his other poets in an absolutely direct manner, thus giving a more than subtle hint that the writer knew the name 'Shakespeare' to be a mere pseudonym. What makes the reference so relevant to Neville's case, however, is that – as Professor Rubinstein found out – Vicars was married to Sir Henry Neville's youngest daughter, Anne.

They did not marry until 1622, so it also seems significant that he omitted the ‘Shaking Spear’ man from the earlier editions of his work, adding him only *after* his marriage to Anne Neville. Secondly, I have discovered a letter to Sir Henry Neville mentioning a book Sir Henry himself commissioned. The writer of the letter mentions Sir Henry’s compiler as being one ‘Mr. D[o]wne’. This particular book turns up in the Worsley Manuscripts, now in Lincolnshire Archives, with a letter to ‘Mr. D[o]wne’ on its flyleaf. This is the very collection in which I found Sir Henry’s Tower Notebook and other documents connected with Neville, thus further affirming Sir Henry’s ownership of the works in this section of the Worsley collection. (The authorship and ownership of this collection had been unattributed before I researched Sir Henry, as explained later in this book.) I must stress, however, that these are only two of the many pieces of evidence in favour of Sir Henry, which are even now so numerous as to require more books and papers to do him justice.

After the hardback edition of *The Truth Will Out* appeared in October, 2005, I created a website – www.henryneville.com – in which I included a selection from some of the primary source material I came across during my research. A number of knowledgeable correspondents have responded by letter and via email through my website, many of whom have been of great assistance in supporting my work and furthering research. I would like here to take the opportunity of thanking you all.

The first person I would like to choose for special thanks is Tim Cornish. He had been researching Neville’s connections with the ordnance and iron industry at the same time as I was writing my book, and he was kind enough to send me the results of his painstaking research. Indeed, he was the man who discovered that Sir Henry had carried out his business negotiations from the inn next to the Globe Theatre.

Next come Mr Christopher Foley, a director of Lane Fine Art Ltd., and Mr John Harley, who is an independent music-historian and a distinguished authority on the life of William Byrd. They sent me their research into *My Lady Nevel’s Book*, in which they identified ‘Lady Nevel’ as Elizabeth Bacon-Doyley-Neville, step-sister of Sir Francis Bacon, wife of Sir Henry Neville senior, and thus the step-mother of our Sir Henry Neville – the true Shakespeare. I was particularly delighted by Mr. Foley’s discovery, as my daughter (a musician) had early on in my research brought my attention to

the then unknown Lady Nevel. Quite independently, in 2001, I had identified her as the same Elizabeth Bacon, and also discovered that Lady Elizabeth's maid married Thomas Morley – the composer who subsequently lived with the Neville family and also set to music 'It was a lover and his lass' from *As You Like It*.

My next thanks go to Dr. John Casson, who corresponds with me frequently and has responded to my theory by researching extended areas of interest on which the works of Shakespeare and life of Neville overlap. His very original line of research is leading to a pooling of our knowledge and so producing an ever-increasing amount of confirmatory evidence in favour of Sir Henry Neville's case.

Last but by no means least in this partial list of supporters, my thanks go to my friend, George Sayn, who is currently upholding my work in so many ways and also continuing to find confirmatory evidence. His extraordinarily wide knowledge of the period and of family, intellectual and business connections within Sir Henry's circle has been of noted significance in tying up Neville's claim to be Shakespeare.

I would like to end by sending a warm round of thanks to all those who have corresponded, or tussled, with me on the subject of Sir Henry. This is an important subject and an important discourse, one that seeks the truth of history and of literature. Introducing new ideas is not only important—it is essential if we are to whittle away at the myths of the man until there is nothing but the fact remaining. This has been a humbling, enlightening and always exciting experience. Despite all the problems and thorns along the way, I am so grateful to everyone who seeks the truth and makes my work worthwhile.

Brenda James, West Sussex, June, 2006

Preface to the hardback edition



I came across the name of Sir Henry Neville while researching various issues relating to the background of Shakespeare's Sonnets. At that moment of discovery I had no idea who he was, and I felt compelled to investigate the shadowy figure of this virtually forgotten 16th-century aristocratic politician.

Readily available secondary historical sources concerning his personality and career were soon exhausted, though even these suggested that he was just the man to have written Shakespeare's works. (Sir Henry had been in the Earl of Essex's circle and was also a friend of the Earl of Southampton – Shakespeare's patron – as well as possessing the learning and 'inside knowledge' of Court and State affairs one would expect from the 'real Shakespeare'.)

Next, I travelled to record offices all over the country on a quest to search out any papers Sir Henry had left behind. One trail led to another until I had uncovered a web of connections and associations between Sir Henry Neville and the works attributed to William Shakespeare. Then the timeline also became clear – at every step, the chronology of the plays coincided with Sir Henry's life events. For instance, when 'Shakespeare' was completing *Henry V*, with many of its scenes set in France, and others written in perfect French, Neville was beginning his Ambassadorship in France; at the very moment 'Shakespeare' was writing *Hamlet* – the first of the dark tragedies – Neville experienced a reversal of fortune (following the Essex rebellion) which ended with his imprisonment in the Tower. And in this same manner, the list of coincidences continued relentlessly.

Sir Henry's personal and diplomatic letters were a delight to read, displaying the lively style and linguistic constructions reminiscent of

Shakespeare's language. The texts of, and knowledge encapsulated within, the plays and poems also overlapped with the knowledge and interests Sir Henry demonstrated in these letters. Even such *documentary* evidence as remained after four hundred years was also confirmatory of his secret authorship. The mysterious Tower Notebook contained references to the deposition of Richard II and notes towards directions for the coronation scene in *Henry VIII* – a play produced eleven years after the date of these preliminary notes. Then came the relatively well-known Northumberland Manuscript, with Neville's name at its head, Neville's family motto and poem beneath it, and Shakespeare's signature being practised at the foot of that document. One document owned and annotated by Sir Henry even hinted at a hitherto unexpected source for some of Shakespeare's history plays. Within that same document too, came hints that the character of Hamlet could well have been based on the personality and life experiences of Neville's admired nobleman, the Earl of Essex.

Eventually, I presented my case and first manuscript to Professor William D. Rubinstein, who had long studied and written about the Shakespeare Authorship Question. He procured a number of additional, specialist academic secondary sources on Sir Henry for me, and we were both further convinced that Sir Henry Neville was the author of the plays and poems which have for so many centuries been attributed to William Shakespeare. Professor Rubinstein also cleverly steered his way through my over-long manuscript, refocusing my work and cutting it down to size. The result of our subsequent collaboration on the text is now presented in this book.

In addition to Professor Rubinstein, whose unstinting support and assistance was so essential to the production of this book, I would like to thank a number of wonderful people whose aid also helped me on my way. During the first four years of my lonely quest, my task of researching the life of a man named in a masquerading code was necessarily a very secretive one. Having taken the difficult decision to leave my post-graduate studies and lecturing for a while, I was embarking on a trail of long-envisaged, very independent research. Only with my family could the matter be discussed, so my first thanks go to my dear husband, children and son-in-law. They all took much time and trouble to involve themselves in my work and its progress. To Christina Wipf-Perry and Benjamin Roberts – my editors at Longman – go thanks for their patient attention to detail, and to Elie Ball

and the other staff at Longman I send my gratitude for all their hard work in promoting the further progress of the book.

It is also a pleasure to thank Gareth Hughes of English Heritage for his assistance in guiding me through the house of Neville's descendants and the treasures of portraiture and books it contains. Dr Geoffrey Parnell, Keeper of Tower History at the Royal Armouries HM Tower of London, discussed with me the true background of the Tower of London prisoners and their situation, and was a great supporter of my efforts to ascertain the truth from primary sources.

The very first personal friend to whom I showed the first draft of my book was David Jenkins, M.Phil, alongside whom I had lectured in English and Civilisation for many years. His extensive knowledge of history and esoteric symbolism supplemented and surpassed my own, thus enabling us both to traverse in conversation a very entertaining pathway of the more hidden connections between the works of Shakespeare and Sir Henry Neville. I am indeed grateful for his steadfast belief in my work, and for his trustworthiness.

Among the many reference centres I have visited, I would like to point out the especial kindness I received years ago from the staff at Maidenhead library. Then come the curators at the Public Archives at Kew, who made copies of some key documents for me. Also the very helpful staff at Berkshire Record Office, and at the Lincolnshire Record Office too. The staff at Essex Record Office patiently searched for some difficult-to-locate documents, while I am also grateful for being able to search the archives of Chichester Record Office.

Last, but by no means least, come my warm thanks to Robin Wade and Broo Doherty, my Literary Agents, without whose friendship, constant support, sage advice and management this book would not have gained an audience.

*Brenda James
West Sussex
August, 2005*

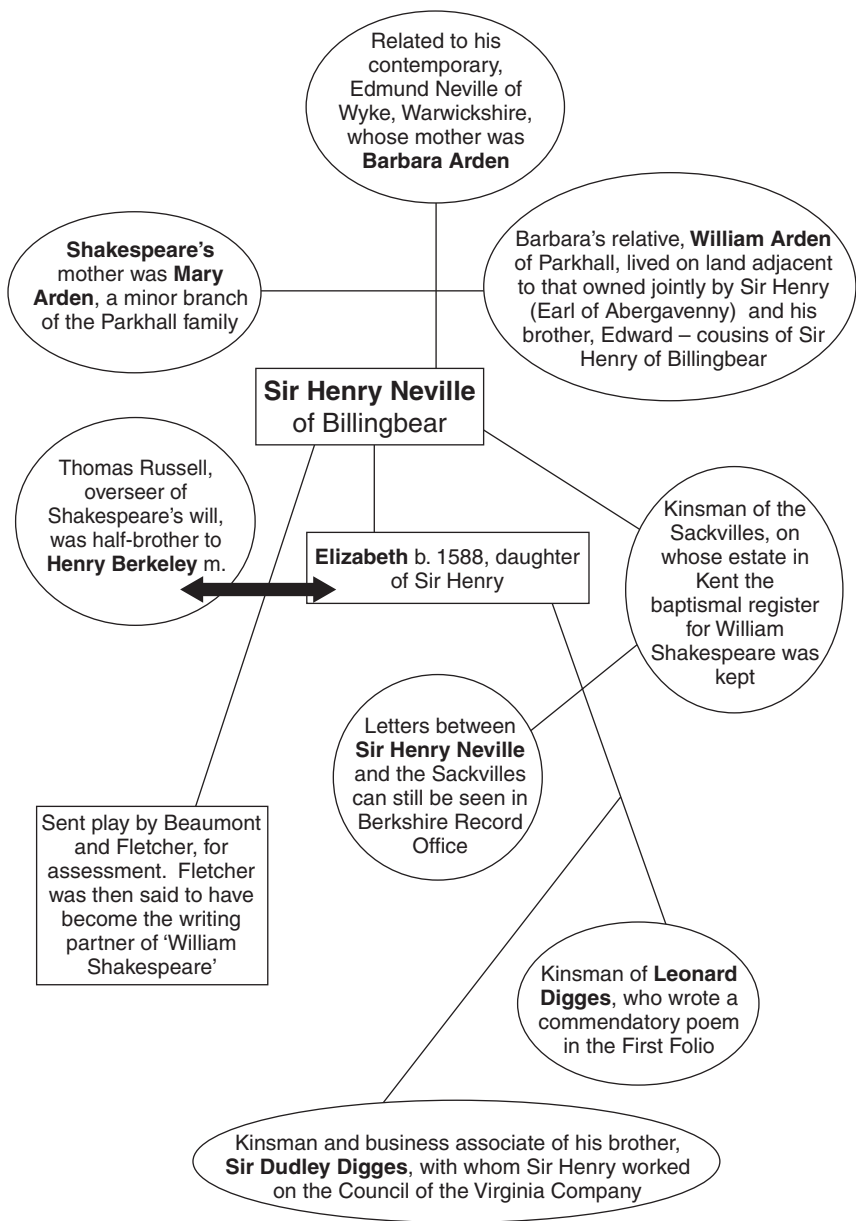
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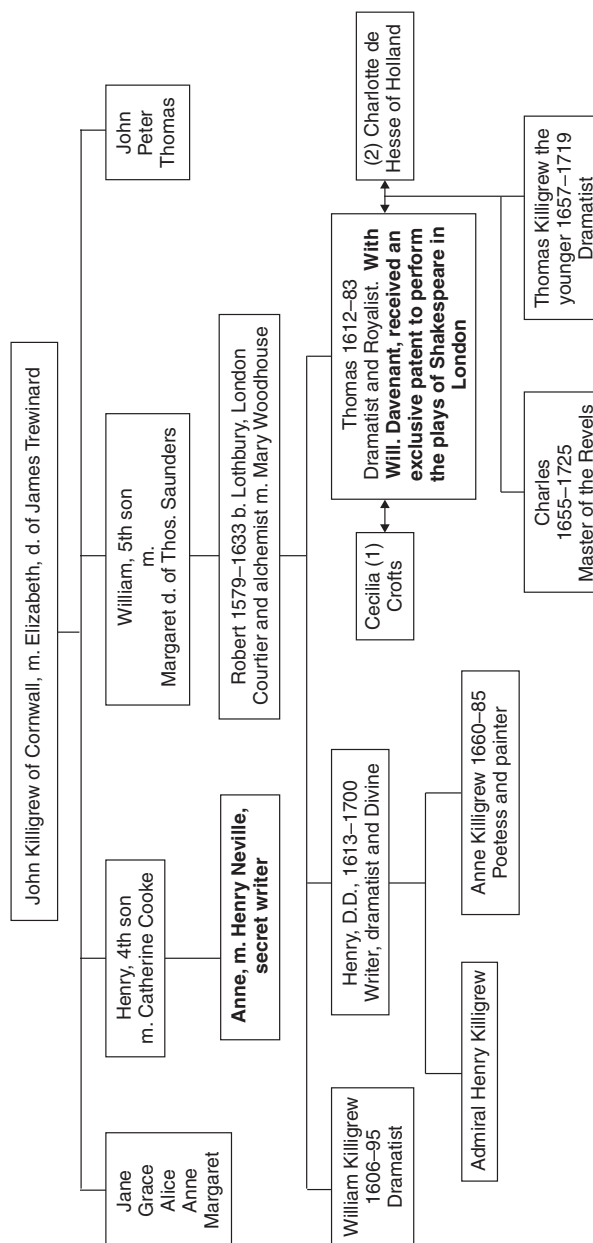
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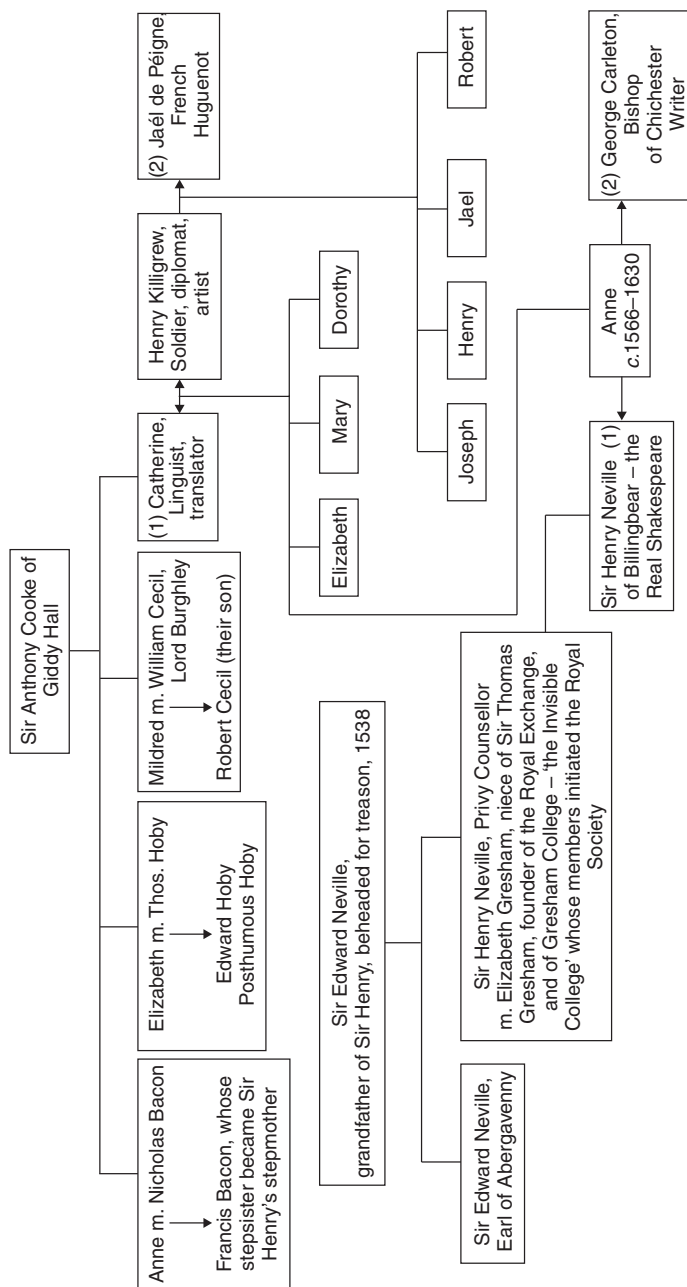
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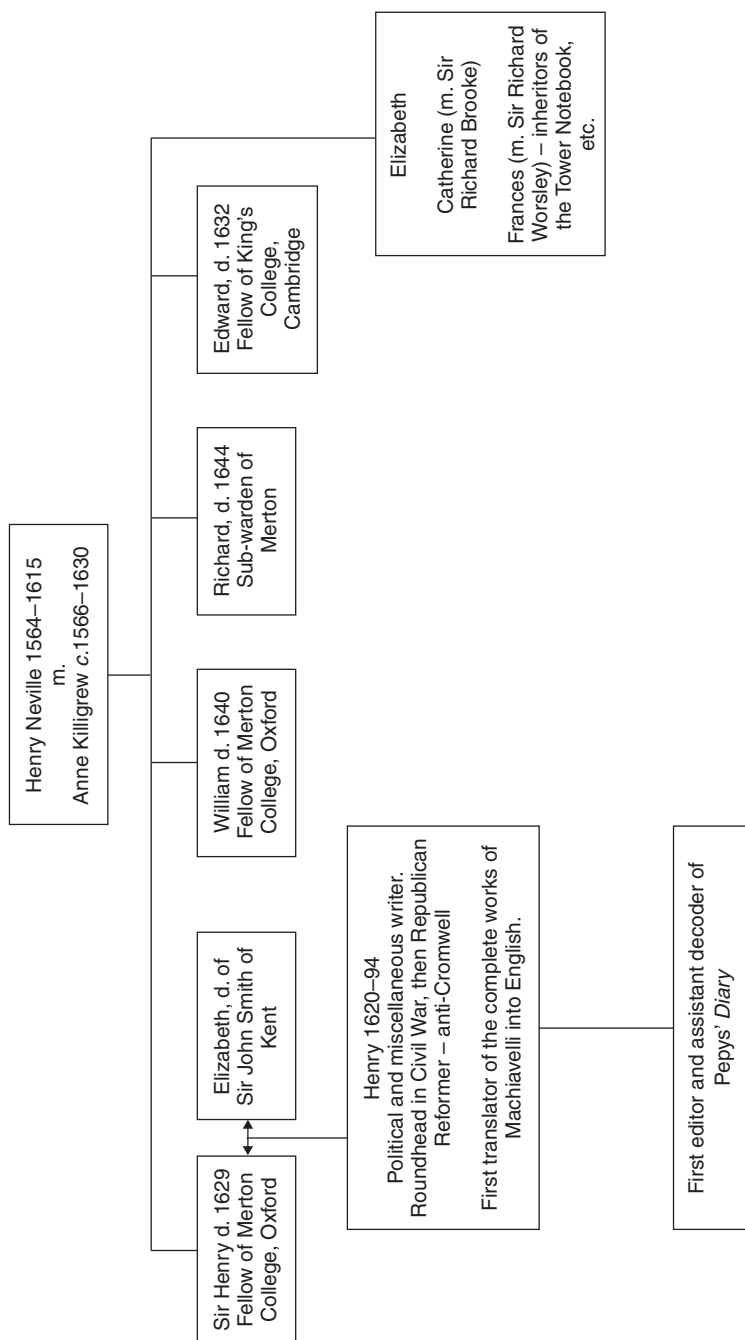
Family tree 1 Henry Neville's links to William Shakespeare of Stratford



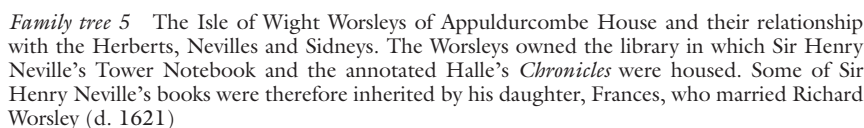
Family tree 2 The Killigrew connection. Henry Killigrew and his brothers produced a remarkable number of literary descendants, one of whom worked with Sir William Davenant, rumoured to be the illegitimate son of Shakespeare. Robert Killigrew, son of Henry's brother William, was an amateur alchemist involved with the Overbury murder. William Killigrew lived with his wife and children at Lothbury, along with Sir Henry Neville

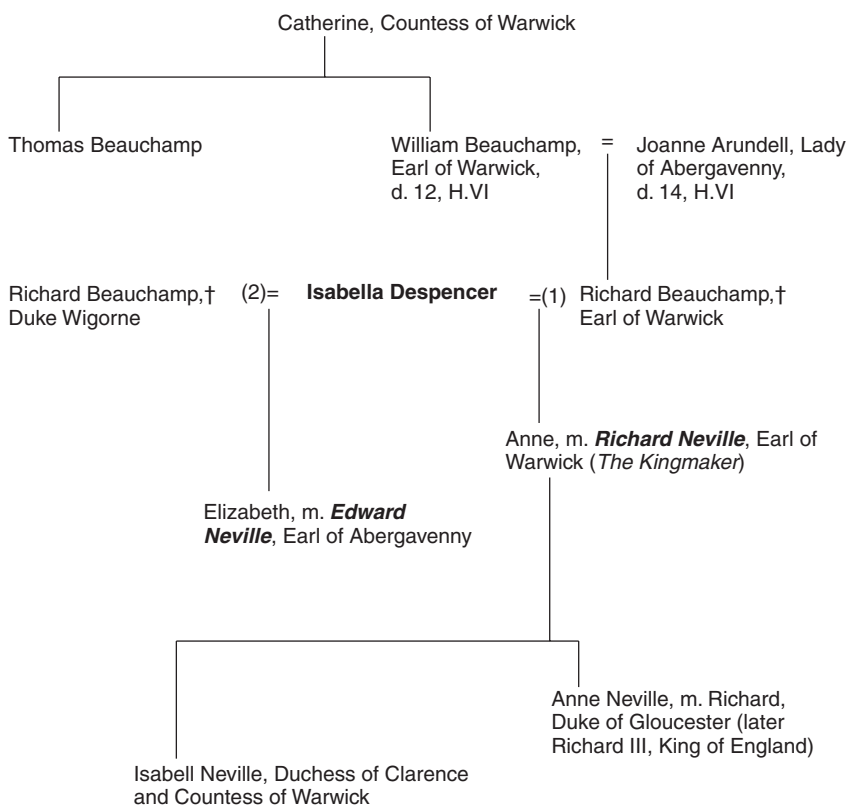


Family tree 3 Sir Henry Neville's political connections, reinforced through marriage to Anne Killigrew (this family tree also illustrates the interconnected nature of the Neville, Killigrew, Cecil and Bacon families)



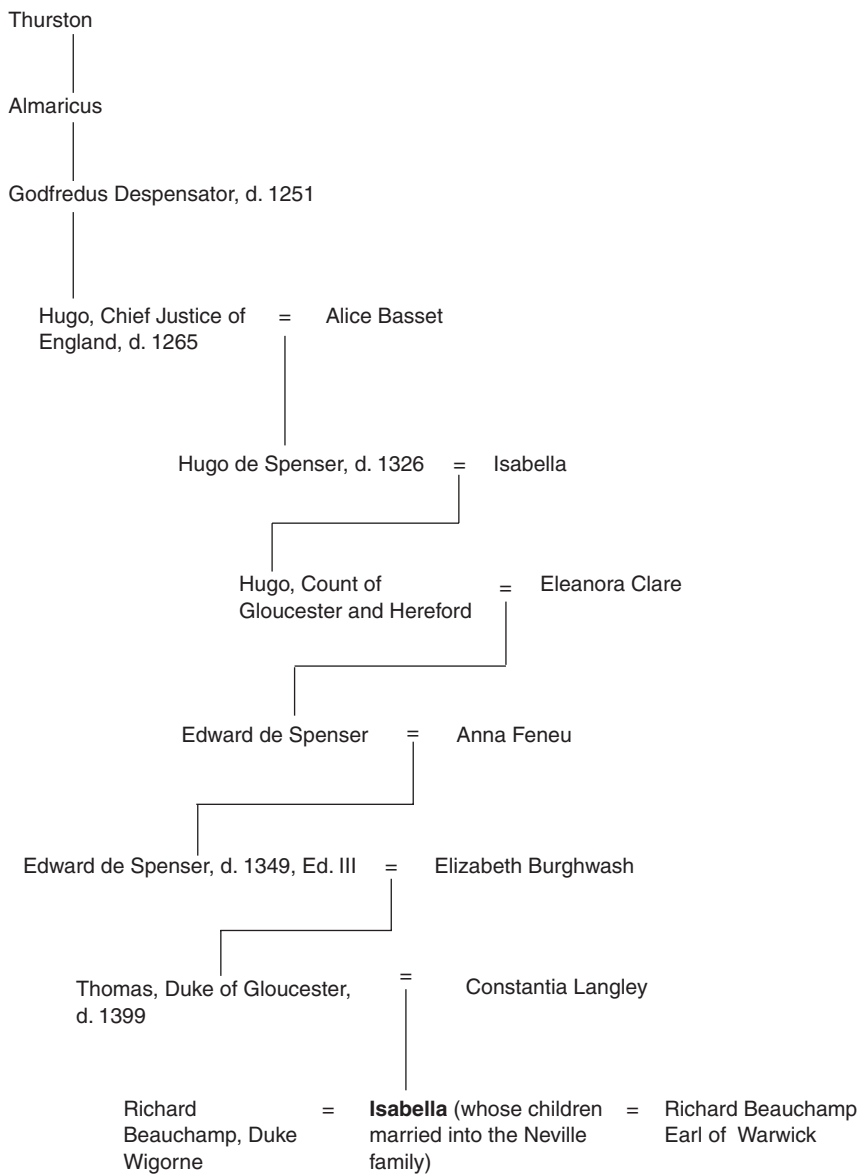
Family tree 4 Literary, academic and political descendants of Anne and Henry Neville





† These two men, sharing the same name, were cousins

Family tree 6 Some pedigrees illustrating the Nevilles' link with the Earls of Warwick and the Spencers (originally called Despencer or Despensor). Besides showing the link with the Spencers, this family tree also illustrates one reason why Sir Henry Neville would have been so interested in Warwickshire as a county from which his 'alter ego' might originate. One of his friends, the writer, Thomas Overbury, came from Gloucestershire and wrote a book about Warwickshire. There was also a marriage between a Spencer and a Neville during the eighteenth century



Family tree 7 An abbreviated Spencer pedigree showing the male dependency up to Isabella, the originator of the Spencer–Neville line



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Chapter 1

The Shakespeare Authorship Question



Shakespeare's background

At the heart of our awareness of the writings of William Shakespeare there is a great mystery, which is often known as the Shakespeare Authorship Question. For over 150 years this question – whether the actor who was born in Stratford-upon-Avon in 1564 and died there in 1616 actually wrote the plays – has continued to perplex well-educated and intelligent people. Although often dismissed by orthodox Stratfordian scholars (those who believe that Shakespeare of Stratford wrote the works attributed to him), it shows no signs of disappearing and, indeed, in recent years has returned with a vengeance as a subject of intense debate, especially in the United States.

While William Shakespeare may well have been the greatest author the world has ever known, as a man his life has proved to be one of the most elusive and mysterious of any human being of his achievement and stature in history. Virtually everything known of the facts of his life seem to belie the transcendent genius of his plays and poems. His parents were illiterate; he grew up in a small provincial town in which lived no more than a handful of educated men; his schooling ended at around 12; there is no evidence

that he ever owned a book. No manuscript definitely known to have been written by him survives, nor do any letters, memoranda or notes he wrote on any subject, let alone literary documents. Shakespeare's only writings which survive, in fact, consist of just six signatures scrawled on legal documents, three of which are on his will. While Shakespeare is named in 75 known contemporary documents, not a single one concerns his career as an author. Most are legal and financial documents which depict him as a rather cold, rapacious and successful local landowner, grain merchant and money-lender.

Shakespeare's life between his marriage in 1582 to Anne Hathaway and his emergence as an actor and presumed author nearly ten years later is a blank, a mystery period known as 'the lost years' in which biographers, lacking any hard evidence for their views or any way to explain Shakespeare's apparent wide erudition, have credited him with being – amongst other things – a law clerk, schoolmaster, traveller on the continent and soldier. At the age of about 47, after a quarter-century allegedly at the centre of one of the world's greatest cultural renaissances in London, the nation's capital, suddenly and for no obvious reason Shakespeare retired to his home town of Stratford, living there quietly until his death about five years later. No one, it seems, marked his passing at the age of 52 in any way, let alone by the publication of memorial verses or funeral tributes.

In 1623, seven years after Shakespeare's death, an enormous memorial volume containing nearly all of his plays, including many published in full for the first time, was edited and produced by a number of his former theatrical associates. The First Folio, as this volume is known, does not mention or acknowledge his family in Stratford, although it seems surprising that they did not retain some manuscripts or effects left by him which would have been useful to the Folio's compilers. There is no evidence that any member of his family – or anyone else in Stratford-upon-Avon – owned a copy of the First Folio; its literary glories would in any case have been lost on Shakespeare's two surviving daughters, who were illiterate.

Since Shakespeare's recognition in the late eighteenth century as England's preeminent national writer, hundreds of historians, researchers and archivists have pored over thousands of Elizabethan and Jacobean documents to discover anything there is to find about Shakespeare the man, and, in particular, Shakespeare the writer. Despite all their efforts, they have found little on the former and nothing on the latter.

There is thus a Shakespeare Authorship Question which has continued to perplex thousands of admirers of Shakespeare's works over the past two centuries: or rather, there are two separate but interconnected authorship questions which, for innumerable readers of Shakespeare's works and others, constitute one of history's most abiding and intriguing mysteries. The first of the two Shakespeare authorship questions is how satisfactorily to explain the seemingly unbridgeable gap between the magnitude of his achievement and the meagreness of his apparent background, while the second is why so little has been discovered about his life as a man and, particularly, as a writer, regardless of how thoroughly we research. As a result, over the past century and a half, many intelligent and perceptive persons have come to doubt whether William Shakespeare of Stratford, the man who was born in Stratford-upon-Avon in 1564 and died there in 1616, and who was unquestionably an actor and theatre-owner in London as well as a businessman and landowner in Stratford, could conceivably have written the plays and poems attributed to him. Over time, a variety of other authorship candidates (as they are known) have been proposed, the best-known of whom are Sir Francis Bacon (1561–1626) and Edward De Vere, seventeenth Earl of Oxford (1550–1604).

To gain a clearer understanding of why so many people have questioned whether Shakespeare of Stratford wrote the plays and poems attributed to him, it may be useful to examine the reasons under three headings: the meagreness of his early life and background and the difficulty of explaining the complexity and erudition of Shakespeare's works in terms of what is known of his educational achievements; the inability of scholars and historians to discover any new evidence about Shakespeare's life, including his career as a writer; and the incongruities between what is known of Shakespeare's life and the evolution of his plays.

Lack of learning

Perhaps the most striking way to approach the sheer inadequacy of William Shakespeare as the author of the plays and poems which bear his name is to consider the following: if the First Folio and the other works attributed to him had been published anonymously and, like *The Letters of Junius*, their author remained genuinely unknown and a matter of continuing controversy and debate, no one anywhere would regard, or ever have regarded,

William Shakespeare of Stratford as their likely author. Virtually everyone (including assuredly most of today's experts who have no doubts that Shakespeare wrote the works attributed to him) would certainly believe that their author was an aristocrat or some other well-connected member of the Elizabethan upper classes, and debate would in all likelihood centre, and have centred for generations, on those figures like the Earl of Oxford and Sir Francis Bacon who have long been the leading alternative authorship candidates. Almost certainly Shakespeare of Stratford would never have been proposed as an authorship candidate; if someone today were somehow to propose the Stratford-born actor and theatre-owner as the likely author, he or she would be greeted with ridicule, with critics of the suggestion quickly pointing out the extent to which Shakespeare lacked the educational background or Court and political connections which the author of the plays must obviously have possessed. The meagreness of Shakespeare's background, and the lack of any documented fact in his life which might lead one to believe that he was a playwright or poet, would rule him out as an authorship candidate among the overwhelming majority of scholars and historians. It is, indeed, safe to say that no one would ever have proposed him as the author of the plays and poems at any time from their original publication to the present day.

The many people who have, for the past 150 or 200 years, doubted whether William Shakespeare of Stratford wrote the plays and poems which bear his name have focused on a number of striking inadequacies and inconsistencies in what we know about the life of the Stratford man, which seem to call into question whether he could have been the real author. Probably the most serious is the extraordinary inconsistency between the verbal facility of Shakespeare's work and the limited educational background of the man from Stratford. We have no certain knowledge of where Shakespeare went to school; the assumption is that he attended the local grammar school in Stratford (the King's New School on Church Street), since his father, John Shakespeare, was entitled, as a burgess of the town, to send his son to this school. (No sixteenth-century enrolment records survive for the school; apart from pure supposition, our only evidence that Shakespeare attended this school comes from the 1709 remark of Nicholas Rowe, Shakespeare's earliest biographer, that he was educated 'for some time at a Free School'.¹) If Shakespeare did attend this school, he would only have done so between the ages of about 7 and 12. In 1576, when Shakespeare was 12, his father

experienced financial difficulties and ceased serving on the Stratford council. Many historians believe that Shakespeare was withdrawn from school at this time; this was the belief of Nicholas Rowe. John Aubrey suggested that young Will often worked alongside his father as ‘a butcher’ during his teenage years.²

The education Shakespeare would have received at Stratford Grammar School, though wide-ranging in some respects, would be viewed with despair by modern educational theorists. It would have consisted of endless hours of repeating memorized Latin grammar and texts, in a classroom full of bored local boys of radically unequal ability from perhaps 6.00 a.m. until 5.30 p.m. (with breaks).³ Recalcitrant scholars would have been beaten at the drop of a hat by the schoolmaster. Although – perhaps – young Shakespeare would eventually have read Latin classics by the likes of Cicero and Virgil, and the Bible, the experience was infinitely stultifying and narrowing, with no opportunities for individual expression or recognition of personal ability except at mastering Latin grammar. Nothing taught in the school touched in any way on any of the liberal arts or any of the remarkably wide range of subjects with which the author of Shakespeare’s plays was evidently familiar, from the new sciences to the law. Perhaps the most crucial point is that all, or virtually all, the lessons the young Shakespeare would have experienced were in Latin and designed to ensure that students mastered Latin, at least after a fashion. It is unnecessary to point out that Shakespeare is not known for his ability in the Latin language, but for his mastery of English, a subject which was not taught at his school and was not used in lessons. How on earth could such a school conceivably have equipped Shakespeare to become the world’s greatest writer? This is for Stratfordian biographers to explain: some speculate that one among the (rapid) turnover of schoolmasters at the school, recognizing the remarkable talent of his young charge, gave him special lessons. Thus, according to Park Honan, it was schoolmaster Thomas Jenkins, an Oxford graduate who worked in Stratford from 1575 to 1579, who ‘apparently . . . introduced William to Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* and perhaps to Arthur Golding’s famous [translation].’⁴ There is no evidence for this piece of speculation.⁵ As Stratford schoolmasters taught dozens of boys via rote-learning for eleven hours a day, six days a week; the likelihood that such a schoolmaster would have found the necessary time for private tutoring seems very remote.⁶

Nor is it very likely that Shakespeare had much educational encouragement from his family. Shakespeare's father was illiterate, indicating that it is unlikely that his childhood home contained a single book. Nor is there any clear evidence that Shakespeare's mother, Mary Arden, could write: on a land deed of 1579 which survives, she made her 'marke' by 'signing' the initials S.M. instead of M.S., next to the place where the scrivener had written her name. A 'small, neat, rather complex design', 'the "S"' Honan states, 'is exemplified in the handwriting of literate persons; the "M" (if such was intended) lacks a final stroke or minim'.⁷ Among all of Stratford's 1,300 or so inhabitants, it is likely that only the vicar and the schoolmaster could remotely be described as educated men, and almost certainly a majority of its adult inhabitants were illiterate. The town did not possess a library, bookshop or newspaper, nor even a school above the elementary level.

Most importantly of all, perhaps, the fundamental and guiding aim of Stratford's local elite in its educational policy was to instil and enforce conformity among its youth. The 90 years or so preceding Shakespeare's education had seen the overthrow of a dynasty and dynastic turmoil, the replacement of one national religion by another, economic crises, numerous foreign wars and treasonous threats, and a continuing sense of insecurity and potential danger to everyone in authority, especially to local officials of no national consequence. Its aim was to enforce intellectual, political and religious conformity in the local community by any means, in particular to avoid being noticed as a hotbed of nonconformist or seditious sentiment. In startling contrast, Shakespeare's works are driven by precisely the opposite animating force: the author's unprecedented ability to empathize with all his characters, among them foreigners, Catholics, Jews, Moors and women, and to bring them all to life. This belies rather than supports the black-and-white view of English society he would have received in his youthful lessons in Stratford. Some biographers have suggested that Shakespeare's Catholicism – he may well have been a Catholic, though this is far from certain – made him sensitive to the plight of social outsiders, but Shakespeare's plays, as most critics agree, were emphatically Protestant in orientation throughout his career, becoming even more markedly Protestant in his latter years.⁸

Perhaps, however, Shakespeare's verbal facility and wide knowledge were the product of some formal education he received after Stratford Grammar School? Unfortunately for this theory, there is no record that Shakespeare

received any formal education past the age of about 12. Comprehensive admission records survive for England's two universities, Oxford and Cambridge, and for the Inns of Court, the lawyers' training institutions in London often regarded as a 'third university'. Shakespeare attended none of these. If he wrote the plays attributed to him, the educational sources of his incredible range of knowledge remain largely unknown.

This is the sum total of Shakespeare's known educational background, what was formally implanted into the supposed writer. The outcome – what Shakespeare actually produced – is so totally different as to be at the very heart of the Shakespeare authorship question. First of all, Shakespeare had the largest vocabulary of any writer who ever lived. His works employ nearly 18,000 different and separate words, about twice as many as Milton used (although Milton was one of the most accomplished graduates of his time at Cambridge University), and perhaps five times as many as the average educated person today. Shakespeare also coined more new words than any other writer in the history of the English language, about 1,500 in all, among them not merely archaisms but dozens of common words in everyday use today, such as 'addiction', 'assassination', 'birthplace', 'circumstantial', 'cold-blooded', 'courtship', 'dawn', 'denote', 'dialogue', 'discontent', 'divest', 'downstairs' and 'dwindle', to cite only those words he coined which begin with the letters A to D, to say nothing of 'alligator', 'amazement' and 'bandit'. Further along the alphabet there is, if one prefers, 'embrace', 'employer', 'eventful', all the way down to 'well behaved', 'widen', 'worthless' and 'zany', while along the way there is everything from 'eyeball' to 'outbreak', 'hurry', 'luggage' and 'retirement'. It may well be that no educated English-speaking person goes more than (at most) a few hours without using one or more words coined by Shakespeare, almost certainly without knowing it. It is quite possible that no book, newspaper or magazine published in English in the past century or more fails to contain at least one word coined by Shakespeare, and probably a great many. Then there are the innumerable common phrases coined by Shakespeare, which most people would assume to be proverbial, but which first occurred in Shakespeare's works: 'into thin air', 'time-honoured', 'be-all and end-all', 'pith and marrow', 'seamy side', 'shooting star', 'the dogs of war' and literally dozens of others.

Even this, however, is only a small part of the story. Not only was Shakespeare unique in his coining of new words and phrases, he was

profoundly learned in the Western world's scholarship and intellectual inheritance. He read ubiquitously and almost omnisciently in classical literature and in the recent literature of many European languages. His works apparently cite or rephrase more than 200 classical and later writers, only a handful of whom (nearly all authors of Latin classics) could have been studied by him at Stratford Grammar School. The list of works apparently used by Shakespeare includes many books which had not been translated into English. For instance, *The Rape of Lucrece* is seemingly based on the untranslated *Fasti* of Ovid. Scholars have traced dozens of other untranslated Latin writers whose works were read and digested in the original. Although Shakespeare was famously credited by Ben Jonson with having 'small Latin and less Greek', the Bard was also familiar with many of the great writers of ancient Greece. Even orthodox Stratfordians admit that the author read relatively recent books in French, Italian and Spanish which had not been translated into English, among them Belleforest's *Histoires Tragiques*, Ser Giovanni's *Il Pericorone*, Jorge de Montemayor's *Diana* and Cinthio's *Epitia and Hecatommibi*.⁹ Rather oddly, Schoenbaum – probably the leading scholar of Shakespeare's life and biography of the past generation, an expert who was well known for instantly dismissing all unorthodox theories of the authorship of the plays – states that 'Shakespeare did not have access to translations' of these and other works, but offers no suggestions as to how, then, he might have read and absorbed them.

If Shakespeare had an excellent reading knowledge of Greek, French, Spanish and Italian, where did he, a young struggling itinerant actor, acquire this knowledge? Where did he read so many obscure books, given that no public libraries existed and we have no evidence that he ever owned a book? The evidence that Shakespeare read voraciously in foreign works is often startling, and difficult for orthodox biographers to explain. For instance – to cite but one example – Diana Price points out that where *Romeo and Juliet* deviates from Arthur Brooke's poem on which it is supposedly based, as it does in four important instances, it agrees with the original Italian version by Luigi da Porto of which no known English or even French translation existed.¹⁰ Where did Shakespeare read or obtain da Porto's version, and why did he use it rather than Brooke's well-known English language 1562 *Tragicall Historye of Romeus and Juliet*? Anyone who has researched the sources of Shakespeare's works is aware that this problem is encountered literally dozens of times: the author of the plays was mani-