

# Letter to the Editor re: *Who really wrote Shakespeare?*

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/culture/2010/mar/14/who-wrote-shakespeare-james-shapiro>

To pour abuse on others is never a good argument: it may be an effective weapon, but it does not make a case. Sometimes it is simply a smokescreen for the abuser's own ignorance or prejudice. Robert MacCrum's article, *Who really wrote Shakespeare?* (The Observer, Sunday 14 March 2010) is, regrettably, splattered with such abuse. Some arguments about the authorship of the Shakespeare works may indeed be "loony", as McCrum puts it, but both the "Stratfordians" and "anti-Stratfordians" are guilty of this. It does not mean that all arguments are loony or that their proponents should be so artlessly and abusively dismissed. Nor does it mean that there are not profound and as yet unanswered questions to be asked concerning the authorship, or that everyone knows everything that needs to be known.

For instance, there is a lot of ignorance about Bacon. Francis Bacon is usually quickly dismissed as not being a poet; but he himself and others who knew him refer to him as a "secret poet". Tributes to Bacon published on his death in 1626 adulate him as the greatest poet of them all – their Apollo and leader of the Muses – who rescued and renovated Philosophy by means of comedy and tragedy, and filled the world with his writings. Well, where are all these plays that had the extraordinary power to revitalise Philosophy? Where is the poetry that Bacon wrote? Where are all the writings that "filled the world"? And what name or pseudonym did Bacon use? A letter to Bacon from his friend Tobie Matthew states that Bacon was known to the world by another name.

Moreover, in an exchange of satires during 1597-8, two Inns of Court lawyer-poets, John Marston and Joseph Hall, referred to the author of the Shakespeare poems, *Venus and Adonis* and *The Rape of Lucrece*, as "Labeo" (a famous Roman lawyer), whom they identified as Francis Bacon, and who they said used another person's name to hide his authorship. Supportive of this viewpoint, the Shakespeare Monument erected c. 1620 in Holy Trinity Church, Stratford-upon-Avon, declares the author to be like Nestor, Socrates and Virgil, famous for being a great judge, philosopher and poet respectively, none of whom were publicly known to have written plays. This is a description that fits Francis Bacon only. Taken as a whole, the Monument suggests that there were two Shakespeares – the actor-businessman and the poet-author, who worked together in partnership.

A prevailing majority viewpoint at present is that the Shakespeare plays were authored by one principal poet-genius, with occasional help or collaboration from others. Fitting this viewpoint is the fact that, alone among all the great English writer-poets of the time, Francis Bacon was the instigator, leader, inspirer and paymaster of a group of poets and other writers, who formed a kind of literary studio, like an artist's studio, of which he was the 'master'. Among them was Ben Jonson, who described Bacon in exactly the same unique words as he used to describe the author Shakespeare in the Shakespeare Folio. This literary studio was patronised by the Sydney-Southampton-Essex-Pembroke group of aristocrats – the patrons of "Shakespeare". Whether or not Oxford was particularly involved with this group is not yet known, but it is certainly possible. He certainly knew them and they, him. It can easily be imagined, with good reason, that they all played their part in the story, even including Marlowe who, as both playwright and secret agent, was well-known to Francis Bacon and his brother Anthony, who ran a key part of the Elizabethan intelligence network for the benefit of the Queen, Walsingham, Burghley, Essex, and his brother Francis. The information gathered was panoramic as well as detailed in scope, covering all walks of life, all strata of society and all the key places of Europe known to "Shakespeare" – plenty, in other words, to feed the author, even down to details such as the flea-infested pissing corners of taverns and the thyme-adorned pastoral banks which, incidentally, are certainly not unique to Warwickshire.