

Shakespeare Authorship Questions



Shakespeare questions concerning the authorship of the Shakespeare works.

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There are some definite questions which need to be answered in respect of the authorship of the Shakespeare plays and poems, for what is known about the life of the actor and supposed author William Shakspere/Shakespeare does not square with the facts derived from a study of the works themselves. For instance:-

How did Shakespeare acquire such an outstanding knowledge and scholarship in classical philosophy and mythology?

An outstanding feature of the Shakespeare plays is their underlying scholarship. For instance, Shakespeare's knowledge of classical philosophy and mythology, and of literature generally, is both encyclopaedic and outstandingly detailed.

A close study of the Shakespeare plays shows that source material, both for the plots and for innumerable individual lines and allusions, was often derived from classical sources. Moreover, a very great deal of the material, some of it abstruse, seems to have been read in its original language, although English and French translations were also used when available. Altogether nearly one hundred, perhaps more, classical authors would seem to have been read by Shakespeare. In addition, nearly all the plays are based upon earlier plays, stories and histories by other authors, drawn particularly from the classical Greek and Roman authors. Homer, Ovid and Virgil are favourites, as also is Livy's *History*, Pliny's *Natural History* and Plutarch's *Morals*. Plato was well used, all of whose works were untranslated when the plays were written, as also the works of Herodotus and the plays of Seneca.

Why are the Shakespeare plays and poems so full of academic learning and University matters?

There is plenty of evidence throughout the Shakespeare plays and poems of university learning. Shakespeare's earlier works, in particular, betray not only an overload of academic learning but a strange preoccupation with university life. His plays of that time are full of University matters, whether the scene is in England or abroad, in France or Germany, Italy or Navarre. Shakespeare's intimate acquaintance with college terms and usages is a very clear indication that he had enjoyed the privilege of university education. *Venus and Adonis*, *The Rape of Lucrece* and *Love's Labour's Lost* are just three examples of this.

Why does Shakespeare often use, out of context and as if natural to himself, the idiomatic language of Cambridge University, and refer to customs and stories unique and private to that university?

Shakespeare's acquaintance with college terms and usages is in many cases very specific and identifiable: so much so that we can see that they belong to Cambridge University. Only an alumnus of Cambridge would not only know but also naturally fall over and over again into using the strange idiomatic language unique to Cambridge University, and this despite which character in the plays is portrayed using this language.

Moreover, this textual evidence is supported by a book published in 1595 by the Cambridge University authorities entitled *Polimanteia*, in which Shakespeare is listed as an alumnus of one of the universities—Cambridge, Oxford or Inns of Court (the “Three Daughters of England”).

Besides Latin and Greek, where did Shakespeare learn French, Italian and Spanish, which he needed in order to read certain source material which he used?

Besides being a classical scholar, and reading his Latin and Greek source material in the original versions, evidence shows that Shakespeare also read source material in French, Italian and Spanish, either because no English translations were present at the time he wrote each play or because he chose to do so. He also borrowed from poems written by French and Italian authors—Ronsard, Jodell, du Bellay, Desportes, Aretino and Petrarch especially. Some of the poems were available paraphrased into English, but there are sufficient signs to show that Shakespeare read them in the original. To have been able to have read all these untranslated works could only have been due to private tuition, as no French, Italian or Spanish was taught in the grammar schools or at university.

How did Shakespeare manage to get access to the multitude of books, many of them rare or untranslated, which he read?

To have read so widely and in such a variety of languages, classical and modern, Shakespeare must have accessed books in libraries other than at Cambridge, for the University Library at Cambridge was very limited in those days, numbering only about 450 books and manuscripts in 1581, and devoted to the classics. The Inns of Court had better libraries. But the principal libraries containing many of the books which Shakespeare used can only have been private libraries, such as that of Dr. John Dee, the Queen’s astrologer and sage, who had the largest collection of books and manuscripts in England (nearly 4,000 by 1583) at his house in Mortlake-on-Thames, and those of the nobility, such as Lord Lumley, whose collection was the second largest in the country (about 3,000 by the end of the 16th century), Lord Arundel, whose fine collection of books and art treasures was housed in Arundel House, on the Strand next to Leicester (later Essex) House, and Lord Burghley (William Cecil), whose London house was also on the Strand. Some books may have been found in foreign libraries—indeed, some information could only be found abroad, and some of that was privileged information, such as the letter written by Joan of Arc, dated 17th July 1429 and addressed to the Duke of Burgundy, which Shakespeare used as source material for the parley between the Duke and Joan in *Henry VI*, Part 1.

How did Shakespeare acquire such mastery of the English language and to such an extent that he not only used over 24,000 different words but also invented at least 1700 new words and latinised others?

It is estimated that Shakespeare used over 24,000 different words in his writings—an immense number. Some have put it even higher, at 34,000, and some much lower, about 15,000; but it depends on whether or not one counts the variant forms of words. Nevertheless, however one counts the words it is still quite exceptional. Moreover, it is estimated by Doug Moston, in his Preface to the 1995 facsimile edition of *The First Folio of Shakespeare*, that at least 1700 new words were invented and added to the English language by Shakespeare. Others put the figure much higher. Generally the new words have been

coined from other languages—primarily Latin, French and Italian—whilst others are old words revived by Shakespeare or current words used in new ways.

Why would Shakespeare want to use so many new and abstruse words and meanings?

It seems extraordinary that Shakespeare would even want to use so many words, and some so abstruse, since in Shakespeare's time a good education was rare and language skills among the majority of the English population were very basic and often primitive, with the spoken language being a rough mixture of assorted dialects and jargon. Yet, instead of addressing the mass of people in language they could more easily understand, Shakespeare shows a distinct liking for unusual words; whilst at the same time he avoids using many of the more ordinary words which were in common use by the general public.

Why are the Shakespeare plays and sonnets filled with legal terminology, some of it abstruse and all of it appropriately used?

The Shakespeare plays, and many of the sonnets, are filled with legal terminology, some of it most abstruse. Moreover, this legal knowledge is not just applied to one sonnet or play but is to be found permeating all the author's works: so much so, that the only reasonable conclusion is that Shakespeare was a lawyer, for, like the peculiar language of Cambridge University, such a knowledge and use of legal terms, employed with precision and aptness, is not learnt by someone without the necessary legal training and experience.

Why do the Shakespeare plays indicate not only the author's expert acquaintance with the law in general, but also with the language, rules, circumstances and even the most trivial aspects of Gray's Inn and its twin establishment, the Inner Temple?

The Shakespeare plays indicate not only the author's expert acquaintance with the law in general but they also indicate the source of his learning and practice. From the evidence of the plays, Shakespeare was well acquainted with the language, rules, circumstances and even the most trivial aspects of Gray's Inn and its twin establishment, the Inner Temple; and yet, like the Colleges of Oxford and Cambridge Universities, the Inns of Court were sacred precincts. The public knew very little of their internal affairs, for guests were seldom admitted behind the doors.

If Shakespeare was not a member of Gray's Inn, how could he have known of the various circumstances and wording of the elaborate Gray's Inn Revels of 1594/5?

In *Love's Labour's Lost*, Act V, scene 2, the masque of "Russians" with their "blackamours" is derived from the exceptionally lavish 1594/5 Gray's Inn Christmas/New Year Revels, *The Prince of Purpoole and the Order of the Knights of the Helmet*. These revels, which acted out the reign of a mock Prince, the Lord of Misrule, complete with imitation Privy Council and officers of State, continued intermittently from 20 December 1594 until Shrove Tuesday, 4 March 1595. Their conclusion was with a performance by the lawyers before the Queen at Whitehall of a masque (*The Masque of Proteus*) on Shrove Tuesday. Not only did these Revels include a performance (on 28 December) of the Shakespeare play, *Comedy of Errors*, but also a procession by the lawyers up the Thames (on 1 February) in pretence of the Prince and his knights returning from a campaign in Russia against Negro-Tartars. The blackamours who accompany the Russians in *Love's Labour's Lost* are the equivalent of the Negro-Tartars in the Gray's Inn Revels. Moreover, Rosaline's jibe in *Love's Labour's Lost*, "Sea-sick, I think, coming

from Muscovy,” echoes the excuse made by the Prince of Purpoole who, on his return from the mock visit to Russia, wrote a letter to the Queen excusing himself from attending on her Majesty that day because of his exhaustion “by length of my journey, and my sickness at sea”. Berowne’s speech in *Love’s Labour’s Lost* echoes that of the Sixth Counsellor in the Gray’s Inn Revels’ masque, *The Order of the Knights of the Helmet*, which was enacted on 3 January 1595.

Why do the Shakespeare plays appear to be written primarily from the point of view of a courtier, and with such intimate inside knowledge of the royal Court and foreign affairs?

The evidence of the plays shows that Shakespeare had inside knowledge of the English Court as well as of foreign affairs. Moreover, his viewpoint is primarily that of a courtier, and the terms and imagery of courtly pursuits such as hunting, hawking and riding are used as if second nature to him. With the one exception of *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, all the plays centre around Court or aristocratic life, whether in England or elsewhere. Even *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, which was presented before the Queen and was clearly written for an aristocratic audience, has a setting in Windsor Park and at the Old Garter Inn (now the White Hart). This inn, situated immediately outside the gates of Windsor Castle, was a popular resort of the courtiers, knights, ladies and gentlemen from the castle, and Falstaff as a theatrical character was based on Henry V’s Knight of the Garter, Sir John Oldcastle.

How did Shakespeare acquire his detailed and seemingly first-hand knowledge concerning both people and places in countries such as Italy and France?

The plays demonstrate that the author had a wide range of intimate knowledge concerning both people and nature, city life and country life, court life, gentry life and the common man, and of England, Scotland, France and Italy, as well as of other countries. The plays display in-depth knowledge of books, places, people, plants and gardens all over Europe. His knowledge of the towns of northern Italy—of Padua, Verona, Milan, Mantua, and especially Venice—is highly accurate, and suggests personal knowledge of the atmosphere, people, architecture and topography of these places; yet it was not until after Shakespeare had written his Italianate plays that any English books on Italy, where he might otherwise have gleaned some (but not all) of the information, were published.

How did Shakespeare become so knowledgeable about and influenced by the Italian Comedia dell’ Arte?

The comic parts of many Shakespeare plays, such as *Love’s Labour’s Lost*, show a strong influence from the Comedia dell’ Arte, indicating that the author almost certainly had some direct knowledge and experience of that form of art. Yet Shakespeare would have had to have visited either Italy or France, where the Italian Comedia dell’ Arte was being performed, in order to witness it.

Why do the Shakespeare plays contain so many political discourses, arguments and questions, demonstrating not only a personal interest but a good grasp of the issues involved in English politics?

The Shakespeare plays contain many political discourses, arguments and questions, demonstrating that the author was clearly concerned about English politics and was both knowledgeable and well-versed in its intricacies and power play. *Coriolanus*, for instance, is a striking example of Shakespeare’s concern of the role of the aristocrat in a democratic state.

Other contemporaries of Shakespeare had also taken Plutarch's *Life of Coriolanus* as a basis for an open discussion of politics, as did Shakespeare for his play, but none show such a comprehensiveness of the issues involved as does Shakespeare.

From what is known about the actor Will Shakspeare, how is it that the Shakespeare plays and poems are so full of profound and highly educated philosophy?

The Shakespeare plays and poems are saturated with philosophical concepts, most of them of immense profundity, which are still relevant and still challenge us today. The plays show that the author had a profound understanding and knowledge of human nature and psychology, and of the Bible, the Cabala, the works of Hermes and the Platonic and Neoplatonic writers, and of the classical myths and their meanings. Furthermore, in the plays the author makes it abundantly clear that he considers knowledge, real knowledge, to be of vital importance to the human being, and that such knowledge is equated with light, whilst its lack (*i.e.* ignorance) is equated with darkness. He is also somewhat of a revolutionary in his philosophy concerning women and marriage, his heroines being highly educated and cultured women, and arranged marriages for money, or any marriage in which the bride is treated as her husband's chattel, being satirised over and over again. Love, practised as mercy and charitableness, is his great teaching.

Where did Shakespeare acquire his profound knowledge of the Ancient Mysteries, upon which he based the underlying structures, rhythms and meanings of his plays, and his metaphysics?

All Shakespeare's comedies and tragedies are mysteries, and at least some of the histories. Their underlying structures are deliberately based upon the alchemical sequence of steps or stages that form the process of life which takes place within successive time cycles, and which were taught by means of drama and various training methods in the ancient mystery schools—Roman, Greek, Orphic, Egyptian, Judaic, British and Christian. The difference between the comedies and tragedies is that in the former the evolutionary or initiatory path of love is followed, whereas in the tragedies love is either suppressed or absent, and tragic hurt and moral regression results, until love is expressed in some way as a saving grace. The 'worlds' of Neoplatonic, Hermetic, Cabalistic and Christian philosophy are represented in the plays, and the nature and working of the gods, goddesses and spirits are based on esoteric principles taught in these various mysteries.

How is it that the Shakespeare plays show such an unusually detailed knowledge of nature as well as of human beings?

To most people who have read or heard the work of Shakespeare, it should be clear that the author was a lover of nature: not just as someone who experienced and enjoyed nature but also as one who studied, understood and knew nature intimately. In his works Shakespeare refers to over one hundred and fifty varieties of flowers alone, wild and cultivated, and to over sixty kinds of birds, both legendary and real, about which he displays an intimate and detailed observation. He often uses examples from nature to describe the nature of human beings. His outdoor settings show his passion for and experience of both gardens and wild places—but particularly gardens, parkland and forest such as only the rich, noble or privileged could afford and own.

Why does the Shakespeare Monument at Stratford-upon-Avon refer to Shakespeare as being like Nestor, Socrates and Virgil?

The inscription on the Shakespeare Monument at Stratford-upon-Avon sums up much of the evidence concerning the author Shakespeare which is found from a study of the plays. However, by doing so it also adds its own enigma concerning the authorship, which is a question needing to be answered. For instance, in the first line of the inscription Shakespeare is likened specifically to three famous people of antiquity: in judgement to Pylus, in genius to Socrates and in art to Maro. To be like them implies more than just having good judgement, genius and artistic ability. There could have been others selected for comparison, or none at all, so why these three? Clearly they are meant to tell us something about Shakespeare.

What it suggests is that the author Shakespeare was a renowned statesman, judge, and adviser of kings and princes like Nestor; a celebrated orator and philosopher like Socrates; and a supreme poet, scholar and high initiate like Virgil. None of these personages were known publicly to have written any plays. However, the choice of two of these personages provides the added inference that Shakespeare wrote plays and poems pseudonymously under the mask of someone else, as reputedly did both Socrates and Virgil.

All of this is confirmed by the evidence in the Shakespeare poems and plays, and therefore makes it clear why it was these three highly eminent historical persons who were chosen for a description of the author Shakespeare. Moreover, the evidence of the Monument, coupled with that of the plays and poems themselves, suggest that there were two Shakespeares—the author and the actor, with the latter masking the former and ‘playing his part’. The inscription helps to confirm exactly who that author was.

If the author Shakespeare was not the actor Shakespeare, then who was he?

To sum up, the true author Shakespeare was someone who was not only exceptionally inspired and talented but well educated, with access to a wide range of books and manuscripts written in classical, foreign and English languages, some of them extremely rare, and who possessed an extraordinary mind and memory capable of acquiring and retaining an encyclopaedic knowledge. Either he was a visitor to various countries and courts of Europe, or he was privy to wide-ranging, detailed and often little-known intelligence about them. He was a celebrated philosopher, a supreme poet, an initiate of the mysteries, a classical scholar of high standing who was able to read and write Latin and Greek with facility, an alumnus of Cambridge University, a lawyer and member of Gray’s Inn, a renowned orator, an adviser of kings and princes, a judge, a parliamentarian and statesman, a courtier, and above all a master of the English language as well as fluent in French, Italian and Spanish.

There is, in fact, only one person, and one person only, who fits this description—and that person is Francis Bacon.

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