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**WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE'S MYSTERY
- THE THEORIES ABOUT HIS EXISTENCE -**

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ABSTRACT

William Shakespeare is known for being one of the most relevant writers in the history of English literature. His ability to write, his vocabulary and his knowledge of the world, among others, have made of his plays a treasure in the world's literature of all times. His perfection in writing is precisely the reason why critics have questioned over time whether William Shakespeare was the real author of the plays attributed to him. Who was William Shakespeare? Or who was the author writing behind the name of William Shakespeare? Several Anti-Stratfordians, those who deny Shakespeare's authorship, have suggested their candidates and have explained the reasons why they are totally plausible Shakespeares. Nonetheless, there are critics who remain faithful to the theory that William Shakespeare did exist and that the only real author of the plays attributed to him was Shakespeare himself. This paper focuses on these two points of view about William Shakespeare's existence, trying to approach the truth about the authorship of Shakespeare's plays.

Key words: Shakespeare, authorship controversy, Anti-Stratfordians, Stratfordians

RESUM

William Shakespeare és conegut per ser un dels autors més rellevants de la història de la literatura anglesa. La seva habilitat en l'escriptura, el seu vocabulari i el seu coneixement del món, entre d'altres, han fet de les seves obres un tresor de la literatura universal de tots els temps. És, de fet, la genialitat de les seves obres la raó per la qual crítics s'han anat qüestionant si realment William Shakespeare va escriure les obres que se li han atribuït. Qui va ser William Shakespeare? O qui va ser l'autor que va escriure darrera el nom de William Shakespeare? Alguns Anti-Stratfordians, que neguen l'autoria de Shakespeare, ja han suggerit els seus candidats i han explicat les raons per les quals aquests podrien ser perfectament Shakespeare. No obstant, hi ha crítics que segueixen fidels a la teoria de que William Shakespeare sí que va existir i que l'únic autor de les obres que se l'hi atribueixen és ell mateix. Aquest treball es centra en aquests dos punts de vista sobre l'existència de William Shakespeare, tractant d'aproximar-se a la veritat sobre l'autoria de les seves obres.

Paraules clau: William Shakespeare, controvèrsia d'autoria, Anti-Stratfordians, Stratfordians

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1. INTRODUCTION

William Shakespeare was born in Stratford-Upon-Avon in 1564, and nowadays is considered to be one of the greatest playwrights of all times. There are many crucial writers in the history of English literature that, unfortunately, may not be known for the majority of the people, but it is almost impossible to find somebody who has never heard the name of William Shakespeare. He is taught in schools, his plays are still performed in theatres worldwide, his books continue to be printed and there are always scholars writing and publishing essays about him. As Harold Bloom puts it, “if any author has become a mortal God, it must be Shakespeare” (3). Shakespeare seems to be the author by excellence that is never going to be old-fashioned, and not by chance. His vision and knowledge of the world, his ability in writing, his vocabulary, the topics he deals with in his plays and the manner to do so have made of his plays a treasure in the world’s literature of all times. Here it is necessary to stand out the importance of his vocabulary legacy in the English language, as he coined about 1.500 words, and many expressions used nowadays appeared for the first time in his plays. Therefore, it is not surprising that William Shakespeare is regarded a genius. Nevertheless, it is because of his greatness that a huge authorship controversy has emerged. All those qualities and merits are the reason why critics have begun to question whether William Shakespeare was the real author of the plays attributed to him. Who was William Shakespeare? Or in other words, who was the author writing behind the name of William Shakespeare? If there was one other than Shakespeare himself, what would be the reason why someone with such writing skills decided to write behind a mask?

Many questions started to emerge, but nobody seemed to know for sure the correct answer. Nonetheless, Anti-Stratfordians, those who deny Shakespeare’s existence, have been attempting to unveil the real identity of William Shakespeare. They have been theorizing about all possible candidates who could have been writing secretly behind the pseudonym of Shakespeare. In fact, there are critics who claim they have enough evidence to prove that the man of Stratford we all consider a genius has never really existed. Some of the suggested plausible authors are: Sir Francis Bacon, Roger Manners, Edward de Vere, Christopher Marlowe, Henry Neville, Ben Jonson, William Stanley or even the Queen Elisabeth I herself. However, not all Anti-Stratfordians agree on the same candidate. Nevertheless, there are critics who refuse to question whether William Shakespeare wrote the plays attributed to him. The so-called Stratfordians, which are sometimes referred as Pro-Shakespeareans, defend that there is no doubt Shakespeare did really exist and that he was the only one who wrote all his

works. They claim that the discredits of Shakespeare authorship are only conspiracy theories. Therefore, this paper approaches this controversy by analysing the two sides of the coin. On the one hand, it will be discussed the Anti-Stratfordian position, together with the most plausible proposed candidates. They are Christopher Marlowe, Edward de Vere, Sir Francis Bacon, Sir Henry Neville, and Ben Jonson. On the other hand, it will be illustrated the Stratfordian position and what the scholars defending this theory say to discredit the Anti-Stratfordians.

2. WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

William Shakespeare was born in Stratford-Upon-Avon in 1564. At that time there was not a register of births, the only way of being enrolled in the town was through baptism. As it is registered in Stratford-Upon-Avon documents, William Shakespeare was baptized on Wednesday 26th of April of 1564 in the Holy Trinity Church. Usually baptism took place three days after the birth, so it is assumed that the boy was born the Sunday 23th. His father was John Shakespeare, who as a young man learned “the trade of whitawer – a tanner of white leather – and glover” and later on “developed other business interests, too, including logically enough, wool-dealing” (Wells 1). His mother, of whom so little is known, was Mary Arden, and came from a middle-class rural family. So, it cannot be denied that Shakespeare was raised in a well-off family. When he was seven, he went to the Stratford Grammar School where he was taught Latin, the Bible and the Classics. It is not certain what he did when he left the school. In 1582, when William Shakespeare was 18, married a 26 years-old woman called Anne Hathaway, with whom he had three children. Some scholars believe that Shakespeare started with his father’s business, reason why he had to go to London. It could have been due to those visits that he started to be in contact with the world of theatre. These are only speculations because the last register before moving to London was the birth of his twins in 1585, and nothing is known until Robert Greene made a reference to the ‘Shak-scene’ in *Groatsworth of Wit* in 1592. Nevertheless, it is understood that he may have become involved with the theatre in the 1580s.

In 1593 Shakespeare wrote his poem of *Venus and Adonis*, and one year later wrote *The Rape of Lucrece*, both of them dedicated to his patron the Earl of Southampton. According to Wells, thanks to Greene’s allusion to Shakespeare and his play *Henry VI*, it can

be deduced that this was his first play. It was on this period when he entered the Lord Chamberlain's Company, for whom he would be an actor and playwright. In 1599, Shakespeare's company built his well-known theatre, The Globe. Unfortunately, no original manuscript of the Shakespearean plays remains, but in 1623 it was published the *First Folio*, containing an amount of 36 plays, half of them exposed for the first time. The original title of the *First Folio* is *Mr William Shakespeares Comedies, Histories, and Tragedies*, making reference to the three genres of the playwright. *Romeo and Juliet*, *King Lear*, *Macbeth* or *Othello*, are some of his most popular Tragedies. Some of his Comedies are *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *Much Ado about Nothing*, or his well-known *The Comedy of Errors*, and *Henry IV* or *Richard III* are examples of Histories. Nevertheless, it must not be forgotten that he also wrote the Sonnets, even though they are less recognized. William Shakespeare's plays have been crucial in the English literature because they satirize some of the Elizabethan era conflicts. They also show mastery of foreign languages and countries, and many other topics such as science, law and politics, among others. He has also lent the English language an important legacy of vocabulary and expressions; he has coined among one and two thousand words, approximately. Words such as *idiom*, *scientific*, *numerous* or *function*, are some of Driver's examples of words coined by Shakespeare (23).

William Shakespeare died in 1616, at the age of fifty-three. He was buried in his home town Stratford, in the Holy Trinity Church. On his gravestone it can be read:

Good friend for Iesus sake forbear
To dig the dust enclosed here:
Blest be ye man yt spares thes stones
And curst be he yt moves my bones.

3. THE ANTI-STRATFORDIAN POSITION

It is well-known that William Shakespeare is recognized as one of the greatest English authors of all times. However, it is precisely because of his outstanding achievement that critics have begun to question whether Shakespeare was the real author of the plays attributed to him. The authorship controversy emerged at the end of the 18th century, when "the Rev. James Wilmot (1726-1808), a clergyman who lived near Stratford" was not able "to find a single book belonging to Shakespeare, despite searching in every old private library within a

50-mile radius of Stratford” (James and Rubinstein 33-4). Some scholars started to investigate the subject in more detail and failed to establish connections between what is known about the playwright and the magnitude of his work. The Anti-Stratfordians are, thus, the ones who deny that the man William Shakespeare was the author of the works attributed to ‘Shakespeare’. What led the Anti-Stratfordians adopt this position is, according to James and Rubinstein:

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. (3)

Therefore, it can be stated that the three reasons why people can discredit Shakespeare are: his lack of education, the lack of documentation and the failure to connect his life with his work.

William Shakespeare was born in a small town where the vast majority of inhabitants were illiterate. His father John Shakespeare “seems to have had at most only partial literacy [...] he probably knew how to read, but throughout his life he only signed his name with a mark” and his mother Mary Shakespeare “also could not write her name, though she too might have acquired some minimal literacy” (Greenblatt 24). Even though in the 15th and 16th centuries the educational system improved considerably, the period of time when children went to school was fairly short. It is assumed by scholars such as Greenblatt that Shakespeare started at school at the age of seven, as it was the established age to do so in that period, and left it among his twelve or forties, approximately. They agree that he went to the Stratford Free Grammar School, where he was taught Latin, learnt the Bible and was introduced to the classics. It is necessary to point out that schooling in Stratford was accessible for everyone, as the Grammar School was accorded to be a free school in 1482, thanks to one of its chaplains. Therefore, children’s background was not an obstacle to be educated. Nevertheless, there is no evidence that he did attend this school as it is believed. Having said that, what is more relevant is that there are no records proving that Shakespeare received education more than the one of his school town.

There is no evidence that Shakespeare went to university. According to Driver, “The playwrights who supplied plays for the late sixteenth century theatres were ostensibly young graduates of Oxford or Cambridge [...] A notable exception was Shakespeare, who, although

poor, is not known to have received a university education” (13). Even though he never received knowledge from any university, Shakespeare is known for being one of the best writers of all times. His works demonstrate a wide knowledge of the classics, a wide knowledge of the world, and a powerful command of the English language. Driver states:

F. Max Müller (Science of Language, Vol. 1, p. 378) estimated that Shakespeare used about 15.000 words, - more than any other English author, ancient or modern; or almost twice the number used by John Milton, who is known to have had classical education. Many of the words used by Shakespeare and contemporary writers were coined words or words newly adapted from Latin and other foreign languages and hence not in common usage. (23)

Therefore, the works of the playwright can be regarded as a gift for the English language. He coined about 1.500 words and moreover, lots of expressions used nowadays appeared for the first time in his works. How can, thus, a man who has only learnt some Latin grammar and knew so little about literature and culture, and moreover, who received only five years of schooling approximately, could have written such works? James and Rubinstein also pointed out that, even if he could understand Latin, “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 (5), which is undoubtedly true.

Shakespeare works are relevant not only for its language but also for the abundant knowledge of literature they show. Plays such as *The Comedy of Errors* demonstrate that the playwright controlled very well the classics, as it establishes references to Ovid, Horace or Virgil, among others. Moreover, this particular play, together with *The Tempest*, is presented according to the Aristotelian unities (plays obeying a pattern of unities of time, place and action). *Venus and Adonis* and *The Rape of Lucrece* are also stories containing reference of the classics. Therefore, with no doubt whoever was writing behind the name of ‘Shakespeare’ had to be a literate person; at least, someone who had done a substantial amount of reading. However, as James and Rubinstein claim, there is no evidence that the man known as William Shakespeare “ever owned a book” (2) or could have been in touch with books as his hometown “did not possess a library, bookshop or newspaper” (6). Examples such as *Henry IV* and *Richard III* demonstrate awareness of the royalty and nobility, together with all his other works proving knowledge of science, law, or politics. “Also, some of the allusions and incidents in the plays are based on books written in Latin, French, Italian, or Spanish and not yet translated into English at the time when Shakespeare was writing his plays” (Driver 22). For instance, Driver explains that is believed that *Two Gentlemen of Verona* was based on a

Spanish pastoral romance called *Diana Enamorada* or *La Diana* (1559), written by Jorge de Montemayor. This text was not translated into English until 1598, which means that Shakespeare had to read it, inevitably, in its original language. Where could the man from Stratford learn foreign languages? And not only languages, Shakespeare also showed mastery of foreign countries such as France and Italy in lots of plays (*Henry IV*, *Othello*, etc), while “there is no evidence that he left England” (Driver 37). Taking into account that he was not from the upper-class, and he made his living performing as an actor, where could he acquire all that knowledge? Moreover, Driver adds that “he did not have the time to write in such detail and such length” (37). It is impossible, thus, that a man who received only the basic education and whose parents were illiterate, could have done so.

Wells assumes that there is not a single document confirming that the man recognized as William Shakespeare went to the Grammar School, as there are no records previous to 1800. Nevertheless, even if it is taken for granted that he did go to that school, there is nothing documented corroborating that he ever went to university. Nothing is known of his first eighteen years of life, from his baptism until he married Anne Hathaway in 1582. Wells explains that from that time until he was first mentioned as an actor in 1592, there are only registers of the birth of his children. The period between he left school and got married, and the period between the birth of his twins and was recognized as an actor, are known as Shakespeare’s ‘lost years’. To a certain extent, it could be understood that lack of documentation about his life. However, what is difficult to believe is that there are no documents certifying that the Shakespearean plays were in effect written by the man known as William Shakespeare. There is not a single surviving manuscript of any of his works. Moreover, at that time it was common for the writers to send letters to each other, but not a single letter is preserved to proof that Shakespeare wrote to his contemporaries and vice versa. The only documents found in relation to Shakespeare’s life are “six known signatures, all on legal documents [...] and have nothing to do with Shakespeare’s life as a playwright and poet, and cast no light on his career as an author” (James and Rubinstein 25). It has to be taken into account as well that those signatures are not even equal, as the name is spoken differently: Shakspere, Shakespear, etc. which is suspicious. Fortunately, his will is conserved. It would have been normal that a playwright with such a production left a legacy to his family, but not even a book is mentioned in the will. As Twain puts it:

It named in minute detail every item of property he owned in the world – houses, lands, sword, silver-gilt bowl, and so on – all the way down to his “second-best bed” and its furniture [...] Books were much more precious than swords and silver-gilt

bowls and second-best beds in those days, and when a departing person owned one he gave it a high place in his will. The will mentioned not a play, not a poem, not an unfinished literary work, not a scrap of manuscript of any kind. (31-3)

James and Rubinstein therefore concluded that “there are no known anecdotes, letters or biographical material of any kind from Shakespeare’s lifetime which unequivocally state that the man who was born at Stratford in 1564 and died there in 1616 wrote the plays” (205).

Twain also made the point that when William Shakespeare died, nobody seemed to notice or care at all, in contrast to some of his contemporaries such as Francis Bacon or Ben Jonson. The death of the Stratford man was lived as a death of any other ordinary actor; “his death was not even an event in the little town of Stratford” (Twain 56). It was after his death that some interest for his works started to appear. In 1619 it was published a collection of Shakespearean works which scholars have called the *False Folio*. Four years later, in 1623, it was published the *First Folio*, containing a sum of thirty-six plays, which eighteen of them were previously printed as *Quartos*. Therefore, the *First Folio* is assumed to be the first work printed containing all the works of William Shakespeare, that is to say, what relates the plays to the man of Stratford. The persons in charge of the publication were John Heminges and Henry Condell, who became co-editors after Richard Burbage’s death. What calls the Anti-Stratfordians’ attention is the fact that none of the members of Shakespeare’s family had nothing to do with the publication. James and Rubinstein point out that here is no evidence that anybody of his family owned a copy of the *folios*, as there is no evidence of a relation of any kind between them and the publication. It is not strange, taking into account that no work, no literary legacy, was mentioned in his will. The *First Folio*, together with six signatures on legal documents are the only documentation connecting the works with the man known as Shakespeare. This is the evidence scholars have, the one and only base to build the biography of the author. If it is compared to what is known about all the other contemporaries, it can be assumed that, about William Shakespeare, the famous playwright, nothing is known. Consequently, what is known of him are only myths and legends that have been built up by scholars trying to solve an unsolvable mystery.

Mark Twain was very insistent in his work *Is Shakespeare Dead?* that the biographies historians have written about William Shakespeare are only hypothesis: “they ‘suppose’ that he ‘might’ [have done]” (38-40). He writes:

So far as anybody actually knows and can prove, Shakespeare of Stratford-On-Avon never wrote a play in his life.

So far as anybody knows and can prove, he never wrote a letter to anybody in his life.

So far as any one knows and can prove, Shakespeare of Stratford wrote only one poem during his life. This one is authentic [...] He commanded that his work of art be engraved upon his tomb and he was obeyed. There it abides to this day. This is it:

Good friend for Iesus sake forbear
To dig the dust enclosed heare:
Blest be ye man yt spares thes stones
And curst be he yt moves my bones.

(35-6)

The lack of documentation attributing the plays to Shakespeare can be used to prove that it was not the man from Stratford who wrote the plays. Therefore, it can be assumed that another person, someone who unquestionably received a better education, was writing behind the name of Shakespeare. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries it was completely normal to write anonymously or behind a pseudonym, because taking into account that “freedom of speech and of the press was unknown in Elizabethan England [...], Many Elizabethan books and pamphlets were published without the name of the authors” (Driver 16-8). This allowed the writer the freedom to write about any issue without the fear of reprisals. Taking into account that the works of Shakespeare allude the Crown and satirize the Elizabethan period concerns, it is absolutely plausible that the sign ‘Shakespeare’ would have been only a pseudonym to hide the identity of the real author. Driver emphasises that it was common to do so: “As expressed in the address to the reader by the author of *The Anatomy of Melancholy* (London, 1621), attributed to Robert Burton, “I shroud myself under his name (Denicritus)... in an unknown habit to assume a little more liberty and freedom of unknown speech” (p.17 of the Philadelphia, Pa. [1856] reprint)” (19). Therefore, it can be assumed that ‘Shakespeare’ was just a pseudonym. Lots of candidates have emerged claiming to be the authors of the plays attributed to Shakespeare: William Stanley, Roger Manners, Mary Sidney, even some critics who suggest that it was the Queen Elisabeth I herself. Nevertheless, the most plausible candidates, and the ones discussed in this paper, are: Christopher Marlowe, Edward de Vere, Sir Francis Bacon, Henry Neville and Ben Jonson.

3.1. *Christopher Marlowe*

Christopher Marlowe was born in Canterbury in 1564, the same year as Shakespeare. He went to the school in Cambridge and then was sent to the University of Cambridge. Thomas and Tydeman state that “of that astounding generation of young dramatists who

effected the transformation of English playwriting during the 1580s and 1590s Marlowe has a claim to be regarded as the best educated” and point out the writer’s “intellectual calibre” (4). In contrast with Shakespeare, who had not had any access to books nor libraries, Marlowe had all the literary sources needed to nourish his knowledge. Despite his father was a shoemaker, as Thomas and Tydeman explain, thanks to his headmaster John Gresshop, who owned “a representative range of texts in both vernacular and the classical tongues” (5), he could have learnt English, Latin and Greek. In addition, Marlowe could have been in touch with “the principal ancient and modern authors, including the philosophers Plato and Cicero, the poets Homer, Virgil and Juvenal, the historians Thucydides and Julius Caesar, and the dramatists Aristophanes, Sophocles, Plautus and Terrence” (5). He was recognized for his great amount of Romantic poetry he produced, achieving to be “the leading playwright” (Pogue 89) at a time when Shakespeare had not even started in the theatre world.

Theoretically, Shakespeare and Marlowe met each other in London, as both of them were immersed in writing. Furthermore, it is believed that both authors could have collaborated in some plays such as the well-known *Henry VI*. Apart from being born in the same year and having become friends, some scholars have observed similarities between both authors that have made them believe that the man from Stratford never wrote a play, and thus ‘Shakespeare’ was only a pen name used by Marlowe. However, Marlowe was stabbed to death when he was twenty-nine years old, so, the authorship theory seems impossible taking into account that Shakespearean works continued to emerge after his death. Nevertheless, Calvin Hoffman did a deep research to prove that Christopher Marlowe was the writer of the Shakespearean plays, and published the book *The Murder of the Man who was Shakespeare*. He found the explanation: “after thirteen years of research he became convinced that Marlowe did not die in a fight in 1593, but that while some unlucky substitute was stabbed in his place” (Foakes 270). This theory is based on the fact that Marlowe did not die in 1593 as it was thought, but he sheltered somewhere and continued to write the Shakespearean plays.

3.2. *Edward de Vere*

Edward de Vere, the seventeenth Earl of Oxford is the eldest candidate for the authorship of the Shakespearean works, as he was born in 1550. Educated in St. John’s College in Cambridge, he was awarded two honorary degrees, one from the University of Cambridge and another one from the University of Oxford. His father died when he was young, so was raised by his uncle Arthur Golding, one of the first translators of Latin into

English. One of his translations is Ovid's metamorphoses, so the young boy would have been in touch with the classics.

Edward de Vere was proposed as a candidate for the first time in 1918, in *Shakespeare Identified in Edward de Vere, the Seventeenth Earl of Oxford* by J. Thomas Looney, who soon received support from other scholars such as Freud. Driver explains that "he made a list of characteristics attributable, in his opinion, to the individual, and then proceeded to find a man to fit his specifications. His search led him to Edward de Vere" (20). If it is so, it must be assumed that "they were written earlier than is generally supposed" (Clark 2). The Earl of Oxford spent time of his youth in Italy, where he acquired the passion for the country that later on would portray on his plays. He was a friend of Lord Chamberlain, the leader of Lord Chamberlain's Company, "one of the most important troupes of actors which appeared at Court" (Clark 4). Moreover, Clark points out that Edward de Vere was the favourite actor of the Queen Elizabeth I, and therefore, the Court should keep records of the plays. In *Hidden Allusions in Shakespeare's plays*, Clark compared the plays of the Court's archive and established a connection between them and the works of Shakespeare, for instance:

The historie of Error = The Comedy of Errors.

The historye of Titus and Gisippus = Titus Andronicus

The history of Portio and Demorantes = The Merchant of Venice. (5-6)

Shakespeare's Sonnets have also been used to demonstrate that their real author was Edward de Vere. Critics believe that poems in one way or another have to express the feelings of the author, and the Sonnets in particular, express the love for another man. Richard M. Waugaman remarks the bisexuality of the Sonnets, and relates them to "de Vere's bisexuality and probable love affair with the Earl of Southampton". According to his theory, the Earl of Southampton "was the 'Fair Youth' of the first 126 Sonnets. He was 23 years younger than de Vere" (858). Waugaman confirms his point claiming that John Benson's 1640 edition pretended to hide the bisexuality of the Sonnets: "in addition to omitting eight sonnets, Benson changed the pronouns to make all the sonnets heterosexual love poems" (864). He points out that maybe the Earl of Southampton could have asked Benson to do so in order to hide his love affair with the writer. Moreover, "Southampton may have also influenced the editors of Shakespeare's 1623 *First Folio* to omit de Vere's name, and instead to promulgate the myth that Shakespeare of Stratford was the author" (Waugaman 864). The last reference Waugaman mentions to relate Shakespeare with Edward de Vere, is his Bible:

Recent scholarship has demonstrated striking connection between those Biblical passages most frequently cited in Shakespeare's works and the hundreds of annotations in de Vere's copy of the Bible [...] there is a direct parallel between the number of times Shakespeare quotes a given passage, and the likelihood that de Vere marked that same passage in his Bible. (859)

3.3. *Sir Francis Bacon*

Sir Francis Bacon was a philosopher and writer born in 1561, in York House. As Dawkins puts it, "together with his brother Anthony, he was given a privileged private education by the best teachers of the time" (1). At the age of twelve he entered the University of Cambridge, where he received all the necessary knowledge to be the genius behind the Shakespearean works. He entered Gray's Inn, together with his brother, and later on was sent to Paris to complete his education. He became a lawyer and entered the Parliament. This fact reinforces the Baconian authorship, if it is taken into account that the writer of the works was very familiar with the law. According to the Baconians, Sir Francis Bacon would have used 'Shakespeare' as a pseudonym because "no courtier or Member of Parliament would write plays under his own name" (James and Rubinstein 35).

James and Rubinstein describe two particular findings that have lead scholars to position in favour of the Baconian theory. The first one is the Northumberland Manuscript, which contains the names of Shakespeare and Bacon, among others. Above the document, on the right side it is written: 'Mr Francis Bacon of tribute or giving what is dew', but the meaning has not been discovered yet. The second one is a painting that theoretically portrays the scene of Venus and Adonis "and contains a picture of a boar similar to the boar's head used in his crest" (36). In addition to their findings, Driver also mentions an archive of "fifty sheets in handwriting of Francis Bacon, comprising over 1.600 separate entries, such as phrases, Biblical verses, proverbs, quotations from classical sources, and expressions in other languages, such as Latin and Italian" (74) that could have been Bacon's annotations to write the plays of Shakespeare. Moreover, the critic also suggests that Bacon, who was "much interested in the language of symbolism" (132), could have left clues in his works in order to leave a mark of who was the real author writing behind Shakespeare. First of all, he states that the sentence of *Love's Labour's Lost*, Act V, Sc. I "Page: What is Ab speld backward, with the horn on his hand?" (Driver 135) hides Bacon's name: "[it] refers to Bacon, either as the English *Ba horne* or *Ba cone* (cone being the shape of a horn)" (Driver 135).

Nevertheless, Driver has also claimed that there is the possibility that the author of the Shakespearean works was not Francis Bacon but his brother Anthony. Anthony Bacon received the same education as his brother, and spent time in foreign countries such as France and Italy, so he also fit Shakespeare in terms of education. Driver accounts for this possibility with the same passage of *Love's Labour's Lost*. It continues:

Page. What is Ab speld backward, with the horn on his head?

Pedagogue. Ba, puericia with a horne added.

Page. Ba most seely Sheepe, with a horne; you heare his learning.

Peda. Quis, quis, thou Consonant?

Page. The last of the five Vowels if You repeat them, or the first if I.

Peda. I will repeat them: a e I.

Page. The Sheepe, the other two concludes it o u. (Driver 135)

In order to decode the meaning hidden on this passage, it is necessary the following cryptic crossword:

	A	E	I	O	V
A	b	<u>f</u>	l	p	t
E	c	g	m	q	u
I	d	h	<u>n</u>	r	x
O	e	i	o	s	<u>a</u>

Driver explains:

ae gives us *f*, *ou* gives us *a*, and the capitalization of and emphasis on *I* implies that it is different from the other four vowels, so we shall use it as a connective and apply it to both the left hand column and the row across the top to give *n*. So we have *f n a*. The *n* is used because of its similarity in sound to *and*. The meaning of the whole passage is, therefore, as follows:

What does Ab stand for? (speld backward, with a horne added)

Ba cone or *Ba cornu*.

Quis, quis? (Which Bacon?)

F n (and) *A* (Francis and Anthony) (136)

If it is taken into account the aforementioned symbolism in *Love's Labour's Lost*, 'Bacon' could make reference either to him or his brother. However, Driver's preferred candidate

seems to be Anthony because of his relation with the name of Shakespeare: “Some of the early poetry of Anthony Bacon has come down to us under the name of ‘Shepherd Tony’” (53) which later on would be transformed into ‘Shakespeare’. His position is reinforced by the fact that Anthony Bacon collaborated with Ferdinando Stanley, the man who Driver believes to be writing behind Christopher Marlowe. At the same time, it is known that Marlowe collaborated with Shakespeare, so it is completely plausible to claim that Anthony Bacon was in fact William Shakespeare. Moreover, the critic claims that *Venus and Adonis* was the result of a “friendly rivalry” between Anthony Bacon and Ferdinando Stanley (66).

3.4. *Sir Henry Neville*

Sir Henry Neville (1564) was a politician and diplomatist from Berkshire. He “was educated at Merton College, Oxford, where he was a brilliant student. He knew many foreign languages and owned a large library” explain James and Rubinstein (53). He had enough knowledge of literature and languages to have written the works of Shakespeare. Moreover, he visited many countries in Europe such as Italy and was named Ambassador to France. He became a politician, so was trained by the law. Therefore, there is no doubt Neville perfectly fits the profile of the playwright. Moreover, if it is taken into account that he became a Member of the Parliament and the criticism in Shakespearean works, it is totally plausible that he had to use a pseudonym to hide his identity. James and Rubinstein, the scholars who wrote *The Truth Will Out: Unmasking the Real Shakespeare* supporting Neville as the author of Shakespeare’s works, believe that:

When Henry Neville was attending the theatre around 1589-91, with an eye to becoming a writer, but needing the cloak of anonymity he must somehow have been introduced to the young aspiring actor from the provinces [...] here was exactly what he had been looking for: a well-placed front man and factotum on the London stage. (93-4)

During Elisabeth I’s reign he was imprisoned in the Tower of London as he was involved in the Essex Rebellion, and was not released until James I ascended the throne in 1603. One of the most acclaimed documents proving that Henry Neville was Shakespeare is, according to James and Rubinstein, the Tower Notebook. This notebook was written by Henry Neville himself during his stay in the Tower, and “consists in large page of extracts copied from the historical sources held at the Tower of London concerning ‘personal services’ afforded to the kings of England down the ages” (44). The experiences lived during

his imprisonment and his direct contact with documents of the court, could have nourished the author to write plays such as *Henry VIII*. James and Rubinstein explain:

Within the pages of that Notebook, there is also mention of ‘three-fours’ and choirs ‘trilling’, which is also described in the stage directions to Anne Boleyn’s coronation in Act IV, Sc. I of *Henry VIII*:

THE ORDER OF THE CORONATION.

- 1 A lively flourish of trumpets.
- 2 Then, two JUDGES.
- 3 LORD CHANCELLOR, with the purse and mace before him.
- 4 CHORISTERS singing. Music. (50)

Another document that directly connects Henry Neville with William Shakespeare is the Northumberland Manuscript. Like Sir Francis Bacon, Neville’s name appears at the top of the manuscript as ‘Nevill’. Nonetheless, as explained before, no researcher has discovered the meaning of the document.

3.5. *Ben Jonson*

Ben Jonson was born in Westminster in 1573. When he finished the elementary school, he did not go to the University like all the other candidates, but worked as a bricklayer with his stepfather. Nevertheless, his literary legacy proves he was well-educated. Johnston explains that it could be due to the fact that “Jonson studied at Westminster school under William Camden, one of the finest scholars of the day” and later on Jonson himself “showed in written tributes to his master how great he felt his debt to be” (xxiv). After working as a bricklayer, he joined the army and later on became an actor. Jonson was concerned that plays should be used to satirize the problems of the Elizabethan period, and it was in 1597 when he began to write his own plays: *Every Man in His Humour*, or *The Alchemist*, among others. In the theatre world he became a good friend of William Shakespeare.

The connection between Jonson and Shakespeare was reinforced in the publication of the *First Folio*. Ben Jonson wrote the note of the preface, ‘To The Reader’.

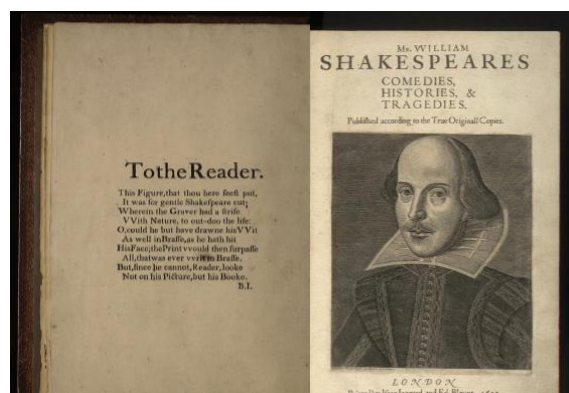


Figure 1
Wikimedia Commons

This note has been interpreted by some scholars as a clue that Jonson gave to unmask Shakespeare, particularly its two last verses: “But, since he cannot, Reader, looke / Not on his picture, but his Booke”. Next to the note, there appears a picture of ‘Mr William Shakespeares’ which Anti-Stratfordians claim that the face of the man suggests a mask. They allude his eyes, saying that it seems to be two eyes looking through a mask willing to be discovered, and they allude the line under his ear to be the border of the mask (see figure 1). Anti-Stratfordians state that Jonson was very insistent on the two last verses of the note asking not to look to the picture but to the book, as if he was giving a hint to make the reader discover the truth. Moreover, Jonson also added in *First Folio* a poem called ‘To the Memory of My Beloved the Author, Mr William Shakespeare and What He Hath Left Us’, and he emphasises that Shakespeare had “small Latin and less Greek”, which can be understood as another clue. George Stevens was the first to claim for Ben Jonson to be the author of the Shakespearean works. His direct relation to the *First Folio* has made him to be, as Greg states, “the only candidate for authorship whose claims have been seriously agreed” (18). He continues:

The most obvious parallel often observed, is between the words of the address, ‘His mind and hand went together: And what he thought, he vttered with that easinesse, that wee haue scarce receiued from him a blot [i.e. erasure] is his papers’ and the passage in Jonson’s Discoveries, ‘I remember, the Players have often mentioned it as an honour to Shakespeare, that in his writing [...] he never blotted out line. (19)

4. THE STRATFORDIAN POSITION

Lots of theories have emerged to discredit Shakespeare as the author of the works attributed to him. The Stratfordians, also called Pro-Shakespeareans, are the ones claiming that the only author of the Shakespearean works is Shakespeare himself. They state that believing Shakespeare was only a mask for some other author to write plays is completely

absurd, and thus the Anti-Stratfordian theories are just conspiracies that make no sense. It is illogical to think that one of the world's greatest writers has never existed and thus, all his biographies have been based on a simple myth.

Scholars who deny Shakespeare to be the real author of his plays make reference to his background, pointing out that his parents were illiterate and that he probably had to join his father's business to help their economy. It is true that lower-class boys did not even attend school as they had to begin to work early, but this is far from being the case of Shakespeare. They claim that Stratford does not have schooling records previous to 1800 and therefore it cannot be known if he really attended school as it is supposed. Anti-Stratfordians have not had taken into account that his was a middle-class family, and as Greenblatt puts it, "in the sixteenth century, bricklayers, wool merchants, glovers, prosperous yeomen – people who had no formal education and could not read or write English, let alone Latin – wanted their sons to be masters of ablativus absolute" (24). Moreover, it must not be forgotten that "for the son of burgesses the education was free up to the age of sixteen" (Halliday 23), so that the young boy received an education cannot be denied. In addition, Edmondson and Wells explains that when he was little he could have been in touch with legends as Robin Hood or King Arthur, which he had access because they were from oral tradition, or because there existed lower-price editions (23). Anti-Stratfordians stand out that Shakespeare did not go to any university, and what he learnt in school was not enough to write those works. As Bate states, their "position begins from the incredulity at the idea of a provincial grammar-school boy being the greatest artistic genius the world has ever seen" (68). Education in the 16th century was completely different as it is nowadays; children went to school mornings and afternoons, six days a week. There is no doubt that the schooling method was much harder. Halliday makes the point that Stratford Grammar School "was one of the best schools in the country (24), which Rowse reinforces claiming that "the school at Stratford was taught mostly by M.As from Oxford" (19). Stanley Wells explains how was the education in those free schools: "such schools provided a rigorous education, primarily in oratory, rhetoric, and classical literature, comparable in some areas to that of university graduates in Classics nowadays". Therefore, it can be stated that the Stratford Grammar School "would have provided all the classical knowledge necessary to write the plays and poems of William Shakespeare" (5-6).

Shakespeare's references to the Bible are also totally understandable taking into account that, together with the classics, it was the base of his education. Rowse explains that "morning and afternoon, school opened and closed with a reading from the Bible, a psalm

sung, and prayers – no wonder these are more quoted in the Plays than any other works” (20). His plays, according to Rowse, also include references to the Greek text-book used in his school “Aphthonius”, where appeared the story of Venus and Adonis that later on he would use in his play. So, he mastered the Bible, the classics, and Latin. However, Anti-Stratfordians claim that it may be that those schools supplied the man from Stratford with enough knowledge of Latin, but his plays are not recognized for its use of Latin, but for the use of the English language. Rowse quotes Dr Johnson who, “in the eighteenth century, with no particular knowledge of Elizabethan conditions, testified, ‘I always said Shakespeare had Latin enough to grammaticise his English’” (19). In addition, Bate makes the point that if he “reached the top of the school, he would have found himself composing formal orations and declamations” and “would have been writing in Latin” (10). It is necessary to bear in mind Shakespeare’s ‘lost years’, in which there is no evidence of the playwright’s actions. But he was just an ordinary man, why there should be any records of what he did? Other authors also have blank periods, as when Neville returned “from his continental sojourn” (James and Rubinstein 83). Moreover, as Bate explained “only when he began to make his name as a dramatist did others begin to pay attention to him” (6). Nonetheless, scholars have speculated that Shakespeare could have been a teacher in Stratford, could have travelled abroad, or worked as a lawyer, soldier or sailor, as Wells explained. What is true is what he did during all those years could have helped him to master his English, as well as taught him about foreign countries, among others. This is a relevant fact because his plays are not just based on what he learnt at school or about education in general, but about his own experience. In the Shakespearean works there are not only references to the classics, the Court, foreign countries, etc. In his works there are references to facts that can certainly relate the author of the works with the man of Stratford. Rowse points out that his works make reference to his father business as a wittawer or glove-maker, as well as to gardening issues, above all his famous allusions to flowers (27-8).

Anti-Stratfordians also use the lack of original documentation attributing the works of Shakespeare to the man of Stratford, but it is completely normal because as Anti-Stratfordians themselves claim, most of the plays were published anonymously. According to Driver,

[A] reason for anonymous publication was the freedom it gave the author to ridicule or caricature contemporary society. Many Elizabethan plays, including Shakespeare’s, used incidents and characters from the author’s experience and acquaintance. The cloak of anonymity was a convenient shield to allow the author to express his

opinions freely or to poke fun at people in public life, without fear of retaliation. (18-9)

Consequently, if we do not have documentation attributing the plays to Shakespeare, is not because someone would have decided to write behind his name, as Anti-Stratfordians state, but because the anonymity would have given Shakespeare the freedom to write openly about any topic. In addition, in the Elizabethan period the authorship of the plays was not so relevant as it is nowadays; there was no copyright, so there was no need to have signed documents or to keep the plays' manuscripts. However, there are works such as *Venus and Adonis* or *The Rape of Lucrece* that appeared under the name of William Shakespeare, together with the *post mortem* work, the *First Folio*, published in 1623. Anti-Stratfordians also stand out that the only original documents remaining nowadays are just six Shakespeare's signatures which not even coincide with each other. Even though in the documents found Shakespeare's name appear spelled in many different ways such as Shakspere or Shake-spear, the spelling that has remained is Shakespeare. This spelling is according to Marín, the best one that fits the pronunciation of the surname and moreover, the one that appears in the poems of *Venus and Adonis* and *The Rape of Lucrece* (8).

“Anti-Stratfordians like to say that none of William Shakespeare's letters survive”, explains Jonatan Bate, regarding it as a completely false statement. “Letters addressed by William Shakespeare to Henry Wriothesley, the Earl of Southampton” explains Bate, “may be read at the beginning of the texts of *Venus and Adonis* and *The Rape of Lucrece*” (73). The Earl of Southampton, “to whom the greater part of the Sonnets were addressed and both *Venus and Adonis* and *The Rape of Lucrece* dedicated” (Williamson 54), was Shakespeare's patron. This fact breaks with the Oxfordians theory claiming for Eduard de Vere, the Earl of Oxford, to be the writer behind Shakespeare. It is true that the Sonnets were dedicated to the Earl of Southampton, but Oxfordians fail in thinking that those sonnets are bisexual. Driver points out that in the Elizabethan period, the relationship between men were closer than it is nowadays, and that it was usual for a writer to express his esteem for his patron. So, the Sonnets are not Eduard de Vere's love expression to his supposed beloved Earl of Southampton, but just the result of a writer praising his patron. In addition, it is almost impossible that Eduard de Vere was the author behind Shakespeare because he died in 1604, too soon taking into account that Shakespearean works continue to emerge after his death. Clark explains it stating that it was because the works were written before the established date, but Jonathan Bate refuses her statement pointing out that some later plays are related to historical facts. For example, “*Macbeth* could not have been composed before the

Gunpowder plot of 1605” and *The Tempest* needed to be written “after the publication of Florio’s translation of *Montaigne* in 1603 and the tempest that drove Sir George Somer’s ship to Bermuda in 1609” (66-7). Therefore, as Bate puts it, “how de Vere managed to write these plays from beyond a grave is a profound mystery indeed” (66).

There are other documents or facts that can prove that Shakespeare, the man from Stratford was the author of the works attributed to him. For instance, Williamson explains that, “as the Professor Bentley has put it, Shakespeare ‘had more kinds of connection with the company than any other man: he was an actor, shareholder, patented member, principal playwright and one of the housekeepers of the Globe’” (127). Moreover, it is documented that in 1613 Shakespeare bought a dwelling in Blackfriars, London. “‘No doubt’, writes Mr Halliday, ‘Shakespeare bought the house primarily as an investment, his only property in London, but as it was only a few yards from Blackfriars theatre it looks as though he might have thought of living there for a time’” (Williamson 106). In *The Genius of Shakespeare*, Jonathan Bate makes reference to lots of other sources regarding Shakespeare as a writer. First of all, there is evidence from Shakespeare’s contemporaries such as Ben Jonson, who wrote the initial note of the *First Folio* making a direct reference to Shakespeare. Moreover, his famous poem ‘To the Memory of My Beloved, The Author, Mr William Shakespeare and What He Hath Left Us’ makes reference to Shakespeare as an ‘author’, and his verse ‘Sweet Swan of Avon’ establish a direct link with his hometown Stratford-Upon-Avon (Bate 70). Moreover, “in a manuscript verse-letter addressed to Jonson, Beaumont specifically praised Shakespeare for writing his best lines ‘by the dim light of Nature’, without ‘learning’. Beaumont thus knew Shakespeare the actor and spoke of him as a writer” (Bate 70). Another example given by Jonathan Bate making reference to Shakespeare as a playwright is the work of John Davis of Hereford, a well-known poet of the period, called *Microcosmos* (1603): “Players, I love ye, and your Quality/ [...] and some I love for painting, poesy”. Its dedication shows ‘W.S’ and ‘R.B’, which “there can be no doubt to whom he refers: William Shakespeare and Richard Burbage, the two leading lights of the acting company”. Bate also explains that later on Davis wrote a poem praising his admiration for both men, and “some years later after that he published an epigram addressed to Will Shakespeare, which simultaneously alluded to his acting and praised him as a great playwright” (71). In addition, regarding the manuscripts of the plays, there is also the testimony left by Sir George Buc. He worked with the “licencing of plays” and he had to “enquire after the names of the authors of certain plays that had been published anonymously”, so

On the title-page of his copy of the play *George a Greene, the Pinner of Wakefield*, he scribbled a note to the effect that it was written by a monster who had played the pinner's part himself. 'Teste W. Shakespea' he added: 'according to the testimony of William Shakespeare'. This is hard evidence that Shakespeare was known to be a central figure in the London theatre world, intimately acquainted with the dramatic repertoire". (Bate 71)

Those aforementioned examples are just a selection of Jonathan Bate's numerous mentions of other sources that allude directly to Shakespeare as an author.

There are two more documents appearing at the time when William Shakespeare was building his career as a playwright and actor that are necessary to mention. The first one is the Robert Greene's work *Groatsworth of Wit* (1592), which is considered the "first reference to Shakespeare in print" (Sawyer 75) and the first reference of him in the theatrical world.

Robert Greene wrote:

Yes, trust them (the actors) not; for there is an upstart Crow, beautified with our feathers, that with his Tygers hart wrapt in a Players hyde, supposes he is as well able to bombast out a blanke verse as the best of you: and being an absolute Johannes fac totum, is in his owne conceit the onely Shak-scene in a country". (Driver 15)

So, it is understood that with 'Shake-scene' Greene would make reference to Shakespeare's theatre, mocking and attacking his attempt to reach the works of the greatest authors of that time such as Christopher Marlowe. The second relevant document would be *Willobie His Avis* (1594), an aggrupation of poems written by John Willobie in which appear the letters 'W.S'. Akrigg states:

With these initials 'W.S', and the cluster of references to 'actor', 'player', and 'Comedy', the theory was inevitably advanced that W.S must be William Shakespeare himself – especially since commendatory verses prefaced to *Avisa* mention 'Shakespeare paints poore Lucrece rape', and so supply our earliest reference to Shakespeare's recently published poem. (217)

Some Shakespearean plays can be related with the life of the playwright, as it can be *Hamlet* or *Othello*. On the one hand, Williamson talks about *Hamlet*, claiming that this play was probably written when his father died in 1601: "with its spectacle of surrounding corruption driving a sensitive mind to the edge of suicide, resisted only because of the belief in judgement after death" it could be understood as a "Shakespeare's particular memorial of the events of 1601" (47). Moreover, he adds that when the playwright handed in the manuscript to the company, "took no interest either in its revision or in its production" (47),

probably because he was affected for his father's death. On the other hand, Williamson explains that *Othello*, the character of Ophelia and her story in particular, could have been based on an event that took place in Stratford in 1580. "When he was sixteen [...] a girl names Katharine Hamlett was drowned in the Avon [...] the final verdict was of accidental death [...] but a page of the register, which would help to understand the suggestion of suicide, had been torn out" (51). In addition, Williamson goes further putting *Hamlet* and *Othello* together regarding the setting of both plays: "it is not inconsistent with probability to suppose that the Ophelia scene, as well as the Ghost scene, was written at Stratford in that September of John Shakespeare's funeral, when a walk to the place of Katharine Hamlett's death" (51-2).

Jonathan Bate shows his amazement to the Anti-Stratfordian position and to their proposed candidates to be Shakespeare, claiming how absurd it is to say that the Shakespearean works were written by someone better educated or by someone from the upper-class. If it is so, Ben Jonson can be discarded because he did not go to university either. First of all, Rowse compares Shakespeare to Christopher Marlowe, claiming that he had the same education as Shakespeare with the only difference that Marlowe did go to Cambridge University. Rowse claims that Marlowe "emerged an intellectual, interested in intellectual issues and abstract ideas for their own sake; an astonishingly original and inspired genius" but remarks that "he was not so good a dramatist" (19), as Shakespeare was. He also establishes the point that Shakespeare's plays have nothing to do with the "intellectual issues" taught in university, and that "he would not have been improved by going to the university" (20). Moreover, taking into account that most of the candidates had published works under his own name it does not make sense that they would have written other works through a pseudonym. Bate explains that there is not "a single example of any aristocrat of the sixteenth or seventeenth centuries having expressed regret publicly or privately at not being able to write plays" (69) because it is evident that "amateur aristocrats such as the Earl of Oxford did write plays" (67). However, they were very different from the ones of Shakespeare. There is another reason why those people could have not been the famous playwright, and that is because "countless technicalities of staging in every one of those plays reveal that only a professional theatrical insider could have written them" (67). So, only an actor being inside the world of theatre and knowing perfectly how it works could have written such plays. Rowse gives the example of Christopher Marlowe to make this point clear: "Marlowe was not an actor, and his plays do not have the professional facility of his rival [Shakespeare] who was a professional player" (34). Finally, to end up with the

Stratfordian position and the absurdity of the Anti-Stratfordian's proposed candidates, it is necessary to quote Mark Twain:

Ordinarily, when an unsigned poem sweeps across the continent like a tidal wave, whose roar and boom and thunder are made up of admiration, delight and applause, a dozen obscure people rise up and claim the authorship. Why a dozen, instead of only one or two? One reason is because there's a dozen that are recognizably competent to do that poem. Do you remember "Beautiful Snow"? Do you remember "Rock Me to Sleep, Mother, Rock me to Sleep"? Do you remember "Backward, turn, backward, O Time, in thy flight! Make me a child again just for to-night"? I remember them very well. Their authorship was claimed by most of the grown-up people who were alive at the time, and every claimant had one plausible argument in his favor, at least: to wit, he could have done the authoring; he was competent". (104)

This is exactly what have happened with William Shakespeare and his works.

5. CONCLUSIONS

William Shakespeare, one of the best writers of all times, has been questioned. Whether Shakespeare wrote the works that over centuries have been attributed to him is now a point of discussion. Scholars who discredit Shakespeare, the so called Anti-Stratfordians, are hundred per cent sure that his works were written by somebody else who used 'Shakespeare' as a pseudonym. Writing behind a mask would have allowed the author to talk openly about any issue of the Elizabethan period and satirize it. According to the Anti-Stratfordians, it is impossible that the man from Stratford-Upon-Avon known as William Shakespeare could have written those works. They claim that his education was too poor in order to be able to write that amount of poetry and plays and reach such achievement. His ability to coin new words and expressions, and his knowledge of the classics, law, the Court and many other issues, is a mastery that only a man from university could have done. Christopher Marlowe, Edward de Vere, Sir Francis Bacon, Henry Neville and Ben Jonson are the most acclaimed candidates to be the author of the Shakespearean works. Moreover, the

lack of documentation attributing the Shakespearean works to the man from Stratford is the proof Anti-Stratfordians need to support their argument.

Nevertheless, Stratfordians remain faithful to the figure of Shakespeare, and claim that it is absurd to believe, and moreover to confirm, that someone other than Shakespeare wrote his works. Alluding his education to state that he could not have been a playwright is illogical taking into account that he received the necessary knowledge to do so. Anti-Stratfordians fail in assuming that only a man with university education would have been able to write such works, as this is far from being the case. One of the candidates, Ben Jonson, did not go to university either, and that does not mean that his poems were written by someone else. Stratfordians also stand out that the author of the works, in order to be able to write plays such those ones, had to be necessarily a man from the theatre. Finally, they claim that lack of documentation is normal taking into account that copyright did not exist on the 16th and 17th centuries, and there was no need to sign the original copy or even to preserve it. Therefore, it is understandable that the only Shakespeare's remaining manuscripts are his birth and death, together with legal documents. However, there are other secondary documents relating the man from Stratford to the Shakespearean works: Shakespeare's dedications to his patron, contemporary author's allusions to Shakespeare, references in books, etc. So, for the Stratfordians there is no doubt that the only author of the Shakespearean works is Shakespeare himself.

On this paper has been exposed the two different positions, providing arguments supporting each theory. It is true that Shakespeare only received the basic education, but if that education was the one that helped him write his works, if he received more education or if he was self-educated will never be known. It is up to each person to believe if Shakespearean works are fruit of this education or if it was someone better educated the real author. Unless a new manuscript appears, there are no original documents of the plays, and the sign of William Shakespeare only appears six times on legal documents. However, his name appears on secondary documents such as the *First Folio*, and in many works from other authors. From the available documentation, it is known that there existed a man called William Shakespeare who born in Stratford-Upon-Avon in 1564 and died there in 1616, having married Anne Hathaway with whom he had three children. It is also known that there are plays signed with the name of William Shakespeare, the most important document attributing those plays to 'Shakespeare' being the *First Folio*. If the man from Stratford did write all those works in his own hand or it was someone else who used the name Shakespeare as a pen name, will always remain a mystery if no document appears proving the opposite.

As Mark Twain said, “we cannot say we *know* a thing when that thing has not been proved. *Know* is too strong a word to use when the evidence is not final and absolutely conclusive” (102). Therefore, believing that it was Shakespeare himself who wrote the works or believing that it was another man who wrote them behind the mask of Shakespeare, is up to the reader.

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