



Brenda James and
William D. Rubinstein

UNMASKING
THE REAL SHAKESPEARE
THE TRUTH
WILL OUT

ROUTLEDGE

THE TRUTH WILL OUT

UNMASKING THE REAL SHAKESPEARE

Till now, where Shakespeare authorship is concerned, I have always been a sceptic; it seemed to me [in] attributing Shakespeare to anyone else, one had to make a good case for him not to be the actor from Stratford.

This book has convinced me that whoever wrote the plays, it was not the Stratford man and the case for Sir Henry Neville is by far the strongest I have as yet encountered.

John Julius Norwich, Author, Scholar and Broadcaster

This is a pioneering book. I can't imagine that any scholar or student, actor or enthusiast of Shakespeare will be able to ignore it. 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 university professor and an independent scholar which gave it birth.

Mark Rylance, Actor, Artistic Director Shakespeare's Globe 1996–2005
and Chairman of the Shakespearean Authorship Trust

This remarkable, intriguing, and provocative book offers a new answer and a completely plausible new candidate, with all the qualities of a believable author. [...] It seems certain to provoke new discoveries which will finally resolve the most perplexing, the most abiding, and the most important of literary riddles.

[This] publication may prove to be an event of genuine world-wide importance [which will] radically change our understanding of the source and course of the English literary and cultural renaissance.

Professor John Spiers, School of Humanities, University of Glamorgan,
& Institute of English Studies, University of London.

Who wrote the works of William Shakespeare? This is the question at the heart of the Shakespeare Authorship debate, and one that has been hotly debated by scholars and enthusiasts for over 150 years.

Everything known about the facts of William Shakespeare's life seems incompatible with the extraordinary genius of his writing. The search for the 'real' Shakespeare has turned up any number of 'candidates', among them Sir Francis Bacon, The Earl of Oxford, even Queen Elizabeth I herself, but none have yet stood up to serious scrutiny.

The Truth Will Out introduces a compelling new answer to one of the longest-standing enigmas in literary history.



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THE TRUTH ABOUT

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The Truth Will Out



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Set by 3

The Truth Will Out



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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