

God is Dead - thus spoke Zarathustra.

My name will be buried where my body is – thus wrote Shake-speare.

1 A Delusion

A Delusion is either a false belief, a false impression or a form of mental disorder. William Shakespeare is such a delusion.

Hold on! I can almost hear you say; *Don't mess my head with Shakespeare; they already did that at school.* The world's greatest playwright, an icon, an institution, banknote, a whole tourist industry, an international brand name, it can't be a delusion? Can it?

2 Delusions

King Arthur, Robin Hood; there was a time when we believed in Father Christmas; a welcome delusion which most of us got over. Then there was the bogeyman, a delusion created by parents to control children. Now we have Professor Dawkins who explains why the concept of an all-reaching deity is delusional with Charles Darwin's science having exploded thousands of years of myths and religious dogma about the origins of mankind. We only have four hundred years of William Shakespeare.

3 Shaxper the Genius

Indeed there *was* a man in Stratford-upon-Avon who owned property in Warwickshire and a dwelling-place in London. I shall call him Shaxper.

The delusion; the delusion is that we are asked to believe that this provincial man with little if any education, who did not mix with the intelligentsia, acquired an English vocabulary twice the size of John Milton's, never left England but mastered Italian and French with an in-depth knowledge of Italian literature, then Latin and Greek; and gained expertise in maritime, judicial, mercantile and almost every other aspect of human endeavour including politics and behavioural psychology.

Incredible! This superhuman ability is glibly explained away with one word – genius, yet the greatest poet in the history of mankind, this walking Wikipedia, this Elizabethan Freud, this wordsmith was never, ever, mentioned as a poet or playwright in any contemporary correspondence. Nothing! There is nothing handwritten to support Shaxper as a poet, playwright or even an ostler. He was invisible, a will of the wisp, and how could he remain hidden? Of course, Genius!

5 The Authorship Question

Actually, if one *reads* all the Shakespeare plays there is quite a wide spectrum in quality; a couple of plays are downright awful and others below par. However, when performed by competent actors working under a decent director, using a robust story-line and editing out the dross, all the scripts can produce compelling theatre and great entertainment.

However, the plays style and texture varies so much that it is so obvious to any rational person (whose income is *not* dependent on the Bard, or who is not mentally deluded) that a range of playwrights contributed their own individuality into the Shakespeare canon; Christopher Marlowe, George Peele, John Webster, John Fletcher, John Florio, Henry Chettle, Robert Greene, Thomas Dekker, Thomas Middleton, Thomas Munday; there are more.

This inconsistency is the century-old authorship question. The plays are clearly not the work of one person but it is evident that some over-arching presence inspired the 1623 collection of thirty-six Comedies, Histories and Tragedies of Mr William Shakespeare, known these days as the *First Folio* and dedicated to two Earls, William Herbert, Earl of Pembroke and his brother Philip, Earl Montgomery.

4 Plays written by teams

Sir Thomas Moore is considered a Shakespeare play but the script is in the handwriting of five playwrights Dekker, Chettle, Heywood, Munday and one other. Commercial plays were and are written by teams. *Sir John Oldcastle* was included in the *Second Folio*. It would still be considered a Shakespeare play

except for the discovery of the accounts of the Rose Theatre which showed it was written by Michael Drayton, Thomas Munday (again) and two other colleagues. Drayton was from Warwickshire, a prolific playwright, a frequent visitor to Stratford and, just before he died, was treated for constipation by Shaxper's son-in-law.

6 Mary Sidney Herbert, Countess of Pembroke.

Occam's razor; everything points to one woman being that over-arching presence; Mary Sidney, Countess Pembroke, mother of the two Earls, sister to Sir Philip Sidney, niece of Robert Dudley, an intimate friend of the Queen and a prolific supporter of literary and dramatic arts. The Sidney family, uniquely, over generations, was absolutely steeped in the literary arts. In their various homes they patronised an entourage of poets and playwrights. Mary Sidney's own poetry is exquisite. It was she who introduced the format of five-act plays to the English stage. The earliest Shakespeare plays were performed by her Pembroke Players. Her niece, also a Mary Sidney, emulated her as a playwright poet and author; more of her later.

7 Destroy the Alibi

So if I explain firstly that Shakespeare was a pseudonym and secondly the relevance of another Stratford on another river Avon how can anybody who is not delusional still support Mr Shaxper?

8 Shake-Speare's (hyphen) Sonnets,

The one-hundred-and-fifty-four Shake-speare sonnets published in 1609 were dedicated to a *Master W H*. The booklet also contains a narrative poem, *A Lover's Complaint*, also by William Shake-Speare. In both there is a hyphen between the Shake and the Speare. The sonnets are beautifully intense, emotionally charged and personal and one senses a story behind them, a story that has been elusive. Two lines tell us unambiguously that the Sonnets were written anonymously.

Sonnet 85: *My name will be buried where my body is.*

Sonnet 72: *Every word doth **almost** tell my name.*

The authors, there were two, used the pseudonym Shake-speare to hide their identities.

Shaxper did not write the Sonnets or, by inference, anything else. It means that most, if not all of what we think we know about Shakespeare is wrong.

The conventional and simplistic view of the Sonnets is that the Bard was first in love with a young man, *Master W H*, and then switched his attentions to an older woman, the so-called *Dark Lady*. The eternal question; who were the objects of the Bard's bisexual love?

The favourite candidates for *Master W H* and the *Dark Lady* are the same William Herbert, Earl Pembroke, and a maid of honour to the Queen, Mary Fitton. Yet nobody has questioned the coincidence that William Herbert and Mary Fitton were lovers.

My book, *The Darling Buds of Maie*, explains that not only was Mary Fitton the *Dark Lady* but it was she who composed the first 126 sonnets addressed to William Herbert. He responded with the latterly printed *Dark Lady* Sonnets. In the opening lines of Sonnets 122, 123 and 124 are embedded conundrums left for posterity to discover their names.

9 Call Mr Will-Shake-Speare

Not only a pseudonym but the name *Will-Shake-speare* was a joke that would have bought a smirk to the faces of theatre-goers.

Only twelve of the 36 plays in the *First Folio* had previously been printed naming Shakespeare as the author. Of these the earliest, *Hamlet* and the Sonnets had a hyphen between the Shake and the Speare. But Elizabethans did not have hyphenated surnames; and, here's the rub; the word *will* was a euphemism for genitalia, both male and female; Sonnet 135; *will thou whose will is large and spacious not once vouchsafe to hide my will in thine.*

Will-shake-speare was a euphemism for masturbation; Willy Wanker the world's greatest playwright? I think not. It was an in-joke to cover a school of poetry and drama enjoyed at the royal courts when it was taboo for the

nobility, such as the play-writers earls of Oxford and of Derby, or women to publish under their own name. The Shakespeare Sonnets were written by a woman and by an Earl who were having an affair; they had to use a pseudonym.

10 Why most Shakespeare plays are excellent

On four gala nights; St. Steven's, New Year, Twelfth Night and Shrove Tuesday, the aristocracy and the courtiers would wine and dine in the presence of their Queen anticipating an enthralling play to follow. This was the sophisticated audience for whom the Shakespeare and other plays were produced. Who but the legally trained could enjoy the 63-line speech on Salic law in *Henry V*; certainly not the groundlings? This was the reason for the plays' excellence; to meet the high demands of the Monarch and their entourage who expected a compelling plot, performed by the best actors, of whom the leading light was one Richard Burbadge.

11 Finding Stratford

The task of editing the First Folio was given to the poet-playwright Ben Jonson, a friend of William Herbert. Jonson's ten-line poem faces the iconic portrait purporting to be Shakespeare, he warns; *look not on his picture but on his book*. Elsewhere publishers' hype mentions the *Sweet Swan of Avon* and a *Stratford Monument*. That was enough to get the pilgrims scurrying to Warwickshire.

William Herbert, as Earl Pembroke, owned a bucketful of property including the house in Wiltshire in which his brother, Earl Montgomery, lived with his wife, Susan de Vere, daughter of the late seventeenth Earl of Oxford whom the film *Anonymous* portrayed as Shakespeare.

The house sits in the village of Stratford-sub-Castle. At the end of its long garden flows the Wiltshire Avon. Casting a long, morning shadow over the village is the massive fortified hill, known as Old Sarum, a Stratford Monument owned by the Pembrokes and visible three miles away from Wilton House, the Earl's country home. So, in juxtaposition we have a village of Stratford, the two

dedicatees of the First Folio, Oxford's daughter, by a river Avon, and an imposing monument. This cannot be a coincidence; this is the Stratford of the First Folio.

Shake-speare a pseudonym, Stratford elsewhere; this is why when one forensically examines the evidence that allegedly supports a Bard in Warwickshire, one finds nothing.

12 The Sonnets' Story

The poem *A Lover's Complaint* should have been printed ahead of the Sonnets because it was the prequel. A maid is seduced by a young lord who promises her marriage, she becomes pregnant and he jilts her; and this is what happened. In June 1600, twenty-year-old William Herbert seduced Mary Fitton, with a promise of marriage. She became pregnant and, when he refused to marry, a furious Queen sent him to prison to reconsider. He remained obstinate. Days earlier his father had died but although he was now an earl he could not inherit the estate until he came of age, three months later. So, a ward of court, in prison having incensed the Queen, unable to attend his father's funeral, his girlfriend pregnant, her father making demands and himself a depressive, he so reminds me of Hamlet.

Mary Fitton left Court xix months pregnant, her *maiden virtue, rudely strumpeted* (Sonnet 66). Under house arrest she wrote the first seventeen sonnets imploring her boyfriend to marry. From these one can tease out enough evidence to identify William Herbert as the young man; especially paraphrasing Sonnet 11; *you may be wilting away, but inside the woman you have turned your back on, the new life, which you created, is fast growing and will be born just when you come of age.*

At the end of March 1601 the rumour around court was that a baby had been lost at birth, however, there are good reasons to believe the child was taken to be fostered.

13 William leaves the Fleet prison

A week later William Herbert came of age, left prison but was banned from Court. Sir Edward Fitton obtained his daughter's release and they travelled home to Cheshire. Did Sir Edward understand what his daughter had suffered? She had just lost her baby; lost all hope of becoming a Countess; been thrown out of Court and distanced from the man she adored who refused to marry her. Aged twenty-three, she had to deal with a cocktail of grief and trauma; and this is what the sonnets are about; the classical stages of grieving; denial, anger, bargaining, depression and finally acceptance, while changing circumstances, and two pregnancies, affected her state of mind, all reflected in her poetry until she married in 1607. And during the six years the poetic exchange of correspondence with William Herbert continued.

14 Grief

Denial starts at Sonnet 18: *Shall I compare thee to a summer's day? Thou art more lovely and more temperate: Rough winds do shake the darling buds of Maie, And summer's lease hath all too short a date.*

And summer's lease did have all too short a date. The bargain they had sealed the previous June with something more penetrating than a kiss ended with the bastard pregnancy. After Pembroke married wealth in 1604, he sent Mary an apologetic poem telling her that he still loved her. The rearranged initial letters of the lines of the first verse spell out MAY FITTON, May, as in the *Darling Buds of May*.

15 The Rival Poet and Captain Ill

In Sonnet 79 a *Rival Poet* appears. She is William's first cousin, Mary Sidney who was married off to Sir Robert Wroth in 1604. When Wroth died nine years later the young widow went to live with her cousin whom she had loved for many years bearing him two children.

In Sonnet 83; Mary Fitton writes *Speaking of **Worth***. What she meant was Speaking of **Wroth**. Ben Jonson used the same wordplay in verses praising Mary Wroth's poetry. Mary Wroth's book, *Urania*, is a thinly disguised allegory

of life amongst the Sidneys and Herberts. One thread follows the love affair between the character Amphilanthos (her cousin, William Herbert) and Antissia (her rival, Mary Fitton) who we learn wrote sonnets and plays and nearly lost her mind after Amphilanthos married.

In one episode Antissia is captured by pirates which leads us on to *Captain Ill* (Sonnet 66) who was either Admiral Sir Richard Leveson, son-in-law of the Lord High Admiral, who provided Mary with a home near Wolverhampton and those two children. He died suddenly in 1605. Or Captain Ill was her first husband, Captain William Polewhele, who had served under Leveson. Polewhele gave her three children and he too died suddenly in 1609 the year the Sonnets were published.

Only recently I discovered why William Herbert would not marry Mary Fitton. Three days after he took her *white stole of chastity* she had sex with another man; Pembroke knew the child might not have been his.

16 Associated Plays

I believe Mary Fitton was coerced into sex by her guardian at court, Sir William Knollys, the Queen's second cousin, and comptroller of her household. He is caricatured as Malvolio in *Twelfth Night*. If so it is reflected in the plot of *Measure for Measure*.

In *Hamlet*, *All's Well That Ends Well*, and *Two Noble Kinsmen* one finds a similar relationships between ennobled men and a lower- status women. The *Winter's Tale*, *Pericles* and *Cymbeline* each tell of a lost wife with a lost child.

From the home of the Duke of Lennox, we can hear William Herbert. He writes: *and even now the company are at the play, which I being tender-hearted could not endure to see so soon after the loss of my old acquaintance Burbadge*. The play was *Pericles*; a lost love and a lost child had caught his conscience. The death of the actor Burbadge two months earlier was a lame excuse.

17 Shaxper's Will and Forgeries

Burbadge, not Burbage; I cringe when I read Burbage; it smacks of poor research or fraud. Shaxper's will, full of anomalies, makes a bequest to his fellows, **Burbage**, Hemminges and Condell. They were actors. This bequest is squeezed between lines in a different handwriting. It looked a fake, however, the probate copy of the will in the Records Office has the bequest within the text and I had to accept that, at least, William Shakespeare was an actor.

Except a few years later I was filing away my copies of probate wills and noticed that Mary Fitton's husband's will, the Shaxper will, and one other were all in the same handwriting except that the upward stroke of the letter d on Shaxper's appeared more vertical. I obtained copies of the wills before and after Shaxper's and these confirmed my observation, there is a three degree angular difference. Further, each will commences with *In the name of God, amen*. The calligraphic initial capital I, seven lines high, made of twenty-four strokes and swirls, is effectively the scribe's signature; Shaxper's "I" is noticeably different to the others and uniquely contains a strange cartouche. The probate copy is a forged replacement and those three actors were *not* in the original will; this is the most significant of a long history of forgeries.

Why forge? The answer is that over the centuries eminent scholars have spent years searching in vain for someone who did not exist. The bogus discovery of a forgery or a faked entry boosts the individual's credibility but serves only to perpetuate a myth. Unfortunately the gullible, craving to be associated with genius, have readily been taken in by this litany of forgeries, fantasy and fraud.

18 Production of the First Folio

The facts all suggest that the brothers William & Philip Herbert underwrote the publication of the First Folio and there was one very good reason. It was to be dedicated to their mother Mary Sidney, Countess Pembroke, on her sixtieth birthday. Plays would have been selected that held special meaning such as those written for her own Pembroke Players. But tragedy! Four weeks before her birthday the Countess died. Printing immediately stopped and only resumed after exactly a year's mourning. If we revisit Ben Jonson's ten-line

poem we find it has was written without the use of the letter M. M was how the Countess had signed her name. M had passed away.

19 Conclusion

I have shown that Shakespeare was a pseudonym, therefore, Shakespeare did not write Shakespeare, and that Stratford was in on the Wiltshire Avon. I have told the story of the Sonnets, not only to unravel their mystery, but also to show how seven subsequent Shakespeare plays reflect the story of the two lovers. I have illustrated that teams of playwrights wrote the plays, but I believe Mary Sidney, Countess Pembroke and her son William Herbert were over-arching prime-movers and influencers, her anonymous, literary-touch providing uniformity and excellence to a number of the plays.

Is it a surprise then, that entering the home of the Pembrokes at Wilton one is faced by a statue of Shakespeare identical to the one in poets' corner in Westminster Abbey? Is it a bigger surprise to see that the face is identical to that of the statue of William Herbert outside the Bodleian Library which was once at Wilton. For me its location at Wilton flags the fountainhead of Shakespeare. In Sidney's sister, Pembroke's mother, I believe we have found our *Sweet Swan of Avon*. Her emblem, a pheon, the arrow-head of a spear.