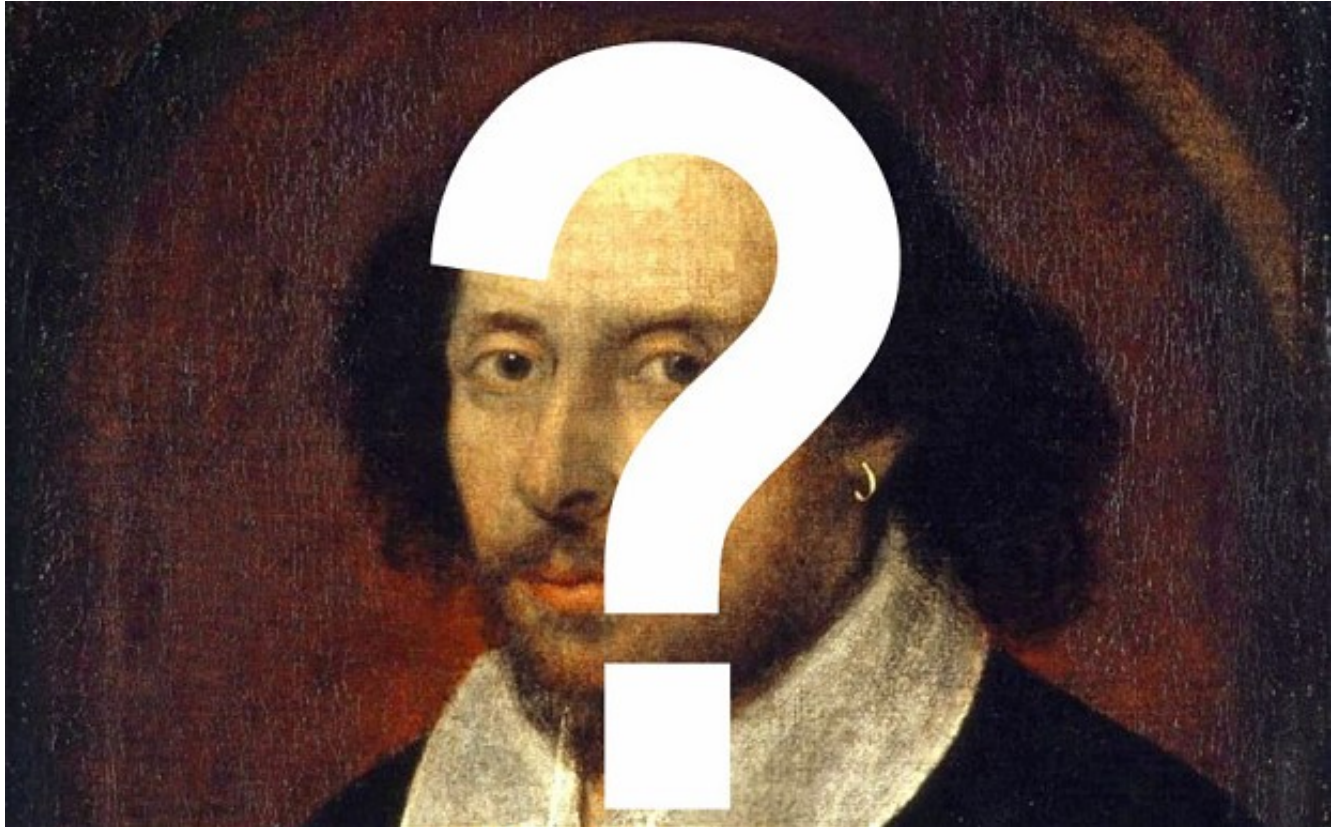


Shakespeare: the conspiracy theories

Who really wrote the plays of Shakespeare? Here are some of the conspiracy theories



Who wrote Shakespeare's plays? Photo: Alamy

By Telegraph reporters

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There is so little known about the real **William Shakespeare**. It is hardly surprising therefore that plenty of theories about our most famous bard and his work have arisen. It was, after all, Mark Twain who said: "So far as anybody actually knows and can prove, Shakespeare of Stratford-on-Avon never wrote a play in his life."

Not always as easily dismissed as Shakespeare champions would have you believe, here are the most widely known theories about the authorship of the plays.

Various authors

In 1848 the American Joseph C Hart wrote a book putting forward the argument that the plays were written by several different authors. In 1856 Delia Bacon, another American, wrote an article to support this theory and attributed the authorship to a group of people who were overseen by Sir Francis Bacon and Sir Walter Raleigh.

Edward de Vere

Edward de Vere, the 17th Earl of Oxford was also the Lord Great Chamberlain of England and a courtier poet. There is little evidence that suggests he did write them, but some believe there are references in the plays to de Vere's life and that there are a series of codes in the writing that implicate the Earl as the author. This is the theory put forward in the film *Anonymous*.

Sir Francis Bacon

It is also thought possible that Sir Francis Bacon, writer of *New Atlantis*, essayist and scientist, could have penned the plays. Again there is little evidence to suggest this, apart from similarities in the plays to his own. The theory that Bacon could have written the plays was first put forward in 1856.

Christopher Marlowe

The playwright Christopher Marlowe was writing at the same time as Shakespeare and it's likely that the two crossed paths. The theory goes that the reports of Marlowe's death in a drunken brawl on May 30 1593 were falsified to protect him from going to prison for being an atheist. Marlovians believe that Shakespeare was named as the play's author to protect the truth of what really happened to Marlowe.

William Stanley

With the initials WS, William Stanley is another strong contender for authorship of the plays. He was the 6th Earl of Derby and had his own theatre company called Derby's men. He was known to sign himself off as Will. He travelled in Europe, and through his marriage to Elizabeth de Vere, he was related to William Cecil, on whom many believe the character of Polonius in *Hamlet* is based.

Roger Manners

The theory that the plays were written by Roger Manners the 5th Earl of Rutland was supported by a German literary critic called Karl Bleibtreu in 1907. Manners married the daughter of the poet Philip Sydney and it is thought that the two of them together wrote the plays. However, the Earl would have been only 16 when the first of Shakespeare's works was published in 1593.

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