



# Shakespeare--Who Was He?: The Oxford Challenge to the Bard of Avon

*By Richard F. Whalen*

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**Shakespeare--Who Was He?: The Oxford Challenge to the Bard of Avon** By Richard F. Whalen

Debate has swirled for years around that most significant of literary problems, the authorship of Shakespeare's works. Now Edward de Vere, the 17th Earl of Oxford, a recognized poet and playwright, has eclipsed Bacon, Marlowe, and all the other candidates for authorship honors. Lengthy and specialized studies have detailed the historico-literary case for Oxford and against the man from Stratford-on-Avon . . . Shakespeare: Who Was He? is the first book to give the general reader a clear, readable, concise analysis of the arguments for both men. Most intriguing are the many direct parallels between Oxford's life and Shakespeare's works, especially in Hamlet, the most autobiographical of the plays. Shakespeare: Who Was He? is a literary mystery of monumental proportions. Whalen's presentation breathes new life into the plays and sonnets through this breakthrough examination of the real-life Hamlet, Edward de Vere, the 17th earl of Oxford.

William Shakespeare is the only literary figure whose very identity is a matter of long-standing and continuing dispute. Was he really the glover's son from Stratford-on-Avon? Or was he someone else writing under the pseudonym William Shakespeare? The question has been called the foremost literary problem in world literature and history's biggest literary whodunnit. Interest in it has never been greater, and that interest is growing now that a consensus has formed for Edward de Vere, the seventeenth earl of Oxford, as the leading candidate. Oxford, a recognized poet, playwright, and patron of acting companies, has eclipsed Bacon, Marlowe, and all the other candidates. The Oxfordian challenge is now being covered in scholarly books, in articles in magazines such as *The New Yorker* and *Atlantic Monthly*, and on television, including an hour-long PBS *FrontLine* program. The issue has even been debated in a moot court before three justices of the Supreme Court--with an intriguing outcome.

Whalen's book is the first to provide a clear, concise, readable summary for the general reader, one that analyzes the main arguments for both the man from

Stratford-on-Avon and the earl of Oxford. His conclusion? The case for Oxford is much more persuasive. Oxford's life in general and in its particulars is mirrored throughout the works of Shakespeare in many striking ways, particularly in Hamlet, the most autobiographical of the plays. Many who have examined the case for Oxford have had their appreciation of Shakespeare transformed and immensely enriched. This book will be required reading for those who love Shakespeare and want to know more about why the authorship controversy persists. The main narrative, which takes the reader easily through the pros and cons for each man, is supplemented by extensive, entertaining endnotes and appendixes, plus a comprehensive, annotated bibliography.

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### Editorial Review

From Library Journal

The great literary mystery will simply not go away: Were the plays and poems attributed to Will Shakspear, the glover's son from Stratford-upon-Avon, really written by Edward de Vere, the 17th Earl of Oxford? Those who have never seriously investigated the question may be astonished at how compelling a case can be made for Oxford as the true author. Particularly striking is how events in Oxford's life parallel events in the plays, notably Hamlet and All's Well That Ends Well. The weakest part of the Oxfordian case is the testimony in the First Folio that appears to point unmistakably to the Stratford man. The attempts by Whalen, who is the president of the Oxford Shakespeare Society, to explain this away seem labored and unconvincing. But, on the whole, the general reader is well served by Whalen's presentation of both sides of the argument. The annotated bibliography, which is the only one of its kind available, is extremely useful for readers who wish to pursue further research.

*Bryan Aubrey, Fairfield, Ia.*

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From [Booklist](#)

Since suspicions mounted in the mid-1800s that some mountebank had tricked the world into crediting a Will Shakspeare with authorship of the Shakespeare canon, orthodoxy has mounted a tenacious defense of its man, the glover's son from Stratford. Its last salvo came from avocational scholar Irvin Matus (*Shakespeare, in Fact*). That the apostasy in favor of Oxford also produces its enthusiastic amateur sleuths, such as Whalen, a retired IBM executive, demonstrates the enduring mass popularity of the mystery. Whalen's main asset is his plain, compare-and-contrast briefing ability: all the issues of evidence and inference are clearly stated, so that the newcomer to the controversy can delve deeper into pro-earl case presented in *The Mysterious William Shakespeare* by Charlton Ogburn. Whalen fairly notes the vulnerabilities in Oxford-as-author, such as the dating difficulty: several of the plays were published after the earl's death in 1604. A piece by noted cold warrior Paul Nitze prefaces this easy introduction to the case. *Gilbert Taylor*

Review

"This great literary mystery will simply not go away: Were the plays and poems attributed to Will Shakspear, the glover's son from Stratford-upon-Avon, really written by Edward de Vere, the 17th Earl of Oxford? The general reader is well served by Whalen's presentation of both sides of the argument. The annotated bibliography, which is the only one of its kind available, is extremely useful for readers who wish to pursue further research."-Library Journal

"Whalen examines the "great debate" over Shakespeare's identity by offering convincing evidence that Edward de Vere, the seventeenth East of Oxford, was actually the author of Shakespeare's works. A lucid discussion, suggested for English literature students."-Booklist/Adult Books for Young Adults

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"Terrific . . . readable, friendly, clear, balanced, honest, a scholarly presentation of evidence in a format accessible to anyone."-Professor Felicia Londre University of Missouri

"I am fascinated by Whalen's plunge into the oft-tossed sea of the Shakespeare controversy. He invites us to accompany him on a stimulating search for answers."-E.J. Kahn author and staff writer for over fifty years for The New Yorker

"Shakespeare--Who Was He? is that rare book--a splendidly written whodunit that solves a real-life, 400-year mystery . . . a mystery bequeathed to posterity by William Shakespeare himself."-Gary B. Goldstein, Editor The Elizabethan Review

"Sooner or later almost every student of Shakespeare will confront the troubling figure of Oxford. Whalen presents all aspects of this fascinating controversy. Oxfordians will delight in giving this lucid, compact study to their Stratfordian friends. It is ideal for both believers, skeptics and agnostics. It just may help you make up your mind."-Norrie Epstein author of The Friendly Shakespeare

"Whalen is forthright about his Oxfordian position, but his lucid, even-handed methodology challenges students to think through the authorship issue and evidence from many angles. The result in class is penetrating questions, critical thinking, and vigorous discussion. Students get hyped using this book to research and argue the authorship problem."-David A. Richardson Cleveland State University

"In a clear, concise, eminently readable style, Whalen takes the reader on a most entertaining and instructive tour of the great debate. Much has been written on the Shakespeare authorship question, but Whalen's brisk summary of it should lead to a much wider understanding of the surprisingly strong case for Oxford and the shaky foundation under the pedestal of the Bard of Avon."-From the Foreword by Ambassador Paul H. Nitze

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