



100 Reasons Shake-speare was the Earl of Oxford: Second Edition

Hank Whittemore

GMJ Global Media
978-1-73738-321-5

100 Reasons Shake-speare was the Earl of Oxford is a probing, provocative, and absorbing work that suggests an alternative attribution for Shakespeare's canon.

In *100 Reasons Shake-speare was the Earl of Oxford*, Hank Whittemore works to reclaim the literary works attributed to Shakespeare for Edward De Vere, the seventeenth Earl of Oxford.

The idea that “Shakespeare” was a pen name for a talented nobleman who fell in and out of favor with the royal court has been around for more than a century, and this book presents one hundred reasons to believe it. In this revised interpretation of the texts and the available history, Will Shakespeare, also referred to as William of Stratford, was an actor and businessman who didn't have the education, experiences, or inclination to write all of the works attributed to him. But Edward De Vere did.

Whether one cheers, howls in disagreement, or falls somewhere in between over such assaults on the literary reputation of William of Stratford, Whittemore's argument is fascinating. He summarizes over a century's worth of investigation into the possibility that the Earl of Oxford was the primary writer behind most of the works we consider to be Shakespeare's, while Shakespeare's plays and poems are analyzed in detail for indications that support Oxford as their author.

Some of the book's findings are, if not incontrovertible, interesting and quite convincing. Making the case for *Hamlet* as the Earl of Oxford's most autobiographical, personal play, it's argued that Hamlet's family tree much resembles the court of De Vere's day, with Queen Elizabeth I inspiring Gertrude; Polonius based on Sir William Cecil, the writer of his own set of precepts to guide his son; and Ophelia modeled on Cecil's daughter Anne, who married Edward De Vere.

Though the book favors Oxford as the rightful recipient of credit for Shakespeare's canon, previous scholarship is cited both for and against Oxford's authorship. Much of the evidence for Oxford might seem circumstantial, yet it accumulates in side-by-side examples of De Vere's documented work and Shakespeare's, or sometimes, in the absences of documentation of Shakespeare's earliest literary attempts and De Vere's later ones.

But even when a conclusion is reached by several measures of informed speculation, the result is titillating, and the incidental information engrossing. A book that Hamlet carries in the 1603 version of the play is identified as *De Consolatione*, a work whose first English translation was financed by De Vere, a dedicated patron of the arts. This leads to comparisons of similar ideas and phrasing between Hamlet's definitive “To be or not to be” soliloquy and passages in the book he carries. The origins and inspirations of *Romeo and Juliet*, *The Merchant of Venice*, and many other works are investigated with the same captivating passion and scholarship. A multi-page bibliography and comprehensive index aid in Whittemore's analysis and illuminate avenues for further reading.

100 Reasons Shake-speare was the Earl of Oxford is a probing, provocative, and absorbing alternative look at some of the most famous works in the English language—and the man responsible for them.

PETER DABBENE (October 8, 2021)

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