



Ghostwriter: Shakespeare, Literary Landmines, and an Eccentric Patron's Royal Obsession

Lawrence Wells

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A mix of memoir with literary criticism, Lawrence Wells's *Ghostwriter* dives into the Shakespeare authorship debate from the perspective of a skeptic working alongside a staunch believer.

Wells was approached to ghostwrite a book for a wealthy, obsessive, and outlandish woman, Mrs. F., who was convinced not only that Edward de Vere, the seventeenth Earl of Oxford, was the true author behind Shakespeare's plays and sonnets, but that de Vere had an affair with Queen Elizabeth I and fathered an illegitimate child. Wells and Mrs. F. became simultaneous allies and adversaries, quarreling over their shared project—a novel recounting de Vere's life. Mrs. F. funded a research trip to England, where Wells and his wife searched for pieces of the history that Mrs. F. hoped to construct. Fielding Mrs. F.'s constant long-distance calls, Wells struggled to connect with his wife, becoming more consumed by Mrs. F.'s Shakespeare theories.

The book includes several excerpts of the novel, which was meted out in chapters to Mrs. F. The scenes in the manuscript flow in and out of the past and present, with Wells and Mrs. F. reflecting Edward de Vere and Elizabeth respectively. But as Wells travels across England, the different sites he visits take over as the point of contact between his story and de Vere's. While the personal remains peripheral for long stretches, at last, Wells's personal life is allowed in during a hike in southwest England.

Mixing the past and present, the facts and fiction, the literary memoir *Ghostwriter* approaches the history behind a controversial literary theory from an intriguing perspective.

JULIA DILLMAN (July / August 2024)

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