

May 13, 2016

Inger Merete Hobbelstad
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Re: [Open letter in reply to your article "NRK is misleading the public," April 26, 2016](#)

Dear Ms. Hobbelstad,

I am writing on behalf of the Shakespeare Authorship Coalition (SAC) to challenge your claim in the article referred to above that "It is beyond doubt (no doubt whatsoever) that William Shakespeare was the author of these writings which carry his name." (Here and throughout, I rely on a translation by Geir Uthaug, which I am assuming to be accurate.)

The SAC is a U.S.-based educational charity dedicated to *legitimizing* the Shakespeare authorship issue by increasing awareness of reasonable doubt about the author's identity. We are known for our "[Declaration of Reasonable Doubt About the Identity of William Shakespeare](#)," signed by over 3,500 people, including over 1,300 with advanced degrees, over 600 current or former college/university faculty members, and "notables" including actors Derek Jacobi, Mark Rylance, Michael York and Jeremy Irons; leading academics such as professors Robin Fox and Dean Keith Simonton; US Supreme Court justices, etc. The largest numbers, both among current/former academics and all college graduates, is those who said their academic field was "English literature" (501 graduates, 109 faculty). Overall, they are broadly representative, from the most artistic field to the most scientific.

Because we are focused entirely on calling attention to reasons to doubt that Mr. William "Shakspere" (sic) of Stratford-upon-Avon was the author (Mr. Shakspere never spelled his name "Shakespeare;" so we use his spelling, "Shakspere"), we take no position on the true identity of the author or on any theory of how or why the works came to be misattributed. We therefore take no position on Petter Amundsen's theory, but we firmly believe that it is a valid question and that he has a right to pursue it, and the NRK has a right to cover it. You and most other Stratfordians seek to suppress the issue, but this is totally unjustified.

To support your claim that the authorship is "beyond doubt," you list "facts that connect William Shakespeare's life and work." Here I quote and respond to some of your "facts":

> "He [Shakspere] was recognized as a writer by everyone he knew in London...."

This is not true. No document from Shakspere's lifetime shows that anyone ever claimed to have seen or met the author Shakespeare. All contemporary references to Shakespeare are to the author and none of them suggests they knew him or that he was from Stratford. [Ten people](#) have been identified who knew Shakspere but never said he was Shakespeare. Stratfordians cannot find any example of even one contemporary who did associate them. Even Stanley Wells, whose books you recommend, acknowledges that no document from Shakspere's lifetime shows that he was the author and all evidence for him is posthumous. We do not know any role that Shakspere played in any play on any date, and nothing says anyone ever commented on his acting. Claims that he was a prominent figure are not true.

> "What made his name famous ... was the very popular poem *Venus and Adonis* (1593) ... The poem was published by Richard Field who was also from Shakespeare's home town ... and a friend of Shakespeare. So he knew the man who had written the poem he published."

The fact that Field printed *Venus and Adonis* does not prove that Mr. Shakspeare necessarily wrote it. Richard Field and Mr. Shakspeare may have known each other, but nothing shows they were "friends." Shakspeare's father took Field's father to court. Field objected to Shakspeare's acting company building a theatre at Blackfriars. Field abandoned his interest in Shakespeare's works soon after the publication of *Venus and Adonis*. These facts do not suggest they were on good terms. Field, the printer, may have registered *Venus and Adonis*, but the publisher was John Harrison, to whom the rights were conferred. Harrison published Shakespeare's *Lucrece* (1594). The decision to publish *Venus* was almost certainly Harrison's, not Field's. Shakspeare didn't remember Field in his will, which was not so friendly of him. No record shows that Field thought his fellow townsman wrote *Venus*, or any other work in the canon.

> "After Shakespeare's break-through [with *Venus and Adonis*], many of the plays were published under his own name, which was relatively rare at this time."

This is very misleading. After the publication of *Venus & Adonis*, which made the name Shakespeare famous, five years passed before the poet was also identified as a playwright in *Palladis Tamia* (1598). During that time, five plays later identified as works of this popular poet were published anonymously. Then, the first time he was ever identified as a playwright, twelve plays that he had written were listed. It made no sense to publish the plays of this popular poet anonymously, unless he was a hidden author.

> "There are many dialect words in Shakespeare's works that originate from Warwickshire where Stratford-on-Avon is situated."

This is totally false. On the contrary, Warwickshire dialect words are under-represented in the canon. It has never been conclusively proven that a single Warwickshire dialect word is present in the canon. Doubters have decisively refuted this claim three times since 2011. For a recent, definitive refutation in a mainstream academic journal, see "[Shakespeare and Warwickshire Dialect](#)," by Rosalind Barber, in the *Journal of Early Modern Studies*, No. 4 (2015), 91-118. Dr. Barber concludes that "not a single claim that Shakespeare used Warwickshire, Midlands or Cotswold dialect can be upheld" (page 115). See, for example, Dr. Barber's analysis of "unwappered," which the OED claims is Cotswold dialect.

Note also that your own Stanley Wells, in *The Oxford Companion to Shakespeare* (Dobson & Wells), writes that "It is somewhat strange that Shakespeare did not... exploit his Warwickshire accent, since he was happy enough to represent, in phonetic spelling, the non-standard English of French and Welsh speakers, and the national dialects of Scotland and Ireland." Warwickshire dialect words are not found in the works. They make no use of its language, history, or geography, and Stratford is not mentioned.

> "The works show great familiarity with the treatment of leather, glove-making and sheep tending – Shakespeare's father's occupation, which William also learned while growing up."

These are isolated references that do not suggest special knowledge that wouldn't be widely available. A major point in James Shapiro's *Contested Will* is that writings at the time weren't autobiographical, so we should neither expect, nor look for, connections between the works and Shakspeare's biography. He says this because he cannot connect them to Shakspeare, but you reach for this connection anyway. It is quite a stretch, compared to other specialist knowledge. Here are examples from the Declaration:

"The works show extensive knowledge of law, philosophy, classical literature, ancient and modern history, mathematics, astronomy, art, music, medicine, horticulture, heraldry, military and naval terminology and tactics; etiquette and manners of the nobility; English, French and

Italian court life; Italy; and aristocratic pastimes such as falconry, equestrian sports and royal tennis. Nothing that we know about Mr. Shakspeare accounts for this. Much of the knowledge displayed in the works was the exclusive province of the upper classes, yet no record places Mr. Shakspeare among them for any length of time. The works are based on myriad ancient and modern sources, including works in French, Italian, Spanish, Latin and Greek not yet translated into English. How Shakspeare acquired knowledge of these sources is a mystery."

> "That Shakespeare was uneducated is one of the accusations from conspiracy theoreticians..., But Shakespeare went to grammar school in Stratford-upon-Avon, where he was thoroughly schooled in major works from antiquity."

No document shows that Shakspeare ever attended the Stratford grammar school. The records are lost. It is an unproven assumption that he attended, based on circular reasoning: "If he was the author, then surely he attended school; the local grammar school was the only option, so he must have gone there." But apart from this *assumption*, nothing shows that he ever attended any school, and judging from his six generally accepted signatures he barely learned how to sign his own name. Some grammar school! It is absurd to think that he learned everything in the works described above at a local grammar school. The school taught Latin; so how did he learn French, Italian, Spanish, Greek, art, music and medicine? How he managed to acquire such vast knowledge in all of these specialized fields is totally unknown.

> "Authors who were on the curriculum are clearly sources of inspiration for his own writings. Among other things the pupils would have read Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, which retell the myths Shakespeare makes use of in *Titus Andronicus* and *A Midsummer Night's Dream*."

It is an unproven and unlikely assumption that Ovid was in the Stratford grammar school curriculum. One grammar school, somewhere, is said to have owned a copy of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. So what? It's unlikely that Ovid's often racy, erotic poetry would have been taught at a Tudor grammar school. A more likely explanation of how Ovid's *Metamorphoses* came to Shakespeare's attention is the fact that the leading alternative candidate was the nephew of their translator at the time he translated them. [Correction: the nephew and uncle lived in the same household at the time the latter translated Ovid.]

> "The university curriculum that other more highly educated authors used are not relevant to Shakespeare."

This is not true. Shakespeare clearly knew Ancient Greek, as even Stanley Wells now acknowledges, and the art of Rhetoric. These were not taught at that grammar school that nothing shows he attended. According to Professor Robin Fox of Rutgers University, author of the book [Shakespeare's Education](#), "The works may not 'require' that the author received a university education, but they clearly suggest that he spent some time at Cambridge or at least had connections there." Also suggesting a Cambridge connection, the book *Polimanteia* (1995), written by Cambridge scholar William Clerke and published by the Cambridge University authorities, lists "Shakespeare" as an alumnus of Cambridge University, probably meaning the man behind the pseudonym, since nothing shows that Shakspeare ever attended.

More relevant than whether he attended university is the fact that Shakespeare was steeped in the law. Legal language and metaphors permeate the works to such an extent that they must have been second nature to him. He almost certainly attended law school, but nobody thinks that Mr. Shakspeare ever did.

> "The parts of the actors in his plays are specifically written for his company, Lord Chamberlain's men, and changed as the members of the company changed."

True; the author was someone who was familiar with the company. He need not have been a member. The leading alternative candidate was a man of the theater and could easily have known all the actors.

> “There are many different renderings of the most famous plays which have survived ... This may mean that the company’s dramatist – Shakespeare – revised them in accordance with how the audience responded or not.”

It could also mean a dramatist *other than* Shakspeare revised them depending on the audience response. Every successful playwright who has ever lived gauges his audience’s response; few have been actors.

> “The company’s working routines and ways of thinking are frequently used as metaphors in Shakespeare’s plays.”

Again, the author was clearly a man of the theatre, but he need not have been an actor in the company. Many great playwrights, then and now, are not actors, but are able to write convincingly about theatre.

> “Many conspiracy theorists argue that neither books nor manuscripts are mentioned in Shakespeare’s will. But these are items which would not have appeared in the will itself but in an inventory list which was attached.”

This excuse won’t work. Then as now, testators made specific bequests of highly-valued possessions. The absence of books suggests that at a minimum they were not important to this man. This is odd in light of the number and rarity of the books used as sources in the plays. Many were expensive, leather or velvet-bound books. It is unlikely that these would have been relegated to an inventory – something often prepared by neighbors. They would have been listed with livestock, crops, and household items. Why did Shakspeare leave no book (or anything at all) to a fellow writer or to his alleged noble patron? Even if such books *were* in an inventory, what happened to them? How did they all totally disappear?

The lack of books is a red herring when used to distract attention from other deficiencies with the will. Stratfordians should stop pretending it is the only anomaly and everything else is as one would expect. Nothing could be further from the truth. It also mentions no book cases, shelves, or chests for holding or storing books, nor any desk or writing materials. It lists no musical instruments, despite the author’s clear love of music, and it mentions no art, tapestries, maps, or other intellectual property of any kind! He leaves nothing theatrical, and nothing for the education of his heirs or to the local grammar school where he supposedly received the education that set him on his path. Nothing suggests a philanthropic spirit – no bequests to schools, colleges, almshouses, hospitals, churches, or public projects (merely a tersely-worded ten pounds to the poor of Stratford in fulfillment of an obligation for charitable deeds), despite the fact that he died wealthy. *Nothing* about the will suggests the author William Shakespeare. Even the preamble is stock language. Many people wrote their own preambles; why not Shakespeare? The will is the only document we know for sure is the product of his mind. It is damning to his claim. No wonder when the Birthplace Trust published *Shakespeare Beyond Doubt* they never mentioned it, despite having previously claimed that it is one of the most important pieces of evidence in his favor!

> “When someone says that it has not been “proved” that Shakespeare wrote his own plays, it is hard to see what they would consider proof. A letter where Shakespeare writes to his wife and says, Hey, Anne, I am sitting here working on *Romeo and Juliet*!?! That is impossible to say.

What would constitute proof would be the same kinds of evidence that one finds for every other writer of the period. Diana Price shows in her book, [Shakespeare’s Unorthodox Biography](#), that the evidence one finds for twenty-four other writers of the period is missing for Mr. Shakspeare, even though he was supposedly the most prolific of all and has been subjected to the greatest battery of organized research.

> “But to scholars it is important to understand that one knows a lot about this, and that what is known points unambiguously in the direction of the same man.”

This is not so. It is true that we have more documents for Mr. Shakspere than for others of the period. Seventy-some documents clearly relate to him, but all are non-literary. The problem is not how much, but *what* we know. What we know about Mr. Shakspere contradicts the idea that he was a writer at all.

> “Scholars naturally deplore that he left no letters. But for anyone working with ancient history there will always be large gaps ... But one must be careful not to fill those gaps with wishful thinking.”

Yes, it would help if we had one letter in the hand of this great and prolific writer, especially since he divided his time between London and Stratford – a situation conducive to correspondence – and he is said to have collaborated with other writers. Why is there no extant letter to or from any collaborator? We have letters in the hands of most other writers of the period. Why not for the greatest of them all? Why did no collaborator write a eulogy for him when he died, or for the First Folio seven years later?

As a scholar who wrote her thesis on Homer, you know that this is not “ancient history,” but the early modern period in the well-documented reigns of Queen Elizabeth and King James, not ancient Greece. What one would expect to find for Shakespeare one does not find. His record is *all gap and no career!* It is you Stratfordians who typically fill gaps in your Shakespeare biographies with “wishful thinking.” Twain wrote that Shakespeare is “a brontosaur: nine bones and six hundred barrels of plaster of Paris!”

> “They are written by a person of William Shakespeare’s background and biography....”

If the works reflect Shakspere’s background and biography, why does James Shapiro, the Stratfordian author you recommend, argue in *Contested Will* that the works *must not be read as autobiographical!*? Shapiro excoriates Edmond Malone, an attorney who was the greatest Shakespeare scholar of his time, for looking for clues to the mystery of the author’s life in the works. Shapiro writes of Malone that he:

“helped institutionalize a methodology that would prove crucial to those who would... deny Shakespeare’s authorship ... (after all ... how would anybody but a court insider know enough to encode all of this?) (39) [and] in doing so, Malone carelessly left open a fire door (40).”

Note that (1) Malone did consider it a “mystery,” as did other scholars – something you now deny, and (2) Shapiro slips up and reveals who he is worried about – “how would anybody but a court insider...” Here Shapiro commits an act of candor, tacitly admitting that if one looks to the works for clues to the author’s life they suggest someone unlike Shakspere. That is not allowed, so the entire line of inquiry must be delegitimized. It threatens orthodoxy, so a wall must be erected and that “fire door” kept shut. Shapiro clearly thinks the works do not point to Shakspere, so he insists they are not autobiographical.

Now you come along, Ms. Hobbestad, and blow the wall to bits by saying they *are* autobiographical! We could arrange a debate between you and Shapiro, except nobody ever really believed him anyway. Of course the works are autobiographical. Sadly for you, your guy isn’t a good fit and someone else is. Since you don’t seem to know, a leading alternative author spent much of his childhood in rural areas, and there are hundreds of parallels in the works to his life, not the mere handful you find for your guy. Now that you have re-opened the fire door, supporters of the alternative will drive their truck through, despite likely efforts to impose a Stratfordian double standard and say only you are allowed to do that.

In sum, you accuse NRK of spreading “disinformation” (and I have no position on whether this is so), but your so-called “facts that connect William Shakespeare’s life and work” are nothing more than the same Stratfordian disinformation put out by the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust in Stratford-upon-Avon. Has it never occurred to you that the Trust has a clear conflict of interest from its reliance on tourism? Whatever else you may think of Petter Amundsen’s work, I cannot see that he has any similar conflict. You are clearly self-interested when it comes to this issue, and most of what *you* say is disinformation.

Conspiracy theories

I notice that you seem to take offense at being called a "Stratfordian," which you define as "someone who believes that Shakespeare was Shakespeare." No, that is a tautology. The authorship question is who wrote the works of Shakespeare, a man baptized and buried in Stratford as William "Shakspeare," or some other person who used the name as a pseudonym, in which case *that* man was "Shakespeare." The term "Stratfordian" accurately refers to those who believe *the man from Stratford* was the author. There is no offense intended, and authorship doubters seldom use that term as an epithet to denigrate.

I wish I could say the same about how you refer to authorship doubters, i.e., as "conspiracy theorists." That is a term of denigration if ever there was one, and you use it, or its close variants, nineteen times. The clear implication is that the views of authorship doubters are not based on any objective evidence, but that we are all "defective" in some way, either in our intellect or our character, and that as a result we all have some sort of psychological predisposition to see conspiracies when there are, in fact, none.

Let us call this strategy, which has been used by Stratfordians for generations, what it is: smear tactics. You can't prove your case based on the evidence, so you argue *ad hominem*, meaning against the man. Lawyers say that if the facts are on your side, you argue the facts; if the law is on your side, you argue the law; and if neither is on your side you attack your opponent. Judging from the extent to which you and other Stratfordians attack your opponents, you must not believe you have much else going for you.

Having worked in the mental health field, and being aware of the stigma attaching to mental illness, I am sensitive to and take particular offense at such tactics. I find it unethical and morally reprehensible. In 2010, I challenged the longstanding claim on the website of the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust, in an article titled "The Authorship Question" by then-chairman Stanley Wells, CBE, which read as follows:

"The phenomenon of disbelief in Shakespeare's authorship is a psychological aberration of considerable interest. Endorsement of it in favour of aristocratic candidates may be ascribed to snobbery - reluctance to believe that works of genius could emanate from a man of relatively humble origin... Other causes include ignorance; poor sense of logic; refusal, wilful or otherwise, to accept evidence; folly; the desire for publicity; and even certifiable madness..."

I [challenged](#) Wells to either back up these claims with data worthy of the high scholarly standards he claims to represent, or remove them forthwith. He never replied, but the article was removed in 2011. The same article and claim later reappeared on the website of the Royal Shakespeare Company (RSC), also headquartered in Stratford. So I wrote to the president of the RSC, HRH Charles, Prince of Wales. After a delay and then some further intervention by one of our prominent patrons, it came down again. I therefore believe it has now been established that there is no valid basis for these Stratfordian claims. One might also ask why, if they knowingly made false claims about us, their word can be trusted at all.

Regarding your "conspiracy theory" allegation, the implication is that all conspiracy theories are false, and so any alternative to the traditional attribution to Shakespeare must be false because it necessarily implies some sort of conspiracy to conceal Shakespeare's true identity, and such things never happen. Or do they? Authors use pseudonyms all the time. If an author, his publisher, a printer, his family and a few friends are the only ones who know that the author is using a pseudonym, is that a "conspiracy"? If so, there must be more "conspiracies" afoot than you think, because lots of writers use pseudonyms.

Does any Stratfordian you know have any more expertise in assessing alleged conspiracy theories than those who usurped the authority to diagnose mental and character disorders had expertise in that field? The reason why I ask is that we skeptics do have someone with a claim to such expertise in our corner. James Broderick, Ph.D., Associate Professor of English and Journalism, New Jersey City University;

co-authored the book *Web of Conspiracy: A Guide to Conspiracy Theory Sites on the Internet* (2008). Broderick and Darren W. Miller spent years researching, then writing a book on, popular conspiracy theories. In our rebuttal to the Birthplace Trust's "60 Minutes with Shakespeare," Broderick writes:

"What I discovered is that most [conspiracy theories] do not hold up under scrutiny. The more one digs, the shakier and less credible they become. The Authorship Question was different. The more I dug, the more credible it seemed, until I became fully convinced of its validity. What I had set out expecting to debunk turned out to be the most compelling, fact-based 'conspiracy' I had ever researched."

It has been said that the one great theme running through all of Shakespeare's plays is the difference between appearance and reality and the difficulty of determining which is which. The plays are filled with masques, disguises, deceptions, mistaken identities, misread motives, conspiracies and betrayals. Most orthodox scholars would probably agree with this, except when it comes to the authorship issue. Then, suddenly, everything is exactly as it appears and anyone who disagrees is a conspiracy theorist. Shakespeare was a conspiracy theorist. Each play has at least one, and some have many conspiracies. If you think we are conspiracy theorists, Ms. Hobblesstad, well, you should be in such good company.

Wells and Shapiro

In your article you recommend the books of Professors Stanley Wells and James Shapiro. I assume that you did this with the best of intentions, so I will try to persuade you that they are both charlatans so you do not inadvertently mislead more unsuspecting Norwegians into falling for their propaganda.

Shapiro recently published a book, [*The Year of Lear: Shakespeare in 1606*](#) (Simon & Schuster, 2015). Doubters who read it saw that it was riddled with errors (as was *Contested Will*) and organized a group to rebut him. The resulting e-book, [*Contested Year: Errors, Omissions and Unsupported Statements in James Shapiro's "The Year of Lear: Shakespeare in 1606"*](#), came out four months later, last February. You should read both books. *Contested Year* is meant to be read as a companion to *The Year of Lear*. It's an eye-opener. You should also read the appendix that shows the same pattern in *Contested Will*.

Re: Stanley Wells, I assume your claim that the case for the Stratford man is "beyond doubt" is based on [*Shakespeare Beyond Doubt: Evidence, Argument, Controversy*](#) (Edmondson & Wells, eds., 2013)? In Chapter 7, "Allusions to Shakespeare to 1642," Stanley Wells claims that he aimed to include "all" allusions to Shakespeare between the first appearance of the name in 1593, and up until the year 1642. In fact, he omitted two key references to Shakespeare, both of which call the authorship into question.

First, in 1624, the second edition of Thomas Vicars' manual of rhetoric gave a list of excellent English poets: Chaucer, Edmund Spenser, Michael Drayton, George Wither. He omitted William Shakespeare! Surely he knew of Shakespeare in 1624 after the First Folio. In a third edition (1628), Vicars corrected the omission with an insertion after the list: "To these I believe should be added that famous poet who takes his name from 'shaking' and 'spear'..." This reference implies the name is a made-up pen name. Vicars probably knew that the First Folio's attribution was incorrect and didn't want to go along with, and reinforce, a misattribution. So he omitted Shakespeare from the second edition the following year. By 1628, he figured out how to include him while hinting it was a pen name without openly saying so. (Schurink, Fred "An unnoticed early reference to Shakespeare" *Notes & Queries*, March 2006, 72-74) (Donald F. Nelson, "Schurink's Discovery of a Century," *SO Newsletter V. 44, I*, Spring 2008, 10-11)

Second, in 1635 Cuthbert Burbage, brother of the actor Richard Burbage, petitioned Philip Herbert, Earl of Pembroke and Montgomery, in a legal case. The Burbages were the founder-investors in the Globe Theatre, and Shakespeare had been a shareholder. Cuthbert Burbage had to have known the role Shakespeare played in the company. In his petition, Burbage names the investors in the Globe Theatre.

He mentions "Shakspere," and "Shakspeare," as one of several "deserving men" and among several "men players." From these terms, it does not sound like Burbage thought of this "Shakspere" as the famous playwright William Shakespeare, but rather as just another member of the acting company.

By 1635, after the publication of the first two folios, the name Shakespeare was well known, and it would always have been spelled that way in print. Further, the man to whom Cuthbert was writing – Philip Herbert – was a dedicatee, with his brother William, of the two published folios! If Cuthbert Burbage knew that the "deserving man" and "man player" was also their playwright, he would have (1) spelled his name "Shakespeare," and (2) mentioned that this Shakespeare was the poet-dramatist immortalized in the folios. This would have greatly strengthened his petition. The fact that he did not do so suggests that he knew his fellow actor-shareholder was not the playwright William Shakespeare.

In his Chapter 7, after saying that he meant to include "all" references to Shakespeare up until 1642, Wells omitted Vicars' allusion to "That famous poet who takes his name from 'shaking' and 'spear'" and failed to mention Cuthbert Burbage's petition which implies that Shakspere was not a dramatist. Here we have strong evidence that Shakspere was not the author, and a leading Stratfordian hides it! There is only one possible explanation for these omissions: Wells knew they destroyed his argument. Both of these omissions are egregious examples of what appears to be a "cover up" by Stanley Wells. I told Wells and Cambridge University Press of these errors. They didn't deny it, but didn't correct it. If they feel they can get away with just omitting this key evidence, what else are they hiding from us?

These are not the only important misrepresentations in *Shakespeare Beyond Doubt*. David Kathman's claim that the works are "peppered" with Warwickshire dialect words is entirely false and misleading. The book falsifies the spelling of Mr. Shakspere's name throughout, even going so far as to claim the name is spelled "Shakespeare" twice in the Stratford parish records, and putting it in quotation marks, when it's clearly "Shakspere" in both records. And you Stratfordians accuse *us* of violating standards! Wells and the Trust knew what they were doing: duping the public and even their fellow Stratfordians.

Shakespeare Beyond Doubt?

A month after *Shakespeare Beyond Doubt* (Edmondson & Wells) was published, the similarly-titled *Shakespeare Beyond Doubt? – Exposing an Industry in Denial* (Shahan and Waugh, eds.) appeared. Due to their similar titles, the two books come up [together](#) at Amazon, making them easy to compare. For what it is worth, our book has better reviews and ratings – 4.0 stars for *SBD?* versus 2.6 for *SBD*. More importantly, HRH Prince Philip, Duke of Edinburgh, when asked by Stanley Wells if he was a heretic, replied "all the more so after reading your book!" The Duke is highly perceptive in our view. Here again, we urge everyone to read both books, knowing that ours comes off better in comparison.

In the General Introduction to *SBD?*, I challenged the Birthplace Trust to prove, in a mock trial before an unbiased panel of judges, its own claim that it is beyond doubt that Mr. Shakspere wrote the works, with the burden of proof on them to prove their claim to the standard of "beyond a reasonable doubt." The Trust declined, and we recruited forty doubters to pledge to donate at total of £40,000 to the Trust if they participated in such a mock trial and succeeded in proving their claim beyond reasonable doubt. Still they refused, so we put the challenge and offer in a full-page ad in the *Times Literary Supplement*. Again they declined. The offer still stands, and the challenge and list of forty pledges can be read [here](#). I will send you a copy of *Shakespeare Beyond Doubt?*, Ms. Hobbestad, with a hard copy of this letter.

The Trust's excuse that there have already been debates, and debates can turn on debating skill, is not credible. We challenged them to a trial, not a debate. Trials focus on evidence, with a presiding judge ruling on relevance and admissibility. Any judge would enforce order and decorum appropriate to the occasion. Each side could present and challenge evidence or cross examine the other side's witnesses. There is no reason why English professors, of all people, should be at any disadvantage in such a trial.

Does anyone really believe that the Birthplace Trust, if they thought the authorship was beyond doubt, would decline an offer to expose us doubters as the ignorant fools they claim us to be, pocket £40,000 for doing it, and put the authorship question behind them, once and for all, if they thought they could? At least we have shown that we have the courage of our convictions, but our opponents clearly do not.

Since the Trust declined, author-scholar Alexander Waugh, Honorary President of the SAC, wrote the e-book [Shakespeare in Court](#) as an illustration of the real reasons why the Trust refuses to participate. The trial is a hilarious exposé of the sort of nonsense put out by the Trust and its trolls on the Internet. But if the trial scene in Part II is humorous and revealing, the evidence presented in Part I is damning. Based on records in the Trust's own archives, Waugh found that five Trust properties – Shakespeare's "Birthplace," "Anne Hathaway's Cottage," "Mary Arden's Farm," "Hall's Croft," "Tom Nash's house" – are not what the Trust claims them to be in its advertisements for them on its website and elsewhere. Note that there appears to be a pattern here of falsification in their books, and also in their advertising.

Authorship declarations

As bad as your list of "facts that connect William Shakespeare's life and work" is, Ms. Hobblesstad, I must admit that it is one of the better short statements on the subject that I have seen by a Stratfordian. That is not saying much, because I haven't seen many. Does it not strike you as a little odd that at this late date you found it necessary to come up with your own list rather than referring to an existing one? We just celebrated a 400th anniversary, after all. Why do you people still not have your story straight? Where is Stratfordians' definitive short statement of the reasons why the authorship is beyond doubt?

It is now nine years since we issued the [Declaration of Reasonable Doubt](#). It took four years to write, with input from some three dozen scholars. In *Contested Will*, James Shapiro had this to say about it:

"It is skillfully drafted... the collaborative effort of some of the best minds committed to casting doubt on Shakespeare's authorship. Its title is inspired, combining the uplift of a historical declaration with that long-established sense of fairness that guided juries to just verdicts, 'reasonable doubt.' A whiff of the courtroom is apparent throughout, as 'the *prima facie* case for Mr. Shakspeare' is shown to be 'problematic' and the connections between the life of the alleged author and the works 'dubious.' The testimony of [twenty] expert witnesses – Mark Twain, Henry James, Freud, Justice Blackmun – is introduced into the record. And by not specifying a candidate it brings together under one roof proponents of all of them" (218).

What Shapiro did not do is write a point-by-point rebuttal, explaining where the Declaration is wrong. Nor did Edmondson and Wells write one for *Shakespeare Beyond Doubt*, despite the fact that both its title and its inclusion of a chapter on the Declaration make it clear that it was one of their main targets. We have repeatedly asked the Birthplace Trust to (1) write a rebuttal and explain where we are wrong, and (2) write a definitive counter-declaration of the reasons why they say there is "no room for doubt." At some point, like after, say, nine years, one begins to think they haven't done it because they cannot.

Now surely all of these English professors should be able to handle such a simple writing assignment. They demand it of their students all the time. The real problem, of course, is that if they did write one it would (1) make it easy to compare the two cases, (2) make it interesting and accessible to the public, (3) make it easy for anyone and everyone to take sides by signing one or the other online for all to see, (4) subject their false claims to scrutiny, and, most dreadful of all, (5) reveal that they cannot compete.

They do not have a list of twenty famous past doubters who looked into it and went for Mr. Shakspeare. They haven't got any solid evidence from his lifetime that anyone ever thought he was the playwright. And while lots of English professors might sign their declaration, they couldn't count on many others.

The last thing you Stratfordians want is a fair competition on a level playing field with accountability. So you claim the issue is "beyond doubt," then refuse to put it to the test in any kind of neutral forum.

And of course you have a really nice thing going in your industry of writing Shakespeare biographies. Has any other person, about whom so little of consequence is known, ever had so many biographers? And now I understand that Norway will soon be the lucky recipient of another biography of the Bard. Your timing is not good. While I understand that you will ignore anything written by us conspiracists, you should read [*The Truth About William Shakespeare*](#) (2013) by the mainstream scholar David Ellis.

I do not know you, Ms. Hobbestad, and I do not mean to single you out for your all-too-common bias, but you've insulted and denigrated some of the best people I have known in my life quite unjustifiably. Not least among these is that author who had such empathy for other people's suffering. He portrayed Hamlet, Ophelia, Timon, Titus, Lear and Edgar so well that he apparently knew them from the inside. You side with those who call us Shakespeare lovers "anti-Shakespearians." I find that hard to forgive.

[A pdf file with the translation of your article that I used in writing this letter is available at this [link](#).]

With best wishes,

John M. Shahan, Chairman, SAC

cc: Alexander Waugh, Honorary President, SAC
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