

**BACON VERSUS
SHAKESPEARE. WHO
WROTE THE PLAYS?**

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Bacon Versus Shakespeare. Who Wrote the Plays? by George Seibel

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Bacon versus Shakespeare

Who Wrote the Plays?

By GEORGE SEIBEL

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Pittsburgh
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1919

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TO MY BOOKBINDER

Bind me my books in stuffs and hues that mean
Something, not in a mute and formal guise;
Let every cover hide some keen surprise
To shadow forth the volume's soul unseen!
Habit good Whitman in a garb of green;
Red gold for rare old Plato, dreamer wise;
A mouchoir for my Musset's streaming eyes;
Spenser the gossamer robe of faerie queene.

And bind my Wycherley in hide of swine;
My Burns in homely borrel, stout and strong;
A crazy-patch Verlaine's absinthine song,
And royal purple Marlowe's mighty line;
But—nothing else were fit to case him in—
Bind up Will Shakespeare in a human skin!

If we wish to know the force
of human genius, we should
read Shakespeare. If we wish
to see the insignificance of
human learning, we may study
his commentators.

Hazlitt's Table Talk

Did Bacon Write Shakespeare?

TWO master minds, many centuries apart, have appeared upon this globe. In the days of Alexander the Great, the genius of Greece flowered in the analytic intellect of Aristotle. The mightiest synthetic brain that ever dwelt within the cavern of a human skull came in "the spacious times of great Elizabeth," in Master William Shakespeare, of Stratford-on-Avon, poacher, player, poet—"master of the revels to mankind"!

As Aristotle could take to pieces all the achievements of the human race, like some surgeon in the dissecting-room, so Shakespeare, like a great architect, builded of dreams and passions those lofty temples and towers of poetry which the tempests of time and the revolutions of history have not bereft of their grace and grandeur.

Both of these giants have encountered detraction, but from different directions. Aristotle's philosophy, which began with observation and experiment, degenerated into futile speculation and deadly dogma. Remember how Galileo was persecuted because he saw spots on the sun, which Aris-

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totle, who had no telescope, had pronounced to be perfect. Remember Victor Hugo's battle against the Three Dramatic Unities falsely deduced from the *Poetics*. Aristotle fell into contempt through the stupidity of the Aristotelians.

The attacks upon Shakespeare have been of a different nature. Aside from Bernard Shaw and old Tolstoy, neither of whom need be taken very seriously in this field, no one has denied the supreme genius of Shakespeare. But since the day of Delia Bacon, a poor crazy creature who succeeded in enlisting the sympathy of Nathaniel Hawthorne, there have been many who have asserted, and have labored diligently to prove, that the great plays were written, not by the ignorant actor from Stratford, but by the crude Francis Bacon, whom Pope described as "the wisest, brightest, meanest of mankind."

Joseph C. Hart, American consul at Santa Cruz, in a book on *The Romance of Yachting*, published in 1848, was perhaps the earliest to question Shakespeare's authorship. Miss Bacon's first article on the subject appeared in *Putnam's Monthly*, in 1856, and she died, in 1859, having labored zealously to establish the delusion endeared to her by family pride. William Henry Smith, of London, in 1856 suggested Bacon as the real author, after the

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doubts about Shakespeare had been raised. Nathaniel Holmes, a Missouri lawyer, Edwin Reed of Boston, and Judge Webb of England, are others who have wasted their time in the same way. Societies have been started and magazines have been published to promote the delusion, so that a bibliographer in 1884 could already enumerate two hundred and fifty-five books and pamphlets on the subject, and now there are probably nigh a thousand. Lawyers are especially liable to be afflicted, perhaps because they are fascinated by the task of making out a case upon slender evidence.

It even became a popular literary diversion to find ciphers in Shakespeare's plays proving that Lord Bacon was the real author. In his youth, as a diplomat at a foreign court, Bacon had devised a system of secret writing. Out of this little acorn has grown a tall forest of overshadowing oaks. Beginning with Ignatius Donnelly, a Greenback lawyer of Minneapolis, and down to Mrs. Gallup of Detroit and Mr. Booth of Cambridge, cipher after cipher has been found in Shakespeare's plays. Evidently Bacon thought one cipher was not enough. He wished to leave nothing to chance. He put in so many ciphers that it is surprising there was room left for any ideas. It does not matter that you can use these ciphers to read