



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

*Richard F. Whalen*

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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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