

Declaration of Reasonable Doubt About the Identity of William Shakespeare

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To Shakespeare lovers everywhere, as well as to those who are encountering him for the first time: know that a great mystery lies before you. How could William “Shakspere” of Stratford have been the author, William Shakespeare, and leave no definitive evidence of it that dates from his lifetime? And why is there an enormous gulf between the alleged author’s life and the contents of his works?

In the annals of world literature, William Shakespeare is an icon of towering greatness. **But who was he?** The following are among the many outstanding writers, thinkers, actors, directors and statesmen of the past who have expressed **doubt that Mr. “Shakspere” wrote the works of William Shakespeare:**

Mark Twain	Orson Welles	William James	Paul H. Nitze
Henry James	Leslie Howard	Sigmund Freud	Lord Palmerston
Walt Whitman	Tyrone Guthrie	Clifton Fadiman	William Y. Elliott
Charles Dickens	Charlie Chaplin	John Galsworthy	Lewis F. Powell, Jr.
Ralph Waldo Emerson	Sir John Gielgud	Mortimer J. Adler	Harry A. Blackmun

Present-day doubters include many more prominent individuals, numerous leading Shakespearean actors, and growing numbers of English professors. Brunel University in West London, and Concordia University in Portland, Oregon, now offer degree programs in authorship studies. **Yet orthodox scholars claim that there is no room for doubt** that Mr. Shakspere wrote the plays and poems traditionally attributed to him.

We, the undersigned, hereby declare our view that **there is room for reasonable doubt** about the identity of William Shakespeare, and that it is an important question for anyone seeking to understand the works, the formative literary culture in which they were produced, or the nature of literary creativity and genius.

Many people think that Mr. Shakspere (a frequent spelling of his name, used here to distinguish him from the author) *claimed* to have written the works. No such record exists. The case for him as the author rests largely on testimony in the First Folio collection of the plays, published in 1623, seven years after he died. However, nothing in the contemporaneous documentary evidence of his life confirms the Folio testimony. Of a few great writers, like Homer, we know nothing at all; but there is only one great writer about whom the more we learn, the less he appears to have *been* a writer. How can this be for England’s Shakespeare?

(To read, sign and download the complete declaration, including summaries of evidence both for and against Mr. Shakspere, go to www.DoubtAboutWill.org)

If writers and thinkers of the stature of Henry James, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Walt Whitman, Mark Twain and all the rest of the outstanding people named above, have expressed doubt that Mr. William Shakspere of Stratford wrote the works attributed to him, why is it even necessary to *say* that there is room for doubt? There clearly *is* doubt, as a matter of empirical fact – *reasonable* doubt, expressed by very credible people. Reasonable people may differ about whether a preponderance of the evidence supports Mr. Shakspere, but **it is simply not credible for anyone to claim, in 2007, that there is no room for doubt** about the author.

Therefore, in adding our names to those of the distinguished individuals named above, we hereby declare that the identity of William Shakespeare should, henceforth, be regarded in academia as a legitimate issue for research and publication, and an appropriate topic for instruction and discussion in classrooms.