

*The Boys from Syracuse* was the first Shakespearean musical adaptation ever made, created back in 1938 (The Regents of the University of Michigan, 2008). It retells Shakespeare's *The Comedy of Errors*, in which two sets of identical twins, separated at birth, end up in the same town – resulting in chaos and confusion for all. But everything turns out for the best in the end, when the families of the twins reunite and reconcile (The Regents of the University of Michigan, 2008).

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## The Shakespeare Conspiracy?

by Tammy Whynot

In the centuries since the works of William Shakespeare were written, there has been doubt cast on the authorship of the thirty-seven plays and one hundred and fifty-four sonnets which bear his name. This controversy may be of interest to young adults who are intrigued by the elements of mystery and conspiracy that are brought up when debating the authenticity of Shakespeare as the actual author. They may feel compelled to learn more about history and literature in general in order to form their own opinion on the topic. As such, having a broad understanding of this debate will be of value to librarians should they be consulted on the issue.

Arguments for or against William Shakespeare having written all—or any—of the works attributed to him are varied and

often impassioned. Some find it impossible to believe that one man could have written the volume of materials that bear his name, or that someone of Shakespeare's educational level could have produced works of such a high calibre (Absolute Shakespeare, 2011). It has also been argued that someone of Shakespeare's class would not have possessed the social connections to write about the topics contained in his works with any authenticity. As well, there are those who have argued that the biographical information available on Shakespeare is patchy at best, leaving them to believe that perhaps the man himself never existed, save as a pen name (Sobran, 1991).

Critics of Shakespeare as the author support other candidates as the true author of his works, such as Christopher Marlowe, Sir Francis Bacon, William Stanley, Queen Elizabeth, or Sir Edward De Vere (Kathman and Ross, 2011). While some of the candidates for authorship seem farfetched, there has been considerable research since the 1920s dedicated to establishing Sir Edward De Vere, the 17<sup>th</sup> Earl of Oxford, as the true author of Shakespeare's works. The supporters of De Vere, known as "Oxfordians," argue that as a "renowned courtier, athlete, poet, playwright, and patron" (Sobran, 1991, p. 45) De Vere had

the education, connections, and travel experience that Shakespeare would have lacked. They also point to the style of writing that has survived in the form of letters De Vere wrote, arguing that there are matches in the syntax, phrasing, and metaphor (Sobran, 1991).

Those who support the authorship of Shakespeare are known amongst scholars as "Stratfordians" (Kathman and Ross, 2011). Their arguments in support of the Bard highlight that doubts cast upon his authorship only emerged in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, mostly due to either misunderstandings about the quality of Shakespeare's grammar-school education and from an attitude of "literary snobbery" ("Was Shakespeare", 1955) which prefers to give credit for the writings to a noble. Arguments that point to the possibility of one person not being able to produce so much quality written work also dismiss the idea that true genius may exist. They point out that if Shakespeare did not author his plays, there must have been a large, ongoing conspiracy to conceal the truth from the public, involving not only figures from the day but historians and Shakespearean scholars. The idea of such a conspiracy existing was derided by one Stratfordian as "sheer madness" (Shakespeare Birthplace Trust, 2011).

There is a wide body of information available both on-line and in print which delves deeper into the debate and presents questions for further thought, such as timelines, historical events, and information about other known playwrights of the day. Based on what is known and unknown about the life of Shakespeare, it does not appear that this debate will be silenced any time soon—like any conspiracy theory, it thrives on unanswered questions from incomplete historical records and plain curiosity.

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## Censoring the Bard: Shakespeare's Content and a Youth Audience

By Tammy Whynot

Audiences unfamiliar with Shakespeare's work may be surprised to learn that within some of the most highly regarded English-language texts of all time--intermixed with elegant description and poignant soliloquies--there is plenty of teenage rebellion, swearing, bawdy humour, gang violence, murder, and references to the