‘Proving Shakespeare’ Webinar, Friday 26 April 2013, 6.30-7.30 BST.

Recorded in Stratford-upon-Avon by Misfits Inc for the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust.
Sponsored by Cambridge University Press.
Speakers: Professor Stanley Wells CBE, Dr Paul Edmondson, Dr Rosalind Barber
Also present: Melissa Leon and AJ Leon of Misfits Inc.

[Slide: Text ‘Proving Shakespeare.‘ Images: Paul Edmondson, Stanley Wells, Ros Barber]

PE: Well it’s a lovely day in Stratford-upon-Avon, my name’s Paul Edmondson of the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust. We’re going to be starting the webinar very soon. About another minute or two. I’m joined by Ros Barber, who’s just published a marvellous book called ***The Marlowe Papers***, and Stanley Wells CBE, our new president for the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust. Okay. So welcome to Proving Shakespeare, this is a webinar about ***Shakespeare Beyond Doubt***, and it’s been sponsored by Cambridge University Press. My name is Paul Edmondson and I’m joined by Stanley Wells and Ros Barber. Thank you very much to Cambridge who published ***Shakespeare Beyond Doubt*** last week, and there was a launch for it as part of the Shakespeare Birthplace celebrations here in Stratford.

[New Slide: ***Shakespeare Beyond Doubt*** Cover Image]

That’s the cover of the book that Stanley and I co-edited. Stanley, an interesting cover wouldn’t you say?

SW: Yes, I think it’s a delightful cover. Joe Fiennes of course in the film of Shakespeare in Love, pondering the next word to write, he’s got his quill pen in his hand, he’s rather informally dressed...

PE: And in a half-timbered room.

SW: In a half-timbered room, indeed, where he’s writing the play of - what was it called? Romeo and Juliet and the pirates?

PE: Ethel the pirate.

SW: [laughs]

PE: And Ros, I said a moment ago I had an e-mail from someone whose Shakespeare seminar immediately started deconstructing that image, which resonated with you?

RB: Yes, absolutely, I like the fact that it’s such a mythical Shakespeare above the title of ‘Shakespeare Beyond Doubt’

PE: As it were, from a fictional story.

RB: A fictional story, yes, but it’s actually a very strong mythic Shakespeare, this image of a good looking young man...

SW: Very sexy.

RB: ... chewing his quill

PE: I think of him as inky-fingered Shakespeare...

RB: Yes

PE: ... which we might come onto later on.

[New Slide: Max Beerbohm Cartoon image 1904]

PE: These were some other possible illustrations. This one is in the book, from the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust's collections. We wanted it as the cover but it's a bit pale. This is a lovely image of 'William Shakespeare his method of work' - and there is Francis Bacon, and there is Shakespeare..

SW: I think in the birthplace, don't you?

PE: Yes, I think that's probably the birthplace.

SW: The windows behind.

PE: But who is giving the text of ***Hamlet*** to who?

SW: Probably Bacon, having written it, is giving it to Shakespeare and asking Shakespeare to be the front man. What do you think?

PE: It could be the other way around, like an Olympic baton.

[New Slide: Cartoon of Shakespeare confronting his wife Anne with baby on her knee]

This was also a possible cover at one point. I guess Anne Shakespeare holding an infant as Shakespeare stands over her holding the latest sonnet, looking at the child: "He's been attributed to the Earl of Oxford!" And so a sense there of the child himself, or herself ...

SW: Shakespeare's work

PE:... like some of Shakespeare's work, being treated as though it's attributable to the Earl of Oxford as well.

SW: A Little bastard.

PE: [laughs]

[New Slide: Publicity poster for the film ***Anonymous***]

This was a catalyst for our endeavour. This is obviously a publicity poster for the film ***Anonymous***, which was released in 2011. It was at the time when the Birthplace Trust launched its Shakespeare authorship campaign, and ***Shakespeare Beyond Doubt*** is the latest expression of that campaign. It was a campaign which was expressed mainly online, but it was always the intention to produce an academic book, and we were delighted that Cambridge University Press agreed to publish it.

[New Slide: Image of SBT house, title: Shakespeare and Authorship]

Shakespeare and authorship is something which haunts any Shakespeare scholar. Stanley, you've had a lot of experience -

SW: Well, over many years of course I've taken part in debates, in a debate in the Inner Temple which was done ages ago, I've taken part in television programmes, radio programmes about it all, always sticking up for Shakespeare. There was a film called ***Much Ado About Something*** which won a prize which you, Ros, also won..

RB: That's right, the Hoffmann Prize.

SW: I was in that... I was featured in that film and so was Jonathan Bate, digging up his turnips in his garden for some reason.

PE: I was interested, Ros, that that film is mentioned in your novel as a point of inspiration for you.

RB: It's the reason for my novel. That was my first experience of the authorship question, up until then I had never even considered the idea that anyone other than Shakespeare wrote Shakespeare and I just happened to turn it on, it was on BBC4 in the Shakespeare season, and I heard Jonathan Bate say 'Well of course it's a ludicrous idea but it would make a great novel' and I thought, 'Yes, you're absolutely right'. [laughs]

PE: And you picked it up and ran with it. Here we see an image of the back of Shakespeare's birthplace as it looks today, and you see the flag flying over the top of the house, and the back of the Shakespeare Centre, the image a reminder that this is something which is talked about a lot, one can't escape it, can't escape it. If you're on Twitter and you'd like to contribute to the discussion as it unfolds, please tweet, we'll be saving all the tweets, but if you use the hashtag 'provingshakespeare' that will mean that your tweet will be automatically archived, so hashtag 'provingshakespeare'. And if you want to name the country that you're tuning in from, that would be great too. So it's a question that comes up in taxis, on trains, when one's travelling, it's also a question which has ingratiated itself within two universities

[subtitle appears: MA in Shakespeare Authorship Studies at Brunel University]

and this was thought to be something which we wanted to respond to as part of the authorship campaign. There is an MA in Shakespeare Authorship Studies at Brunel University, and there is also

[subtitle appears: Concordia University]

a centre, a Shakespeare authorship research centre, at Concordia University. Stanley, we found these two expressions of the discussion worrying.

SW: Yes we did, that it's infiltrating. We do feel, of course, that it's a perfectly good subject, the phenomenon, of whether, the phenomenon of doubt is a good subject for academic study, indeed, it forms the basis of Jim Shapiro's book, Jim Shapiro who wrote the Afterword to our book, of his book, wittily called ***Contested Will.*** But Concordia

University has an annual conference, and they had one last week, and it's entirely devoted to deconstructing the idea that Shakespeare wrote Shakespeare.

[New Slide: Image of Concordia University. Text: No intellectual justification? Shakespeare Authorship Research Centre, Concordia University, Portland Oregon]

There was a long lecture given at that conference which is available online, which I've read, called '***The Factual Desert of Stanley Wells***'. It's entirely devoted to demolishing, or attempting to demolish, the arguments that I put forward in a five minute talk in a debate to the English Speaking Union eighteen months or so ago. It's a very intelligent piece, but of course I believe it to be completely and totally misguided and wrong.

PE: Should say this point, that if you have any questions, we hope you do have questions, you can submit them at any time during the discussion. It would be very helpful if you were to say your first name and also which country you're sending your question from. Ros, have you ever been to the Shakespeare Authorship Research Centre?

RB: I never have, but I have been to Brunel, and I know Bill Leahy, and I don't agree that there's no intellectual justification - I understand that you feel this very strongly - but I think that it's actually important to look at the evidence that is argued, that is put forward on both sides, you know, in the sense, if you look at the authorship studies that are done by people like Brian Vickers, he's deconstructing the Shakespeare canon in his own way, he's accepting that there are a number of hands involved in writing Shakespeare. I think, you know, there's a lot that's spurious in the non-Stratfordian arguments that are put forward, but I also feel the same way, I have to say, about the strong Stratfordian defences. I think that there are problems here that need to be discussed, and that they are *best* discussed in an academic context, in lots of ways. So I actually welcome the absorption of this question into professional academic circles.

PE: It's interesting, isn't it, how many academics try to avoid this issue...

SW: Yes.

PE: ... I don't think this is your experience, but certainly among Shakespeare colleagues there is sometimes a tendency just to, just close down any kind of discussion...

RB: Completely.

SW: To remain aloof about it, as if it's beneath their, beneath contempt.

PE: I mean I really do feel that the Birthplace Trust is pitching in, getting its hands dirty in this argument.

RB: I really appreciate that after, it seemed to me, a very, very long time, a hundred and fifty years of really no-one weighing in with any significant academic book on the subject, that there is finally an academic book by twenty respected and established Shakespeare scholars, to put forward the orthodox side of it, and I really welcome that development, I think it's an important development, but you know I personally don't think it settles the question beyond doubt, I think it raises a lot of other questions. That it's just the beginning of something for me, it's the beginning of a conversation.

PE: Certainly one of the things we hope we've done with - picking up the metaphor of beginning the conversation, or perhaps furthering the conversation - is we hope we've put some oxygen into this discussion, because I think you know you look in certain parts of it and for too long the Shakespeareans have never had anything to do with the anti-Shakespeareans and vice versa, and I hope there's now some oxygen there that we've brought to the discussion. Let's open the book and as it were look at its structure.

[New slide. Text: 'Part One: Sceptics'. (Chapter titles)]

It comprises three parts. The first part is called Sceptics, and there you will find, as it were, some prominent case studies about people who have been nominated as alternative writers of the Shakespeare canon, whatever we might mean by that word canon in that context. So Graham Holderness gets the ball rolling as it were with the person who got the ball rolling, Delia Bacon, in the middle of the nineteenth century. And then the case for Sir Francis Bacon is taken up by Alan Stewart, the case for Christopher Marlowe by Charles Nicholl, and the Earl of Oxford, though his name is missing, Alan Nelson wrote the chapter on Oxford. He really did write the chapter on Oxford-

RB: [laughs]

PE: - it's not disputed, and the unusual suspects by Matt Kubus. More on that in a moment. But Stanley, these are prominent authorities on these writers.

SW: Yes, they are, yes. Graham has written a very interesting piece on Delia Bacon, a much maligned lady, who was

[New Slide: image of Delia Bacon. Text: 'The Unreadable Delia Bacon']

a distinguished woman in her own right, a good teacher, even though she went on to take up very unorthodox views, and Graham's piece is a very interesting re-examination. She's always talked about as being unreadable, and Graham is one of the few people

[text appears: 'Book The Philosophy of Shakespeare's Plays, 1857']

who have actually read the unreadable, the unreadable book ***The Philosophy of Shakespeare's Plays***...

[text appears: 'Collaborative authorship, a 'school' led by Sir Walter Ralegh']

SW:...the other...

PE: She was interested in collaborative authorship, wasn't she?

SW: Yes

PE: And in some ways, Ros, I mean, you're sort of perhaps a modern-day Delia Bacon yourself, wouldn't you say. Is that fair?

RB: No, I would think that's not at all fair.

PE: Okay

RB: [laughs]

PE: [laughs] Sorry.

RB: [laughs] Thanks!

PE: I mean, you look nothing like her.

RB: No, and I think we have very different backgrounds. I mean for a start, she was self-taught, as I believe that as a woman she couldn't [go to University] which is very interesting

PE: She was questioning, she was questioning.

RB: She was questioning, yes, but -

SW: She was American.

RB: Plenty of people have questioned and not just Delia Bacon, obviously, but she was the first person to put it out there.

[New text: 'Style difficult to read, hypothesis never actually proven [and unprovable]; more like gothic fiction...]

But she was self-taught, whereas I've done an MA and a PhD, so quite a lot of -

PE: I was making a comparison mainly to do with the fact that both of you have
RB: difference.

RB: Some scepticism.
PE: Enquiring minds, scepticism.

RB: Enquiring minds, yes.

PE: And actually, the collaborative authorship, she was ahead of the game, as well as being the first one to get the ball rolling.
SW: Yes, [unclear] was very interestingly...[unclear, words spoken over PE]

PE: Absolutely. And you see collaborative authorship, although it was beginning to be acknowledged in Shakespeare studies during that time -
SW: Yes, it was.

SW: Exactly the same time, actually.

RB: Yes.

SW: The first theories about Fletcher's hand in Henry VIII, for example, comes in then.

PE: But the sense in which collaboration is something which has grown within Shakespeare studies...

SW: Very importantly in the last thirty years.

RB: Yes, absolutely.

PE: In some ways, Stanley, you have been at the forefront of this.

SW: Yes, I've been with the Oxford Shakespeare, of which I've been journal editor.

RB: Yes. I do actually have an issue with the word collaborative, because I'm very interested in words, and I do have an issue with the word collaborative because I think of it very much as co-authorship, I know the Brian Vickers book is ***Shakespeare Co-Author***, and I think that co-authorship can take a number of different forms.

SW: Yes

RB: Collaboration suggests all sitting round the table doing something at the same time, whereas I think co-authorship gives much more possibilities for a partial manuscript being finished by someone else, or someone gets the beginning, someone gets the end, and especially because you tend to see co-authorship in the Shakespeare canon at the beginning and the end of the canon much more than in the middle -

SW: Yes

RB: I much prefer the term co-authorship, I think it's a bit more *correct* than collaboration.

SW: Yes

RB: Because collaboration is too suggestive of things that may not have occurred.

SW: Yes

PE: Well her style is difficult to read, there's an example of that just looming, but just to reflect briefly on the cultural moment in which she appeared, detective fiction was on the rise, ten years earlier, Charles Darwin had published ***Origin of Species***, in which he'd removed one absolutely unquestioned theory of the start of the universe, as being the Christian and Judaic narrative of the origins of the world, and put in an alternative theory, and then ten years later, what do you know, something similar is being done with your, Shakepeare's plays, I find that highly interesting, and possibly explic- the reason why this phenomenon didn't start until the middle of the nineteenth century.

RB: Yes, I think it's part of the reason.

PE: Part of the reason.

[New slide. Text 'Delia Bacon' and an extract from the book.]

Now this is an example of what Graham Holderness cites in his chapter as an area of her unreadability, and this is why she's little read today, it's a very difficult style. [Reads:] 'The brave, bold genius of Raleigh flashed new life into that little nucleus of the Elizabethan development. The new '*Round Table*,' which that newly-beginning age of chivalry, with its new weapons and devices, and its new and more heroic adventure had created, was not yet 'full' till he came in. The Round Table grew rounder with this knight's presence. Over those dainty stories of the classic ages, over those quaint memorials of the elder chivalry, that were spread out on it, over the dead letter of the past, the brave Atlantic breeze came

in, the breath of the great future blew, when the turn came for this knight's adventure; whether opened in the prose of its statistics, or set to its native music in the mystic melodies of the bard who was there to sing it.' I was fine until I got to the Atlantic breeze, and then slightly after that, after knight's adventure I sort of lost my...

RB: will to live.
SW: Yes, yes.
PE: [unclear, RB and SW speaking over]

RB: Well she really desperately needs an editor, I have to say.

SW: [laughs]

RB: I was having problems with the 'newly' and 'new' and the 'new'.

PE: [laughs]

RB: Yes, she's not a great writer, is she.

PE: Quite an innovator.

RB: But it's very fictive as well, the approach is. And it's interesting to me that the first person to put the Marlowe argument forward, put it forward in a novel.

PE: Yes
SW: That's true.

RB: But this is, you know, very imaginative writing.

PE: It is, and it alludes self-consciously to myths, doesn't it, Arthurian especially.

RB: Mmm.

PE: And I love that cultural clash between the American and the British, the Atlantic breeze coming in, that's very very interesting.

SW: The Atlantic breeze is Delia Bacon.

[New slide: Images of Marlowe, Bacon, Oxford. Text: 'Whodunnit?']

PE: [laughs] She is the Atlantic breeze. But anyway, what arises pretty quickly after, after she gets the ball rolling, in the next seventy years or so, is a sort of Whodunnit scenario, whereby it's beginning to seem that anybody apart from Shakespeare of Stratford is a reasonable suspect. So there we have an image of a man who *might* be Christopher Marlowe, there's no certainty about that...

RB: Yes, that's the putative portrait, yes.

PE: ... Francis Bacon...

SW: Great writer.

PE: ... great writer...

SW: Mostly in Latin.

PE: ...and the Earl of Oxford, and there we think of the three, as it were, prominent nominees.

SW: Those are the three most prominent *currently*, yes.

PE: But there are many others.

[New slide, Text: 'Who else?']

Some of the people who have been mentioned are Roger Manners, the Earl of Rutland, Daniel Defoe, that's an interesting one, Sir Henry Neville, William Stanley, 6th Earl of Derby, Elizabeth the First herself, she crops up in a lot of the narratives about this, Sir Walter Raleigh, Lady Mary Sidney - the will for it to be a female nominee has also...

SW: Just come up in recent years, that one, yes.

PE: Edward de Vere, 17th Earl of Oxford, even Ben Jonson's been suggested. Now in our book there is a chapter by Matt Kubus

[New slide. Text: 'Mathematically, each time an additional candidate is suggested, the probability decreases that any given name is the true author. - Matt Kubus, The Usual Suspects']

which sort of mops up, at the last count, seventy-seven of the nominees, in which he says 'Mathematically, each time an additional candidate is suggested, the probability decreases that any given name is the true author.'

RB: I want to query that, because I want to know is that mathematically true? Do we have any mathematicians listening in to the webcast who could actually tell me whether that's a true statement or not?

PE: Mathematicians, we need you at this point.
RB: [laughs]

PE: Send a tweet to Stratford-upon-Avon.

RB: But it looks to me like an assertion, rather than something that is necessarily mathematically true. But my maths only went to A level, so what do I know?

PE: Well, whenever we hit probability, I always imagine large bars of chocolate and fractions and so on.
RB: [laughs]

PE: But it seems to me, as I understand the maths there, it's about the more, the more named possibilities that there are, the less a share of chocolate that they'll receive.

RB: But you see, does it really work like that? Because, do we not agree that there is someone who is at least the central author of the works of Shakespeare, even if there are

other hands involved, that there *is* a true author? So, I mean, if this was mathematically true, surely that would decrease Shakespeare of Stratford's probability of being the true author, as much as it's saying *any* given name is the true author. And that would include *all* the names. So I dispute that as a point of maths. I think that it sounds clever, but probably isn't true.

[New slide: Corpus Christi portrait of Christopher Marlowe]

PE: What about this man, here. If this is indeed Christopher Marlowe.

RB: Well he does at least have the track record of being an excellent writer in the same genre as William Shakespeare-

SW: Absolutely, yes.

RB: Acknowledged as a very powerful influence on Shakespeare's writing, essentially - he didn't exactly invent blank verse drama, but he was the first person to make it work, and the English history play, he wrote long narratives out of Ovid, so he has Hero and Leander, the first publication with William Shakespeare's name on it is Venus and Adonis, which is almost a pair of poems, very similar poems.

PE: He's a great writer...

RB: He has the right writing background.

PE: Of course, we would say 'he ain't Shakespeare'.

RB: Well he certainly wasn't Shakespeare at the time he's supposed to have died at the age of 29, but then nor was Shakespeare. And I think you said in your book, Stanley, ***Shakespeare & Co***, you said that if Shakespeare had died in the same year that Marlowe's meant to have died, 1593, we would regard Marlowe as the better writer.

SW: No, what I said was if Shakespeare died in the same year as Marlowe *did* die.

RB: Ah, yes, okay, yes, I certainly changed the words a bit, but you said Marlowe was the better writer.

SW: Yes, I believe that. There would have been more great writing from Marlowe than there had been at *that* point from William Shakespeare.

RB: Yes.

SW: Though of course at that time, Shakespeare had already written some plays, so if you think Marlowe wrote them as well, you're in a quandary.

RB: Well, there were plays that were already written which we now attribute to Shakespeare, but nothing appeared with the name William Shakespeare on it until a couple of weeks after Marlowe died, or supposedly died.

SW: Ah well there are plays in the First Folio, they're attributed to Shakespeare there.

RB: Yes, but they're not attributed to him until 1623, and in fact, until the 1920s quite a lot of orthodox scholars, even some very well-respected names, attributed things like the Henry VI plays to Marlowe. So in fact you know there was a whole school of thought that some of those early plays were essentially Marlowe plays that Shakespeare had taken on and rewritten and adapted.

PE: Ros, your novel takes the premise that Marlowe didn't die in 1593.

RB: Yes.

PE: And I'm not sure, I'm not sure whether that's something you, you actually believe or not. You don't - You question the evidence.

RB: I question the evidence around his death, yes.

PE: But the evidence doesn't have to be true in order for your novel to tell a good story.

RB: No, no, it is a work of fiction, as I keep trying to reassure people, and you can thoroughly enjoy it no matter who you believe is the author of Shakespeare, especially if you love Shakespeare, because I've put a lot of Shakespeare references in.

PE: You see, for Stanley and I, it *does* matter, absolutely, that the evidence that exists for Marlowe's death, the coroner's report, and the burial record, are good enough pieces of historical evidence, wherever one's coming from, which make them undeniable.

RB: Well, I mean, this was the interesting point for me when I read Charles Nicholl's chapter in your book, on Marlowe, is that Charles Nicholl himself has written a very excellent book, I have to say, ***The Reckoning***, and then another version of it ten years later, in which he very much disputes that the inquest document is true. Now, he doesn't dispute the burial record, but he *does* dispute the inquest document, he raises all kinds of issues with it, as people have ever since it was first discovered in 1925. And the fact is there's been no real agreement as to the veracity of the inquest document, you know, scholars have been very much split, and I would say the majority believe the inquest document to be false.

SW: Well the important thing is that he's *dead*, and you're not disputing *that* evidence, if he's dead he can't go on to write the works of Shakespeare.

RB: Well-

SW: Of course this is all partly to do with the fictional, you've written this excellent, fascinating novel in verse, with a number, a great many different poems in, it's not a single verse narrative, and it's only one of many many novels that have been written, the most famous one perhaps is the one by Anthony Burgess-

RB: Yep

SW: -***Nothing Like the Sun***, and we have a chapter in our book by Paul Franssen about fictional treatments of this topic, there have been many doc - many novels, over a good, as you said yourself the first suggestion of Marlowe came in a novel about a hundred, a little less than a hundred years ago...

PE: It's interesting, Paul Franssen in his chapter identifies fictional tropes among that body of work, that genre, and one of them is that Shakespeare has to be presented, normally is presented, in that genre, as an uneducated person from, you a know, a town which is in a sort of backwater, and that constant trope, we had it in the film Anonymous -

SW: Very much so, he was a drunken, illiterate buffoon.

PE: And actually one of the things about ***The Marlowe Papers*** is Shakespeare hardly appears.

RB: Yes [laughs].

PE: I just wondered why that was the case.

RB: Yes, I did completely sideline him, I agree. I have him agreeing to be the front and sort of represent the plays, but he - well actually, one of the things I based that on is the fact that there is so little *personal* testimony around him, that he doesn't seem to have hung out with other writers, we don't have anything, you know, he doesn't seem to belong to that circle of writers in London, and, you know, no-one ever reports a conversation with him in a pub, or you know, there's no obvious communication with him, he doesn't get involved in that commendatory poems business, and so he seems to me a very taciturn man, he keeps himself to himself. And also because I know that Diana Price has shown that there are periods of time when we expect him to be in London, and then it turns out he's in Stratford, he's doing some business in Stratford, so I imagined him being really quite absent for the purpose of the book. I thought that would work rather - rather well. And I think, you know, I agree that there is this trope in fiction of really diminishing, as much as possible, William Shakespeare of Stratford, and sometimes making him quite an objectionable character, and I think that is entirely for the purpose, I suppose, of making a good story or something, making a baddie. I didn't want to make him a baddie, I think if he was in role, which he is in the novel, where's he protecting this man's life by agreeing to front his plays, then he's doing him a good service, he's doing a good job, so I didn't want to take him apart.

PE: My favourite depiction of Shakespeare in any novel is in Virginia Woolf's ***Orlando***, in which Orlando sees Shakespeare writing, and it's a rare account, in any work, of how Shakespeare physically sat, or looked, when he was writing. And the whole narrative just stops. And you know it's supposed to be Shakespeare and he keeps cropping up in ***Orlando***. And Orlando stares at Shakespeare across a room: 'Is this a writer? Tell me everything that ever happened in the world', it's a marvellous moment. Let's think about Part Two: Shakespeare as Author.

[New slide, text: 'Part Two: Shakespeare as Author. (Chapter titles and authors)]

PE: Theorising Shakespeare's authorship by Andrew Hadfield, the University of Sussex. That chapter really is incredibly helpful, I think, because it's, its about helping us all to relax about that fact that we shouldn't be worried about there being gaps in the records of people's lives, or, that the kinds of records that we would most wish to see in someone's life don't in fact survive and aren't there.

RB: I did have a problem with that chapter, I mean Andrew is someone I know rather well as my PhD supervisor, but he'd already been challenged on this point, I believe, when he put this in ***60 Minutes***, and challenged with the data of Diana Price, because it is actually

unusual: the number of gaps, the amount of gap that there is, if you like, this man-shaped absence of data, is actually extraordinary, and I thought it was problematic for me in that chapter, that he - I would like to see an answer to Price, I haven't yet seen an answer to Price's data, showing that Shakespeare's ... the gap in Shakespeare evidence that actually shows he was a writer - because we have a huge amount of evidence about him, more than any other writer, but *not* related to writing, so -

PE: It's how you approach evidence, isn't it -

RB: Yes.

PE: - it's what you decide to do with that evidence, and Diana Price has a different agenda, I think, there, with her telling history. Andrew Hadfield is right in saying we shouldn't be worried about -

RB: Well, is he? Is he, is he? Because they are extraordinary gaps, they're not usual gaps, they are exceptional gaps, and that hasn't yet been answered, and I'd love to see an answer to that.

PE: In-
SW: But-

PE: Sorry, carry on Stanley.

SW: Well, I was going to say in *my* chapter, the next chapter in the book,

[New slide: image of Shakespeare monument in Holy Trinity Church, Stratford]

I produce a great many allusions to Shakespeare as a writer -

RB: But they don't link to Shakespeare of Stratford, and there's no link to him until long after he's dead, but that's 1623 -

SW: That's 1623, but that's only seven years after he's dead, and why not, why -

RB: Well-

SW: Why discount evidence after somebody's dead?

PE: Can I just jump in here and say the first reference to that by corroborative evidence in the First Folio's 1623, but the funeral bust might have gone up in 1616, we do not know that it didn't.

RB: No, we don't know when it went up, it's true, we don't know when it went up, but the point is, I want to know - I don't know if we can ever know - but I do want to know why there aren't references to him that show that he actually knew other writers and that he had any kind of writerly life.

PE: Well there are writers who talk about a writer called
William Shakespeare -
RB: William Shakespeare, and that's not disputed, and Stanley very very... I mean I like you really take us through it, year by year, and I really appreciate that, you know, piece by

piece, through the evidence of writers who know that there is a writer who publishes under that name, William Shakespeare. But none of them know him personally, there's no - there's certainly no *indication* that they know him personally, if they did know him personally they don't reveal a personal connection -

SW: Oh, that's not quite true, I mean there's the Manningham anecdote about Shakespeare -

RB: Yes, but that's an anecdote! And he's heard it from Mr Curle. So he clearly doesn't know Shakespeare personally. And also we don't know, it doesn't say that he's a writer. He's connected to theatre.

PE: But I see what I'm hearing from you Ros which is an absolutely completely understandable longing, we sometimes don't have the evidence, the kinds of things we would like to have evidence for, and the fact that we don't have evidence, isn't evidence of absence.

RB: But if you ask someone who's in evidence science, like Professor David Schum, who is emeritus professor of Evidence Science at UCL, he says that where there is absence of evidence where you would *expect* evidence to be, that in itself is an important piece of evidence that needs to be accounted for by any explanatory narrative.

PE: Well we can't always account for evidence, and you see this is a problem with some Shakespeare [unclear] plays -

RB: Why, why can't we account for *extraordinary* - and it is extraordinary, Price has shown that - extraordinary lack of evidence? She compares 24 other writers of the period who all *do* have a literary paper trail, and he - he has none.

PE: Well Shakespeare does actually, and Diana Price is wrong.

RB: On which points?
PE: And Stanley can we, I'm sorry, can we hear from Stanley Wells, co-editor of the book,

[New Slide, Text: 'Evidence for Shakespeare: publication, theatrical knowledge, references, memorial and posthumous evidence']

on evidence for Shakespeare.

SW: Well there's masses of evidence from the publications that it's Shakes - that Shake, that as Ros says, that somebody called Shakespeare wrote, wrote plays, wrote poems, there are, there are commendatory verses to somebody called Shakespeare, there's Ben Jonson's discussions with William Drummond of Hawthornden, in which he talks about Shakespeare as a man, there's Ben Jonson's testimony, that he loved Shakespeare 'this side idolatory', there's a lot of evidence about, about Shakespeare.

PE: I have huge problems with the anti-Shakespearean perspective that dismisses posthumous evidence [clicks] like that, and this phrase 'in his lifetime' keeps popping up, it matters not a jot. Funeral monuments are normally made after someone has died,

RB: Of course they are, of course they are-

PE: for goodness sakes, and if we went on the evidence of a funeral monument, we might say, well, Jane Austen wasn't a writer, because it doesn't mention the fact that she was a writer on her monument. It does on Shakespeare's.

SW: Yes.

PE: He's compared to Virgil, he's compared to Socrates and Nestor -

SW: Shakespeare *of* Stratford-upon-Avon.

PE: Yes.

RB: Yes.

SW: And he was buried in Stratford-upon-Avon.

RB: I agree, but isn't the lack of *personal* evidence curious? Isn't that-

SW: No, I don't think it is.

RB: You don't think that is?

PE: Ros, what do we mean by personal evidence?

RB: Evidence of someone-
PE: Do we mean the *tone* of it?

RB: Well, just the fact that he appears to move in those writing circles, and that, you know, I mean, even Ben Jonson, now Ben Jonson sounds like he did know him personally, I agree, none of that is published until after his death, but he sounds like he knows him personally, but he sounds - he says, on the one hand he's saying marvellous things about him, on the other hand he's quite disparaging.

PE: Well, he was a, he was a friendly rival, wasn't he.

RB: Well, you know, you can - there's many ways of reading the evidence and another way of reading it is that he was actually talking about two different people, that's certainly the way some people have read it.

PE: I like, I like the fact that a Stratfordian friend Richard Field published Shakespeare, and that he's mentioned in ***Cymbeline***, Richard du Champ.

RB: Yes, but -

PE: And I think Richard Field, Richard Field moved in exalted circles, and he was a very important publisher -

RB: He published for Lord Burghley, you know, which would be, would work very well for the Marlowe story because Marlowe is known to have worked for Lord Burghley as well.

PE: This is a problem here isn't it, 'worked very well for the Marlowe story', as if everything is just detective fiction, which with a, you know, pick and choose-

RB: Well it's all about taking different narratives. You take the, you take the orthodox narrative, and I look through at the Marlowe narrative, there's the Oxford narratives, there are other narratives, and what interests me is how different pieces of evidence add up to or join in to these various narratives.

[New Slide. Text: 'Publication Evidence' (various quartos listed with their dates)]

PE: There's lots of publication evidence-

RB: I think Richard Field's reference in ***Cymbeline*** is very interesting because in that case it's actually Cloten who's dead, with his head chopped off, and he's referred to throughout the play as 'Clot.', and so it's 'Richard Field is a clot', is an entirely different way at looking at it. He's saying, 'here is someone who's associated my name with Stratford, thanks Richard Field, I think you're a clot.' That's - I'm not saying that's true, at all, I'm just saying here's a different way of reading the evidence.

[Some problems with transmission begin at this point for a few seconds]

PE: You see, all of this in front of us Stanley, all [missing] mangled

SW: Absolutely

PE: And it will all [unclear] through the sense of these [unclear] quartos [missing] name on the title page [missing?] and [missing] evidence because all of these are different publishers, different printers ... We're seeing before us a list of plays, but it's a hugely complex strata of information which made these publications possible. People knew each other. People talk.

RB: But no-one seems to have known William Shakespeare the writer. No-one seems to-

SW: Richard Barnfield did, for example. Richard Barnfield writes a commendatory poem.

RB: Yes, but that's a totally impersonal reference! He's writing to the author, William Shakespeare. All of these -

PE: But how do you know he didn't know him?

RB: What I'm saying is that these are impersonal references, there's no evidence of a personal friendship in these references, they are standard Elizabethan commendations, William Shakespeare - no-one doubts, no-one at all disputes the fact that the name William Shakespeare is on all of these plays, no-one disputes that -

PE: But all of this argument, really, is, you're wanting to gainsay these references to Shakespeare in his lifetime, to say that he's not the William Shakespeare of Stratford-upon-Avon, and why, why do you want to do that? Why don't you want it to be Shakespeare of Stratford-upon-Avon?

RB: This is an interesting thing about your approach, and I know James Shapiro's as well, that's you're 'why don't you *want* it to be' and what is it about my psychology, or even, my pathology, that makes me doubt Shakespeare, you're always looking at that. I mean there's *two* chapters devoted to Delia Bacon in your book, and looking at the psychology

of Delia Bacon, and *why* does she doubt, because I'm pretty sure this is something you don't understand. But I have to tell you, the answer is, that the *evidence* isn't sufficient, that the *evidence* doesn't add up, that there isn't the evidence for Shakespeare *as a writer*, Shakespeare of Stratford *as a writer*, that there is for other writers of the period -

SW: There is, for example, the, there is the fact that people visited Stratford soon after Shakespeare died, to look at his monument, because they knew he was a writer. There is the manuscript on William Basse's elegy on William Shakespeare, which is headed 'William Shakespeare died in Stratford-upon-Avon, the time of his birth, 1616', and that is an elegy that refers specifically to Shakespeare as a great tragedian, it uses the word tragedian, which might mean either an actor or a writer -

PE: So you see the alternative scenario is that all of the evidence, and we've only just touched on a little bit of it, the mostly likely outcome of that evidence is that the plays were written *by* Shakespeare of Stratford-upon-Avon. Now if, if, if you want to rewrite history, if you want to rewrite evidence, if you want to pitch in and say actually let's look again, let's tell a different story, that is something you can do, but please don't expect people who are interested in truth of history, and what the past tells us through documentation, to go along with it.

RB: Well actually I have to say the people that *you* call anti-Shakespeareans, who are actually non-Stratfordians in my book, they're *very* interested in the the truth, they're very interested in the evidence, and it's not about rewriting the evidence, it's about looking at it in a different perspective.

PE: And dismissing it.

[New slide, text: 'Shakespeare and School', text from the chapter]

Shakespeare and School's an interesting one, this is -
RB: Well, I have to say, you dismiss some evidence as well, I see dismissal of evidence on both sides.

PE: Shakespeare and School's an interesting one, because for the school record, it doesn't exist, but that's not unusual among grammar schools. I think the school records in Stratford only started in the 1800s.

SW: 1800s.

PE: And this is a magisterial chapter by Carol Rutter of Warwick University, in which, of course, all of these chapters have different purposes, within a critical mass of evidence which the book is bringing together. And Carol wrote this chapter in part to demonstrate you didn't have to go to university, or be an aristocrat, to write Shakespeare, and that all you needed was a really good grammar school education of the kind which was available in Stratford, and had been available for many, many years before the school was properly given its charter by Edward VI. And that, and that the likeliest outcome is that Shakespeare went there with many others, we know the records don't survive, but the body of work shows an educated school mind.

SW: A correlation between -

RB: I have no problem at all with the idea that the author of these works went to an Elizabethan grammar school. And I think it's very likely that Shakespeare of Stratford went to the grammar school in Stratford, even though there's no evidence to support that, it seems a reasonable assumption that he did have some schooling at the grammar school, given the position of his father. What Carol Rutter's chapter proves, as far as I'm concerned, is that the author of those works had experience of being a grammar school boy. And I don't have any problem at all with that.

[New slide. Text: 'Part Three: A Cultural Phenomenon ... Did Shakespeare Write Shakespeare? (list of chapters and their authors)]

PE: Part three of the volume is called 'A Cultural Phenomenon, Did Shakespeare Write Shakespeare?' and here it's a sense of the afterlife of the discussion, the kinds of energies which it makes possible, we've just mentioned earlier Paul Franssen's overview of fictional treatments of Shakespeare's authorship, from the university of Utrecht, Kate McClusky is writing about the contemporary desire to tell stories rather than to get bogged down in historical fact, and that fictions will always be more attractive to the human mind than truth with gaps. Because it's part of what makes a story palatable.

RB: But that's what I would say that the orthodox is doing, the orthodox -
PE: And that leads to conspiracy theories, doesn't it.

RB: Well no, I don't agree, and I think by using the term 'conspiracy theory' you're trying to just automatically dismiss anything that doesn't agree with your point of view, and I think, you know, actually there are valid points of view on all sides of this debate-

PE: It's interesting how the authorship discussion, Shakespeare authorship discussion hovers in the background of other discussions about what might seem much more serious conspiracy theories, such as those around 9/11, or
Barack Obama not being born in the States and so on.
RB: I think this is a -

RB: I think this is an *entirely* false comparison, because we're not talking about conspiracy theories -

SW: Sorry, we *must* be talking about conspiracy theory if we say -
RB: Because you don't agree about - because you don't agree-

SW: No, excuse me, excuse me, just one moment. If you're saying that there is massed evidence that somebody called Shakespeare is associated with these plays, if you're then saying that man wasn't Shakespeare, you're saying that the real Shakespeare - and you're not disputing that the real Shakespeare existed -

RB: No.

SW: - that he, that there was a conspiracy in which he took part to conceal the true authorship, and that he was the front man for it.

RB: Now, a conspiracy is not the same as a conspiracy theory. Conspiracies do exist, the word conspiracy has been in the dictionary for a long time, Shakespeare himself writes about conspiracies, there were an enormous number of plots - you know, the Babington

Plot, and the Main Plot, and the Bye Plot - of that time, which are all conspiracies. That's very -

PE: Well let's call this one the anti-Shakespeare plot.

RB: That's very different from a conspiracy theory. A conspiracy theory means something that's not even worth our time of day to look at, we'll just dismiss it out of hand -

SW: Yes, that's what the anti-Shakespeare -

RB: - And I appreciate you think that's what the non-Stratfordian - it's not worth your time of day, because your belief is very, very strong -

PE: No, it's not belief.

RB: It *is* a belief.

PE: It's our knowledge based on evidence.

RB: Well it's based on evidence that doesn't actually all add up.

PE: Well there, there we fundamentally disagree.

RB: We do fundamentally disagree, yes.

PE: We fundamentally disagree, and this is the kind of discussion which the book is making available. Let's not forget this declaration of reasonable doubt.

[New slide. Images: SAC logo, Michael York, Derek Jacobi, Mark Rylance. Text: 'Anti-Shakespearian responses...']

There we have Michael York, Derek Jacobi and Mark Rylance. All prominent actors -

RB: Who you called Anti-Shakespeareans! It think it's very interesting -

PE: Yes, they're Shakespearean actors with anti-Shakespearean beliefs.

RB: But they're *not* anti-Shakespearean. No-one -

PE: But they all think Shakespeare didn't write Shakespeare.

RB: Yes, but no-one involved in this is anti-Shakespearean. Everyone I know who is a Shakespeare sceptic *loves* the author Shakespeare. *Loves* the works of Shakespeare. Gets deeply involved in -

[New Slide. Text: 'The "Declaration of Reasonable Doubt"' and excerpt from chapter]

PE: So why don't they want Shakespeare of Stratford-upon-Avon to be the author?

RB: Well it's not a matter of wanting, you see, you seem to think that there's some kind of pathology going on here, it's a matter of not being [satisfied] - searching for the author

and then finding him strangely absent, and then looking at the evidence and saying 'well why doesn't this evidence exist?', when it does exist for other people.

PE: But you see denials of history -

RB: It's not a denial of history. If you look at this *completely* neutrally, if you came to the evidence entirely neutrally, and you looked at the seventy plus documents relating to William Shakespeare of Stratford, and some historian looked at this guy and it didn't have that name on it, and you asked him, 'what does this guy do for a living?", any neutral historian would say 'Well he buys and sells grain, he buys and sells tithes, he lends money at interest, he chases people through the courts, he's a businessman, he's a broker, he even brokered a marriage. You can see him in the role of broker, that is documented. Now if he was a writer, all the evidence during his lifetime that he was a writer - and I agree with you that once you get to 1623, it is *established* that William Shakespeare of Stratford-upon-Avon is the author of the works, and people then start coming to Stratford - not finding much, I have to say, because apparently his daughters don't seem to know that he's a writer, other people who should have known he was a writer don't seem to know he's a writer -

PE: Well his daughters are an interesting example, because alongside Shakespeare's grave is Suzannah Hall's grave, 'witty above her sex, but that's not all, wise to salvation was good Mistress Hall, something of Shakespeare was in that, but this wholly of him with whom she's now in bliss.' So she is evoked as the poet's daughter in that Shakespeare's mentioned -

RB: So why would he leave her functionally illiterate, why would she not be able to recognise her husband's handwriting -

SW: She wasn't illiterate, she could write.

RB: Well, if you actually look, if you look at her handwriting, she's not someone who's really -
SW: [unclear, all three speaking at once]
PE: [unclear] handwriting, that's nonsense. My doctor doesn't -

RB: She's not a very literate person, she doesn't recognise her husband's own handwriting.

PE: Excuse me, my doctor doesn't have very good handwriting but he gives me the right tablets. And it doesn't mean to say that he's illiterate.

RB: And his, Shakespeare's other daughter *was* illiterate.
SW: Also you're talking about the absence of evidence. If you're talking about the absence of evidence, where is the evidence, the positive evidence, that Marlowe wrote Shakespeare? Or that the Earl of Oxford Wrote Shakespeare?

RB: I absolutely agree with you. The point is that all of the candidates, including yours, who you believe to be the true author, they all have-
PE: [unclear] based on evidence -
RB: all based on *circumstantial* evidence.

PE: Based on evidence.

RB: But it's circumstantial -

PE: Based on evidence. How could you-

RB: And it's circumstantial for *all*-

PE: How would any of these anti-Shakespeareans like the evidence to be, how bad would you like it to be before you start denying it and saying 'well actually, black *is* white'.

RB: That is -

PE: I think you're on very dangerous ground in construing history in our own image in this way.

RB: I [unclear] think that's what's happening here.

PE: I think perhaps it might be. Let's look at this quotation from the "Declaration of Reasonable Doubt" chapter by Stuart Hampton Reeves. He's asking about what it's achieved. It started in 2007, it's out there, it was thought that the film ***Anonymous*** was going to increase its signatures, um, it didn't, there are spaces on that document reserved for the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust and Shakespeare Institute, both of which are missing signatures, surprise surprise, this seems to be a gauntlet thrown down at the 'orthodox' Shakespeareans - I don't like being called orthodox if that's referring to me - whom the Declaration seems to simultaneously deride for their small-mindedness - I'm not small-minded - and yet crave acceptance from-

RB: [laughs]

PE: and I'm happy to welcome anybody. So this is a very interesting quotation, and this sense that keeps coming up from people against Shakespeare, saying, 'oh, you're small-minded, you're in denial, you're an industry in denial' -

RB: Well it's thrown in both directions. Because you've just called *this* denial, haven't you.

PE: 'You're being over-defensive.' [not clear if this should be in quotes or not]

RB: Well, unfortunately -

PE: What I'm calling denial is the denial of lots of different kinds of evidence-
RB: But that's-

PE: Wrapping it all up and saying, 'ooh it's a homogenous whole' -

RB: But that's what's being said on the other side as well-

PE: No, it's not-

RB: And the trouble is both sides are accusing the other side of denying evidence.

PE: What's being said on Shakespeare's side is these are individual pieces of evidence, the most likely outcome of which suggests that Shakespeare of Stratford-upon-Avon wrote the plays, we *must* move on because I want to get onto questions.

[New slide: image of web page, 60 Minutes with Shakespeare]

I want to remind us briefly that this book is part of the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust's authorship campaign. One of its prime expressions was '60 Minutes With Shakespeare' dot com, where you can hear sixty very prominent people, including the Prince of Wales himself, adding to the discussion -

RB: His input was *pure* fiction, I have to say -

PE: in a vibrant, a vibrant and interesting way, and we also had the great Shakespeare cover up,

[New slide. Image: Shakespeare statue covered with a white sheet.]

now this is where I want to talk about the phrase anti-Shakespearian, as opposed to anti-Stratforidan. Anti-Stratfordian is rhetoric by the anti-Shakespearians, and I hope-

RB: Well how is anti-Shakespearian not rhetoric from your side?

PE: Well it is, it's in response to, it's trying to put oxygen into the debate, because you cannot have Shakespeare without Stratford.

RB: But you're trying-

PE: Excuse me-

RB: to *win* the debate by changing terms. You're trying to win it-

PE: I'm trying to put in- well that's what debates do, isn't it.

RB: Well, your changing the terms is a fairly underhand of trying to close the debate down, don't you think?

PE: No it's not, no it's not, because behind my change of terms is a philosophical and literary proposition which is as follows. That you cannot remove the author from the context which made that author possible, you wouldn't suggest for a moment that Charles Dickens could be separated from his London, or that Michelangelo could be separated from Florence and Rome, therefore why should Shakespeare be a special case, why should you say its find to have ***Hamlet*** but it wasn't the man, the 'man from Stratford', who wrote it? This, to us, seemed a nonsense. And actually, it's really interesting that you're finding the term anti-Shakespearian problematic, because we've obviously hit a nerve in our use of it, and in covering Shakespeare of Stratford up on the day that Anonymous was launched, we were saying, Okay, if its not Shakespeare, remove him entirely from our national life.

RB: But that's [unclear] don't you think, because Shakespeare the author would still exist, the plays still exist -

PE: We captured people's imaginations, Shakespeare's county was wiped out for a day, because the plays would exist, but our understanding of where he came from and what made him a unique breathing person-

RB: Could be, could be *deepened.* Could be deepened. We could have a better idea of who he was.

PE: - has just been ignored by the anti-Shakespearians. The Afterword by James Shapiro

[New slide. Text: 'Afterword by James Shapiro' and excerpt from chapter]

reminds us of the dismal box office showing for ***Anonymous***, and this has [reads] 'undoubtedly been a setback for them.'

RB: It was a poor film.

PE: 'And Emmerich's own admission that the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust shares the blame for his film's rapid demise is an indication that an organised response contributed to that end. The facts and analysis presented in this volume will make responding to the next film or the next campaign or the next question posed about Shakespeare's authorship by a student or a stranger or even a teacher that much easier.' And I wonder if that'll be the case on both sides.

[New slide. Text: Questions, www.shakspearebitesback.com, www.60minuteswithShakespeare.com. Details of next webinar.]

It's time for questions. Thank you Ros and Stanley for a most lively discussion. Question from Andrew from the UK: 'Why does everyone believe ***Titus Andronicus***, Shakespeare's first play, was entered anonymously in the Stationer's Register?'

RB: Lots of things were entered anonymously. ***Venus and Adonis*** was entered anonymously in the register.

PE: And actually it raises questions about the difficulty of chronology of the plays.

RB: Yes.

PE: Not everyone would agree it was Shakespeare's first play.

SW: It was 1594. I don't believe it was his first play.

RB: I believe I'm with you, Stanley, on that. 1594 for me, too.

PE: 'What about Shakespeare's acquaintance with Ben Jonson? There is evidence that they knew each other.' That's from Ellie. Yes, there is. And Stanley, this is posthumous evidence on the whole, isn't it?

RB: Mmm.

SW: Y...es.

PE: Well except they, well, I'm just thinking it's in the First Folio, the list of actors.

RB: Yes, technically those are, only just, but they are posthumous.

SW: Yes, but, but I believe in posthumous evidence, I've no objection whatever to the validity of posthumous evidence. Ben Jonson is the person who tells us most about Shakespeare. Ben Jonson was a colleague of Shakespeare, in the sense that one his plays were put on by Shakespeare's company, or one of them was, and he clearly, he writes very intimately about Shakespeare, he writes sometimes critically about Shakespeare, but he also writes that he loved him this side idolatry, he writes the first full critical appreciation of Shakespeare, the Ben Jonson elegy in the First Folio's a very important piece of criticism, the finest piece of Shakespeare criticism before Dryden, later in the seventeenth century-

RB: I'm not sure it's criticism, it's one of those sort of -

SW: I beg your pardon, it is criticism.

RB: There's no criticism, it's just a straightforward over-the-top Elizabethan eulogy.

SW: No, I don't think it is.

PE: See the harmony of this discussion continues. 'How do anti-Stratfordians' (or anti-Shakespearians) 'explain away, explain why 'lowly' William Shakespeare of Stratford became the frontsman for all the works if he had no connection i.e. because he was so lowly', that's from Jen, from Elsinore, on Twitter.

RB: From Elsinore, excellent!

PE: I know!

RB: That's great.

PE: So, so, how is that connection made? With apparently a person of lowly origins, with these aristocrats who are being nominated-

RB: Well I think, I think Richard, Richard Field - I don't know about the aristocrat thing - but Richard Field, for me, is a possible link in terms of knowing, as I imagine he did know - Stratford was not a big place, he was only a couple of years difference in age - may well have known him and known of his willingness to enter any kind of deal. So that's total speculation, I'm just saying there are possible mechanisms by which William Shakespeare could have been brought in and decided to do the job.

SW: Alright, but a Stratford man, who publishes William Shakespeare's first long poem, surely that's a connection between Stratford and Shakespeare the writer?

PE: ***Venus and Adonis*** in 1593.

SW: Yes.

RB: Yes. But we have all the other problems that show that no-one who knew him appears to - the man from Stratford himself - appears to know him *as a writer*.

PE: Somebody tweets, Helen tweets, 'I often see sceptics claiming that a man of letters would not let his daughters grown up illiterate, how do we counter this?' They weren't illiterate.

RB: Well one of them definitely was, she signs her name with a cross, doesn't she?

PE: We have Susannah's signature -

RB: Yeah, she can sign her name.... but Judith can't sign her name, can she?

PE: Rene Weiss at University College has interestingly made the connection that Susannah was taught to write *by* her father, because the handwriting is similar with the closing up of 'N's and so on.

RB: Similarly bad.

PE: Similarly bad, but what's wrong with having bad handwriting? People might have bad handwriting -

RB: Well, people who earned a living by the pen, in that day, especially when you had the blotting issue... I mean, and this is the other thing, look at those signatures and compare them with what Hemmings and Condell say about what they received, the blotless manuscripts, I mean this is not a penman who could avoid blots. So therefore they must have been receiving fair copies. Now, you know what is -

SW: Well they weren't. There's the textual evidence shows that they were just generalising in a very vague way. If you studied the texts that are printed in the Folio, you'll know perfectly clearly that some of them were written, printed, from abominable manuscripts.

RB: Exactly. So what's really going on there?

SW: Well what's going on there is that they're just being flattering because they're writing a preface to the book.

RB: Yeah, but then what does Ben Jonson say about that? It's quite interesting, he says that they took *offense* when he said, you know, 'would that he had blotted a thousand'-

SW: By blotted, all he means there is revised.

RB: But how can you say that's what he means, because there are so many different ways of reading that-

SW: How can you say he doesn't?

RB: I'm simply saying, Stanley, that there are multiple ways of reading any text, and Ben Jonson in particular is *extraordinarily* enigmatic and ambiguous in the way that he writes about Shakespeare.

PE: There's a question here about collaboration, which is an interesting one, about 'is it possible to conceive of an idea that the King's Men' (the actors Shakespeare worked with for some of his life, the Lord Chamberlain's Men), 'collaborated on the works, and that *they* were involved.' That's a very interesting question.

SW: Yeah, I think to a certain degree they collaborated in the sense that when Shakespeare was rehearsing, putting his plays into rehearsal, I'm sure that he got suggestions from the authors, there's a very interesting example in ***Midsummer Night's Dream***, where the first quarto has one speech spoken entirely by one person, and in the Folio, which is a more theatrical text, a demonstrably more theatrical text, that speech is the speech of Theseus, is divided up between Theseus and Lysander, which is clearly a more theatrical way of putting the speech across, and I think it's very likely that an actor said, 'look, I can't, you can't expect me to speak all these lines, both questions and comments myself, let's Lysander speak the comments. That's an example of Shakespeare's practicality, of Shakespeare being a man of the theatre, working very closely with his actors.

RB: We don't know-

SW: There is, by the way, no evidence that Marlowe was an actor.

RB: No, but there's no evidence that the author is working closely with his actors from what you've said, that in itself doesn't mean anything, we don't know -

SW: I'm sorry, I'm sorry, there's masses *more* evidence, that's only one detail, there is for example the evidence that's from the first quarto of ***Much Ado About Nothing***, that the author of that play had in mind Will Kemp as the speaker of Dogberry's lines -

RB: We-

SW: And Cow- Cowley as the speaker of Verges', which shows quite clearly that the author had these actors in mind.

RB: You don't know that the copies that the Folio was printed from, or that the quartos were printed from - where they had the actors' names in place - come from the author's own pen, or whether they're from copyists, we have no idea!

SW: Er, we have considerable ideas about them, I must dispute that from the point of view of an editor.

RB: We don't know that that is the *author* who has substituted Kemp's name, or Sinklo's name, or anyone else's name, we don't know, because we don't have the original manuscripts, we cannot see where they've come from, we're not aware of who's been copying and which- whether it's the authors -

[SW and PE both talk over]

PE: Yes but this, this, this, this is the problem, isn't it -

RB: It *is* the problem.

PE: there's no smoking gun in history, it seems to me that Shakespeare can't have moved or breathed or done anything without somebody writing about it before you're convinced that it was Shakespeare of Stratford, and this is -

RB: Yeah but nobody, *nobody* said anything about it, it's a pity really -

PE: completely untenable - approach -

RB: you'd think they would be interested in - there he is -

PE: Lots of people have said. You're denying again -

RB: No, it's not about denial -

PE: From CJ on Twitter, who agrees with you, Ros, there's no evidence that links Shakespeare to the writer - to, of, St - writer of St - no links that link Shakespeare the writer to Shakespeare of Stratford. A question which often comes up from the anti-Shakespeare side: 'why does Shakespeare, why does Stratford Shakespeare leave no books in his will?' well, you know, that's again using a gap and trying to turn it into a narrative which you find *convinces* your belief and fuels your belief. 'If Shakespeare co-authored with Middleton and others, are all Jacobean playwrights part of the conspiracy?', well that's what people believe, Jane, thanks for your question, 'Why would Ben Jonson and the others collude in this lie?' I love Dame Janet Suzman's point on 60 Minutes With Shakespeare when, you know, actors couldn't keep secrets. They're told somebody, this conspiracy, and it is a conspiracy, whether it's a theory -

RB: But I must ask why you think actors would be in on it? What on earth makes you think that people would be in on it?

PE: Because in order for them to have covered up the real author-

RB: Yeah, but why would they need to? They're given a script, they're given their parts, in fact, they're given an individual part, and they rehearse them -

PE: I also, I also find it interesting how this discussion hardly ever includes reference to the sonnets themselves, I know they do in Marlowe's case, you tell the story, but the poems aren't often under dis- under, at dispute in this, it's always about the plays people talk about -

SW: One of the poems ends with 'For my name is Will'

PE: That's one of the sonnets, isn't it.

RB: Yeah, I know -

SW: Not Marlowe, not Chris.

RB: I agree, and you know, I agree that he does say 'My name is Will' more than once, and in ***The Marlowe Papers*** I use that as saying he's trying to kind of feel his way into the persona and, you know, feel that 'oh they love these plays', he's struggling with the idea that people love these plays that are attributed to someone else, and he's saying 'but my name is Will, because that's my pen name, that's who I am'. But he's also playing on the idea of will, not as in the name,

PE: Molly -

RB: but as in the -

PE: Molly from New York says 'I've spent much of my life devoted to the study of Shakespeare and for me it *always* comes down to why does it matter', Molly, there are lots of people who respond why does it matter, to which I would respond of course it matters, it matters utterly, wouldn't you like to know as much as possible about the painter of the Last Supper, or the author of Mrs Dalloway, and those -

RB: So why close down the discussion?

PE: [unclear] absolutely matters, otherwise there wouldn't be the discussion about it.

SW: Yes, to me it also matters that the works, give and take the collaborations, show the development of an imagination, the development of a mind, and I think this is, to me, it's rather in the same way that you can see the works of Beethoven, for example, you can see him developing and growing, maturing as he goes on, this is true of Shakespeare too.

PE: So, we're going to have to wrap up, but I just want to say that our next webinar is on Monday the sixth of May, four o' clock, reviewing Shakespeare, I'll be joined by Paul Prescott of the University of Warwick, and we'll be launching a new review site to do with Shakespeare reviews, international, there'll be no other site like it.

[New slide: Website image. happybirthdayShakespeare.com]

I want to remind you too that happybirthdayshakespeare.com, a project by bloggers around the world to celebrate the impact of *Stratford*'s greatest son, is still live, and we were celebrating Shakspeare of Stratford's birthday here in Stratford last weekend, a great celebration for many round the world, and of course the Birthplace Trust received lots of messages of goodwill from people who love Shakespeare sending messages to Stratford.

[New slide: 'Cambridge University Press']

I'd like to thank Cambridge University Press very warmly for sponsoring this most lively discussion, and I'd like to thank

[New slide. Text 'Proving Shakespeare', images of Paul Edmondson, Stanley Wells, Ros Barber]

my co-contributors to this discussion, Stanley Wells, and Ros Barber, very much indeed.

RB: Thank you Paul, thank you Stanley.

SW: Bye!

END OF WEBINAR

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