

OXFORD BY THE NUMBERS: WHAT ARE THE ODDS THAT THE EARL OF OXFORD COULD HAVE WRITTEN SHAKESPEARE'S POEMS AND PLAYS?

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Alan Nelson and Steven May, the two leading Oxford documents scholars in the world, have shown that, although many documents connect William Shakspere of Stratford to Shakespeare's poems and plays, no documents make a similar connection for Oxford. The documents, they say, support Shakespeare, not Oxford. Our internal-evidence stylometric tests provide no support for Oxford. In terms of quantifiable stylistic attributes, Oxford's verse and Shakespeare's verse are light years apart. The odds that either could have written the other's work are much lower than the odds of getting hit by lightning. Several of Shakespeare's stylistic habits did change during his writing lifetime and continued to change years after Oxford's death. Oxfordian efforts to fix this problem by conjecturally re-dating the plays twelve years earlier have not helped his case. The re-datings are likewise ill-documented or undocumented, and even if they were substantiated, they would only make Oxford's stylistic mismatches with early Shakespeare more glaring. Some Oxfordians now concede that Oxford differs from Shakespeare but argue that the differences are developmental, like those between a caterpillar and a butterfly. This argument is neither documented nor plausible. It asks us to believe, without supporting evidence, that at age forty-three, Oxford abruptly changed seven to nine of his previously constant writing habits to match those of Shakespeare and then froze all but four habits again into Shakespeare's likeness for the rest of his writing days. Making nine such single-bound leaps from a distant, stylistically frozen galaxy right into Shakespeare's ballpark seems farfetched compared to the conjectural leaps required to take the Stratford case seriously. Note, for example, the supposition that the young Shakespeare, who was entitled to do so, might actually have attended

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the Stratford grammar school. It is hard to imagine any jury buying the Oxfordians' colossal mid-life crisis argument without much more than the "spectral and intangible" substantiation that it has received. Ultimately, this argument is too grossly at odds with the available documentary record and stylometric numbers for Oxford to be a plausible claimant.