Written by **Sam Blumenfeld** on November 19, 2011

Anonymous: Emmerich's Grotesque Elizabethan Romp

But the authorship question is not based on fantasy. It is based on a real historical dilemma involving the world's single greatest body of literature. Indeed, that is why there has been so much serious doubt about the true authorship of the works attributed to William Shakespeare. If the 36 plays in the First Folio are considered the world's most outstanding work of literary genius, then there is every reason to want to know as much as possible about the man who wrote them.

One of the more recent compelling books on the subject is Diana Price's *Shakespeare's Unorthodox Biography: New Evidence of an Authorship Problem*, published in 2001. She examined every single document pertaining to Shakespeare unearthed over the years by a small army of scholars, and came to the conclusion that he was not a writer. "These documents," wrote Price, "account for the activities of an actor, a theatre shareholder, a businessman, a money-lender, a property holder, a litigant, and a man with a family, but they do not account for his presumed life as a professional writer."

So if Shakespeare did not write these timeless masterpieces, who did? That has been the subject of a very lively debate among Shakespeare doubters, one in which three prominent contenders have emerged and gathered their own following: Sir Francis Bacon, Edward de Vere (17th Earl of Oxford), and playwright-poet Christopher Marlowe.

The first American to seriously doubt Shakespeare's authorship was Delia Bacon (no relation to Sir Francis), a brilliant woman who led a successful career as a lecturer in history. Some of her students considered her a genius. Born in 1811 in Tallmadge, Ohio, Bacon turned her interest to literature in 1852, reading all of Shakespeare and coming to the astonishing conclusion that the plays in the First Folio revealed a well-hidden, comprehensive philosophy that could have only been written by several philosophers — including Sir Francis Bacon, Sir Walter Raleigh, and others. She decided to pursue her research and writing in England.

She remained in England five years, corresponding with Emerson, Carlyle, and Hawthorne, spending her last months in sickness and near poverty in Stratford-upon-Avon where she had hoped to be able to open Shakespeare's tomb. She wrote in one of her last letters: "The archives of this secret philosophical society are buried somewhere, perhaps in more places than one."

Her obsession with the authorship mystery affected her mind, and she was brought back to the United States in April 1858. The opening chapter of her projected book had been published in *Putnam's Monthly* in January 1856, but when the book itself, *The Philosophy of the Plays of Shakespeare Unfolded*, was published in 1857, it was largely ignored, probably eclipsed by the oncoming Civil War. She died in September of 1859.

The next important event in pursuit of the true author was a book written by an English school teacher, Thomas J. Looney (1870-1944) (pronounced Loney), *"Shakespeare" Identified as Edward de Vere, the 17th Earl of Oxford*, published in 1920.

Of this book, Charlton Ogburn wrote in his massive tome, *The Mysterious William Shakespeare* (p. 145):

> Looney did what no one had done before. He approached the quest for the author systematically, and with a completely open mind.... He deduced seventeen characteristics of the author and then set out to comb through the annals of the Elizabethan age to see who would come closest to possessing them.

The man, in Looney's opinion, who fit all of the characteristics was none other than Edward de Vere, the 17th Earl of Oxford. Thus was born the Oxfordian theory, which has spurred the publication of many books and articles on the subject, including *Joseph Sobran's Alias Shakespeare*, published in 1997, and Mark Anderson's 2005 tome, *"Shakespeare" by Another Name*.

But it wasn't until 1955 that the third contender came to the fore, Christopher Marlowe, in a book by Calvin Hoffman, *The Murder of the Man Who Was Shakespeare*. Prior to the publication of Hoffman's book, it was assumed by all of the doubters that Marlowe had been killed in a tavern brawl in 1593 and therefore could not have written the works attributed to Shakespeare.

But Hoffman raised the question: did Marlowe actually die in 1593 as reported, or was his death faked in order to free him from indictment for blasphemous speech that would have resulted in his execution? Hoffman had come to believe that Marlowe was the actual author of the plays in the First Folio. He had read all of Marlowe and all of Shakespeare and came to the conclusion that they were written by the same person. But if Marlowe had been killed in 1593, how could he have written all of those plays?

Hoffman then set about researching the actual circumstances of Marlowe's alleged death by studying the Coroner's Inquest, which had been discovered by Professor Hotson in 1925. The document, translated from the Latin, convinced Hoffman that Marlowe's death had indeed been faked and believed that it had been carried out by his friend and patron, Thomas Walsingham, cousin of the late head of Elizabeth's Secret Service, Sir Francis Walsingham.

In my own study of the faked death, I came to the conclusion that it had been authorized by none other than Lord Burghley, Queen Elizabeth's secretary and closest counselor. Marlowe had been a member of the Secret Service, had achieved fame as a great playwright, and was considered a valuable asset by Burghley and the Queen, and that is why she agreed to go along with Burghley's plan.

Marlowe was then sent into exile with a new identity and continued to write plays which he sent back to London from Italy via diplomatic courier. Burghley then forwarded the manuscripts to Thomas Walsingham at his Chislehurst estate in Kent where they were copied by a scribe, after which Marlowe's friend and publisher, Ed Blount, conveyed them to William Shakespeare at the Globe Theatre. The actor and part owner of the theatre had been chosen as a front for the plays, which were performed with great success.

There is no doubt in my mind that Christopher Marlowe was the author of the works attributed to Shakespeare. He had the genius, the proven ability to write dramatic masterpieces, and the education that honed his talents. At Cambridge he attended Corpus Christi college where he was thoroughly schooled in Calvinist theology, which is why the plays are filled with so many allusions to the Bible. In all my research, I found nothing, not a single fact, that would have disqualified Marlowe as the true author.

Several readers of my book, *The Marlowe-Shakespeare Connection*, have told me that it ought to be made into a movie. I couldn't agree more. But I doubt that Hollywood would want to make another movie on this subject after the atrocious *Anonymous*.

As for the Emmerich film, it is based on an original screenplay by John Orloff, a professional writer who decided to weave a web of Elizabethan intrigue based on the Oxfordian theory. For some reason Roland Emmerich read the monstrosity and decided that it would make a great movie. But what he created is a very bad movie, chronologically confusing, historically grotesque, and philosophically nauseating. Apart from its great cinematography, costumes, and sets, the movie has no redeeming qualities. It pretends that there is an authorship problem and creates a scenario of such outrageous fiction that I am sure the average viewer, unacquainted with the real authorship controversy, will come away totally horrified by the unseemly barbarism of the Elizabethan era, convinced that the authorship question is some delusional pastime of feeble-minded intellectuals who don't have anything better to do. Also, I don't think this foolish drama will win any prizes.