

Letters to the Editor of Commentary:

To the Editor:

As the author of *The Marlowe-Shakespeare Connection* (McFarland, 2008) I was greatly disappointed by John Gross's article in the March 2010 issue, "Denying Shakespeare." By concentrating on Delia Bacon and Thomas Looney he produced a red herring. He and Professor Shapiro do not seriously deal with the very cause of the authorship controversy: the lack of a single document that would prove beyond a doubt that William Shakespeare was a writer or even capable of being a writer.

Indeed, Diana Price, in *Shakespeare's Unorthodox Biography* (Greenwood, 2001) examined every single document related to Shakespeare and came to the conclusion that he was not a writer. The documents indicated that he was an actor, a part-owner of a theatre, a buyer and seller of real-estate, a litigant, a money-lender, a dealer in commodities, a tax evader, but not a writer. And it certainly is not without significance that in his Will, Shakespeare mentioned no plays, poems, books, or even a Bible. When he died in 1616, none of his supposed fellow writers gave it any notice.

The long-standing controversy over Shakespeare's authorship did not begin with Delia Bacon. It began in 1781 when an English clergyman, the Rev. James Wilmot, desiring to write a biography of this great author, went on a hunt to find books that once belonged to the playwright who used them in writing his dramas. Assuming that his poor, illiterate heirs had sold Shakespeare's library, he visited every house within fifty miles of Stratford, but came up with nothing. He then reluctantly concluded that Shakespeare was not the writer of the works attributed to him. But the question then became: if Shakespeare did not write the plays, who did?

Over the years there have been many contenders. But it wasn't until Calvin Hoffman's book, *The Murder of the Man Who Was Shakespeare*, appeared in 1955 that the idea that Marlowe did not die in a barroom brawl in 1593 was seriously considered. Indeed, it was the discovery of the actual Coroner's Inquest by Prof. Leslie Hotson in 1925 that provided scholars with a true description of what had taken place at Deptford in 1593. Hoffman concluded that Marlowe had been the subject of a faked death in order to save him from Archbishop Whitgift's inquisition.

Marlowe had the genius to write the greatest plays in literary history. None of the other contenders did. And that is why Marlowe will soon replace the Earl of Oxford as the leading contender for the authorship claim. And this will open a whole new world of Shakespeare scholarship, for this writer found in the 36 plays in the First Folio a countless number of Marlowe clues cleverly inserted by the anonymous author.

As for Marlowe having written both *The Jew of Malta* and *The Merchant of Venice* as being a cause for concern, I see it as a cause for enlightenment. Barabas is a stereotypical villain, evil but at the same time comical. You can't possibly sympathize with him. But Shylock can indeed elicit sympathy. *The Jew of Malta* is about greed,

making money, exacting revenge. *The Merchant of Venice* is about the law and a stubborn, unreasonable litigant. Yes, Jews were discriminated against and persecuted throughout Europe, but considering the war between Catholics and Protestants at the time, Jews fared much better than, say, the Huguenots who were slaughtered by the thousands in France. Those two plays ought not to be judged in light of the Nazi holocaust of the 20th century.

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