

SHAKESPEARE'S MONEY

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Shakespeare's Money – How much did he make and what did this mean? By Robert Bearman (Oxford U.P. 2016)

Robert Bearman has been for many years the foremost authority on the life of William Shakespeare so far as interacts with the locality of Stratford upon Avon. As such he is a leading supporter of the idea that William Shakespeare, or, more correctly, Shaksper, wrote the works that bear Shakespeare's name, an idea which more and more regard as at least doubtful, if not totally disproved. With his mastery of the Warwickshire evidence allied to the investigations about theatrical financing and income, he can present a useful contribution to the authorship study generally. He allies himself with David Ellis the 'orthodox' author of *"The Truth About William Shakespeare"* (Edinburgh 2012), whose views differ from those of the doubters by a crevasse a mile deep but one inch wide, against those many writers (I would say of historical novels) whose "idle speculations which, through sheer lack of evidence, can neither be proved nor disproved but which evolve into unhistorical hypotheses quickly taking on lives of their own" (p.5).

If he had kept to the implied rule of that criticism, he would have written a very different book: the irrelevance of William Shakespeare to the canon and the life of the real writer would surely have made him and many others adopt very different careers. Against his meticulous dissection of William's father's financial career we have to set the usual speculation that Shakespeare attended the local Grammar School for which no record for the period survives. Two near contemporaries went to Oxford in the period and they were both the sons of a town Alderman, John Shakespeare's social and financial superior; of them only one is recorded as attending the Grammar School, and he was then later at Winchester College before going on to Oxford. While Bearman does not commit himself to Shakespeare as a pupil of the school, he does speculate (perhaps outside the area of his expertise), "Clearly.... Shakespeare... would have been more than adequately provided with the opportunity to pursue those careers open to university graduates" (p.24). The anti-Stratfordian contention that Shakespeare was probably functionally illiterate is not mentioned.

Again, outside the area of his expertise, he writes: "The so-called 'lost years' extend from 1585 to 1592 during which Shakespeare clearly again established a firm foothold in the theatrical world " (p.28). This depends on the contention that the two publications "Greene's Groatsworth Of Wit" and the apology in "Kind Heart's Dream" clearly refer to Shakespeare: they do not, as anti-stratfordians have amply demonstrated. In 1594 "Shakespeare emerges as a sharer in the newly formed Chamberlain's Men": this is based on the evidence of a payment by the Treasurer of the Court chambers account to "Will Kempe, Will Shakespeare and Richard Burbage servants to the Lord Chamberlain", which appears to be a false entry to cover up the absence of accounts by the recently deceased Treasurer Sir Thomas Heneage, and not to refer to Shakespeare at all – Bearman reports the entry in a footnote (p.33 n.1) but does not mention the controversy arising. Bearman reports, "... his skills as a writer clearly had been sufficiently demonstrated to encourage the ... players to recruit him in the late spring of 1594 as their 'resident playwright' and a sharer in the profits of their new company the Chamberlain's Men"(p.39): evidence – none.

If one strips out the writer-as-co-director nonsense (who on earth would give even the most minor rôle to a man of Shakespeare's educational attainments?), one comes to the really valuable part of the book, where Bearman analyses the income generated from the theatres including the Globe in

minute and incontrovertible detail. The only element which Bearman slides over relates to how Shakespeare actually became a shareholder, where Bearman has to be unconvincing, especially when we know from Jonson's caricature of Sogliardo in *Every Man Out Of His Humour* that Shakespeare benefited by direct gift from his "friends", and not from his essential contribution as the Company principal playwright-in-residence. Again (p.44) Bearman has to resort speculation to skate over Shakespeare's absence from Government scrutiny when *Richard II* was deliberately staged to support Essex's attempted putsch in 1601. By this time such evidence as there is shows Shakespeare permanently absent from London and back in Stratford, where again Bearman's unrivalled expertise can demonstrate Shakespeare's income and capital position from then on to his death.

The glaring weakness of Bearman's book can now be exposed. It may be possible to suggest that Shakespeare financed his purchases from 1597 on from his substantial income as a Globe shareholder or on credit in expectation of it. From 1601 in order to collect that income he would have to go to London. Then in 1604/5 he would no further use for his theatrical investment, and was able to lay out the very substantial sum of £400 on tithes, again Bearman suggests by borrowing and repayment on the expectation of his theatrical income. This seems unlikely especially as his Vendor's death in 1606 Shakespeare owed only £20 capital on his purchase. There would be no one else to make such a loan or loans: the income was dependent on the theatres being open and not closed because of politics, fire or plague, and would have to be collected by personal appearance in London. There is no evidence of such loan or loans or any repayment. The straightforward answer must be that it was then that Shakespeare sold his theatre investment, which with the income arrears stands a much better chance of financing that initial payment, with the added advantage that the income could be readily collected locally. Anyway Bearman records "there would seem, from after 1605, to be a clear falling of Shakespeare's ability to raise capital for further investment..." Q.E.D. ? It is in 1605 that Shakespeare "lay" (connoting a temporary stay) at the modest house of Christopher Mountjoy in London, presumably in connection with the negotiations and collection of the sale proceeds at that time.

Bearman dips a speculative toe into all the litigation over the theatre shares that poor record keeping causes. Shakespeare is not involved either as a party or a witness, and appears only in the mention of his name in the reference in which it appears: which depends on the witness's recollection rather than any still extant document. 'Orthodox' commentators have made fairly desperate attempts to link Shakespeare with the Blackfriars Theatre when it finally opened in 1608, but both in terms of dramatic style and of evidence these fail. By the Globe fire in 1613 he had apparently disposed of his interests (p.151) On p.148 Bearman mentions a share shake-up when Ostler was brought in, the minor shareholders in Blackfriars a one seventh share each, which suggests Shakespeare still had a share. Hemmings, a fellow shareholder however, specifically said it was a one sixth share, but "by a slip" (according to Chambers: *The English Stage* Vol II Oxford University Press p.423a) when he meant a one seventh share. Bearman p.153 also suggests that Shakespeare was paid for the verses on an *impresario* at Court in 1613, but the evidence now gives the credit to the artist - another apparently unrelated Shakespeare.

Finally we have to deal with Bearman's exposition of the changes in Shakespeare's social position throughout his lifetime. Here Bearman is right on the ball, save that he begins with a hiccup over the question of what if any (nil) patronage Shakespeare received from the third Earl of Southampton, which is corrupted by Bearman's mistaken view of Shakespeare's non-existent literary career, but may related to the Russell Essex Southampton anti-Blackfriars Protestant faction in 1596. In connection with Shakespeare's (or technically his father's) Arms' applications, he completely

disposes of the mythical connection to the Catholic and treasonous Park Hall Ardens. Back in Stratford although extremely comfortable his circle does not necessarily seem much higher socially or particularly more wealthy. He marries his daughters off to the second son of a not well connected doctor – the son certainly prospered – and to the third son of a local mercer. The legatees under his Will were with one exception a modest crew. Bearman readily contrasts these with those who imported much greater riches from London by investing in local estates or were already established land owners such as the Cloptons, the Verneys, the Grevilles and the Lucys. The only exception is the wealthy and landed Thomas Russell appointed overseer of the Will and a small legatee, but this seems to be an attempt at social climbing, comparable to the arms applications and the Church monument arrangements and sent up by Jonson in *Every Man Out Of His Humour*. Bearman suggests a greater connection with Thomas Russell by citing the poems of Leonard Digges, Russell's stepson with whom he was on bad terms, but they were addressed to the real writer, and Bearman passes over Digges reference to "mad relations" circulating in Stratford in 1632, which are most probably related to the town's undistinguished deceased inhabitant William Shakespeare being touted as the real writer .