

Erratum: Richard Vaughan Davies reported a mistake in his book *In the Shadow of Shakespeare* reviewed by Jennifer Pommer below in the April 2021 Newsletter. The version sold to us by Amazon at the time lacked a later correction, and the review below quotes the error: ‘... document from 1612 describing a meeting between Samuel Pepys ... and an actor’, which should read ‘... document from 1662 ...’. Astute historians among us should have known that Pepys was born in 1633. We agree that the book is ‘ideal as an intriguing introduction to SAQ studies’. *In the Shadow of Shakespeare* is available from Amazon as well as good bookshops. See also the author's website: <https://vaughandavies.org/>



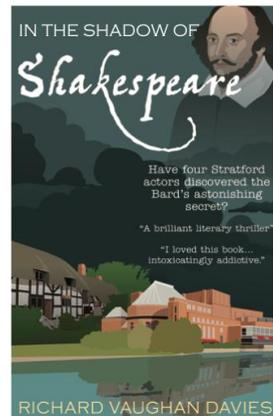
REVIEWS

In the Shadow of Shakespeare by Richard Vaughan Davies

Review by Jennifer Pommer

In his book *The Shadow of Shakespeare* Oxfordian Richard Vaughan Davies has written a plausible story involving actors who work through the issues of the Shakespeare Authorship Question (SAQ) while preparing for a production of *Hamlet* at The Royal Shakespeare Theatre in Stratford-upon-Avon. The main characters are four actors and the Shadow, who appears to dog the actors as they try to untangle the truth. It combines authorship details familiar to Oxfordians, weaving the relevant SAQ theories together in fictional packaging. Many theories are believable, some less so.

The main characters are Hamish, the young actor and understudy for the part of Hamlet, who is at first played by a much older actor, only called ‘Sir’ in the novel. Olivia plays the part of Ophelia and is Hamish’s love interest in the story. She is the one who contests the SAQ throughout. Polly is the older,



seasoned actor playing Polonius, who first introduces the authorship question. Oz plays Osric, a gay actor who, with Hamish, is intrigued by the SAQ. Polly recites the many reasons why a minimally educated actor could not have written the plays that are rich in detail about law, the classics, philosophy, languages, court life, and foreign travel, especially in Italy. The idea captivates them, so Polly invites them to dinner to discuss in greater detail.

Oz, after studying the Sonnets, advances his theory that Shakespeare was bi-sexual, with quotes and his interpretation of ‘Sonnets 135’ and ‘48’. He explains that Shakespeare mentions the name ‘Will’ thirteen times in ‘Sonnet 135’, showing that the writer could have been enamored of the Stratford actor, who was the ‘fair Will’ of the Sonnets. Both Hamish and Olivia question the theory.

At the dinner, Polly delves into what he knows about the SAQ and he theorizes that Edward de Vere was Shakespeare. After some discussion, Hamish and Oz accept the theory’s credibility. They come to the conclusion that there was a cover-up with Shaxpur [this spelling used throughout this review] part of it. Hamish decides to read up on the de Vere angle.

Olivia, however, vocally denounces the theory:

‘Rubbish! ... It’s just intellectual snobbery. He was obviously an ordinary man with extraordinary genius.’ (p.53, para 3)

She then introduces the topic of Shakespeare’s Shadow in the story by saying the Shadow does not like his memory destroyed by questioning the authorship of his plays. Polly contracts food poisoning from the dinner and needs a hospital stay. Olivia believes the Shadow is showing his displeasure at the discussion about the authorship.

Further ideas are unearthed a few days later. Oz suggests the real Shakespeare must have had connections with the Royal Court. Hamish’s research finds connections to de Vere’s travels and similarities between the plays and de Vere’s life. They cover the possible Royal cover-up of the author. They even theorize that Ben Jonson might have murdered Shaxpur when it seemed Shaxpur might blurt out that de Vere was the real writer. Further accidents occur as ideas emerge for de Vere as the author.

One is a chance meeting at a restaurant that leads Hamish and Olivia on the trail of an original document from 1612 describing a meeting between Samuel Pepys, the diarist, and an actor who worked with Will Shaxspur. According to the document, the actor told Pepys that the actor was:

... a very handsome fellow of great wit [but] ... Will Shaxspur was no writer, but a good enough actor. (p.127)

They photograph the paper on their phone and all photos strangely disappear from their phones. Ophelia repeats her warning to leave the SAQ alone despite the soundness of the arguments for de Vere as the author.

Another ‘accident’ occurs when Oz gets stabbed during rehearsal. The Shadow interferes again during an evening performance of *Hamlet*, when an accident causes ‘Sir’ to break his leg. The Shadow’s final act for stopping continued discussion on de Vere as the author is when Hamish and Olivia are boating on the River Avon. Hamish has been explaining to Olivia all he’s learned about it; she seems ready to finally accept the idea. Then the boat capsizes nearly drowning her. They are both very shaken, but effectively shaken? Have the Shadow’s warnings brought about the desired result?

Richard Vaughan Davies’ novel provides a vehicle that could establish a broader base of people learning about de Vere as Shakespeare. The storyline of actors working on the Shakespearean play of *Hamlet* keeps it a piece of light fiction, yet the questions raised could bring the SAQ into the mainstream, to a larger, non-academic readership.

Who is the Shadow? It could be Shaxpur, Stratfordians or even de Vere; those with centuries of historical and present-day ties to the man from Stratford are still trying to obscure the name of real writer – perhaps de Vere really does want his name to be buried where his body is?

The novel quotes several passages of Shakespeare’s works as well as already known theories for de Vere. What is true, what is possible and what is fiction? To help explore the ideas further, Vaughan Davies includes separate chronologies of the lives of Shaxpur and de Vere, a recommended reading list, and the full text of the Sonnets mentioned in the novel to let the reader better decide or at least interpret their own meaning. This book would be ideal as an intriguing introduction to SAQ studies – if only such studies were allowed!