

Question 45

Is it plausible that Sir Francis Bacon wrote the plays attributed to Shakespeare?

Alan Stewart

Francis Bacon was an early and leading contender in the hunt to find the man who could have written Shakespeare's plays. He fit the bill in many ways. The dates are right: Bacon was born in 1561, three years before Shakespeare, and he lived until 1626, helpfully long enough to have seen the First Folio into print three years earlier. More importantly, he possessed the intellectual scope and ambition to be worthy of those plays. He once wrote that he had taken all knowledge to be his province, and he achieved success in multiple fields: as a courtier, a politician, parliamentarian, lawyer, essayist, natural philosopher—indeed, he is the father of modern science.

But the man could not write a play. We know this because he penned some court entertainments, and they are sadly static affairs in which stock characters--a hermit, a soldier, a secretary--stand and deliver set pieces about the joys of being a hermit, a soldier, a secretary. There's not a trace of the grasp of plot, character, nuance, conflict that we expect in Shakespeare's plays. In short, Francis Bacon had no drama.