

QUESTION 42

What psychological impulse might lie behind the questioning of Shakespeare's authorship?

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Doubting Shakespeare's authorship might be a way of dealing with envy and competition. If great people aren't actually that great then you don't have to feel quite so measly in relation to them. Then there's also the fact that conspiracy theories often try to give rational explanations for things that just seem too sublime or irrational. So the famous person who dies in a stupid accident *must* have been killed by the CIA. The idea that Shakespeare was able to do so many things — to know so much about the world, and about the interior lives of human beings, and then to be able to articulate all of that using strict rhyme and meter over such a huge body of work — makes him an uncanny figure. It might be more comforting to think his works were written by a group of writers (maybe including men and women) or that he actually only wrote a couple of plays himself.