

QUESTION 40

When did people start to question Shakespeare's authorship of the works?

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In 1623, Leonard Digges predicted that Shakespeare's plays would outlive his "Stratford monument." Eleven years later, a traveler to Stratford wrote that he'd seen the funeral monument of that "famous" poet. Further on in the century, there was a rumor that the writer William Davenant was Shakespeare's illegitimate son. What made the story credible was that Davenant was born in Oxford, and Oxford was a stopover point for Shakespeare's frequent trips between Stratford and London. Stratford vicar John Ward, who ministered to Shakespeare's descendants, was told that when Shakespeare came home to Stratford for good, he still sent new plays back to London twice a year. For the first biography of Shakespeare in 1708, Nicholas Rowe dispatched a man to Stratford to research the playwright's life in town and parish records. In other words, everyone connected the author Shakespeare with the town of Stratford. All the facts were there. It wasn't until 250 years later that anyone questioned the facts.