

Question 56

Why Conspiracy Theories?

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Conspiracy theories began once the Bard had been sainted. We like our saints to have a touch of the impossible about them. They are not merely human. Conspiracy is another word, then, for God, delivering something astonishing and then kicking over the traces.

In this way of thinking, our fancies about authorship express our deep-rooted need for magic. There may only be a few conspiracy theorists – but how many of us long for just one of their conspiracies to be true!

But we don't want the wrong kind of magic. Just as the princess is in truth a shepherdess, we don't want our lowborn heroes to be inveterately plebeian. We might think we do: but we don't.

Or maybe Coleridge had it right: Shakespeare must have remained a child, some sort of changeling. Had he been a real flesh and blood man, he would have been a monster.

Or maybe our blank-faced nobody was in on it from the start: stealing into unknown spaces; seeing everything and everyone before a soul has even noticed him; and then disappearing. He was his own conspirator.