

Was Shakespeare the author?

By ERIC COLIN PETERS

A no-nonsense lecture by John Prinz was the offering at Southfield Public Library's second "Evening with Shakespeare."

Prinz, assistant librarian at Wayne State University, tackled the problem of Shakespeare authorship. He provided an amusing glimpse into that branch of criticism which aims to prove that Shakespeare could not or did not write Shakespeare.

Among those Prinz took to task for discrediting Shakespeare was Ralph Tweedale, a patent attorney, whose personal collection of books on Elizabethan history was recently acquired by the library.

A woman named Dehlia Bacon supposedly started a trend in the mid-19th century. She attempted to tie her lineage to Francis Bacon and to prove a stated thesis that he was the true author of the plays, written anonymously and given to stage manager William Shakespeare for production.

In a frenzy she tried to dig up the poet's grave and eventually died insane, but a Baconian society was formed and continues to draw members today.

The Bacon "mystery," or perhaps its failure, fostered other theories and brought forth still more candidates for authorship. The list now exceeds 200 and is growing all the time.

LIKE THE Bible, Prinz said, the Bard is bound to attract a lunatic fringe to his vast body of criticism.

One of the favorite candidates is Christopher Marlowe who was himself a famous playwright of the period. His

plays display a markedly different style, mood, shape and attitude.

One problem with Marlowe is that he died, stabbed in the eye in a fight over a liquor bill, before about half of the Shakespeare plays were written.

Typical of the fictionalizing liberties that are taken by alternatists, supporters of Marlowe (who was a government agent, a homosexual and a notorious atheist) have him being secreted out of England and a substitute killed in his stead.

They say he spent the rest of his life abroad, smuggling his manuscripts across the English Channel to Globe stage manager William Shakespeare by means of a homosexual lover.

The current favorite, said Prinz, is one Edward de Vere, chosen because he knew several languages, was educated, and held a high position at court. This gave him an insider's knowledge of power politics and propaganda.

He was well traveled and knew the law. These are all qualities which appear in the plays, say the critics, and areas about which Shakespeare himself could know very little or nothing.

ANSWERING these arguments, Prinz said that Shakespeare's father was mayor (baird) of Stratford and the local grammar school without tuition.

During a visit to Stratford by Queen Elizabeth there is a good chance that young William saw productions of the Queen's Players and later the Earl of Worcester's Men, a troupe of very skilled actors.

He is known to have kept company with the Earl of Southampton, who be-

review

came his patron, and to have learned from that rich and influential circle of intrigue and politics.

"Other than his genius and limited book readings, though, how did Shakespeare do it all? I'll tell you," said Prinz, "plagiarism."

"Plagiarism on a scale you've never seen before, Shakespeare didn't create most of the plots, characters and dialogue himself. He adopted or lifted it from the popular literature of the time. He took it from history books, stories and poems."

Prinz likened the explosion of the Elizabethan theater to the rise of the silent films at the start of this century. And he likened Shakespeare's writing to that of a screen writer who takes other sources and turns them into another medium.

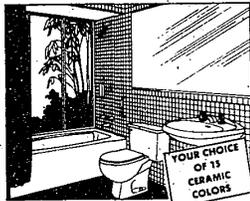
Another of these New Baconians spoken of about the social mood of England, court intrigue, cryptograms, parallels, Bacon's "New Atlantis" and other topics.

To my mind there is no more celestially inspired theory of authorship than this: that the plays of Shakespeare, like the symphonies of Beethoven (he was deaf, you know), the calendar observatory at Stonehenge, and the pyramids of Egypt, were done and brought to earth by superior beings from another planet.

On the other hand, you don't support that Shakespeare wrote them himself?

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Northwest UU member named 'Unsung Unitarian'?

Lenore Upton Storer, long-time member of Northwest Unitarian Universalist Church in Southfield, has been named the 1980 Unsung Unitarian Universalist for the Michigan District.

For 14 years she was chairperson of the public-relations committee and still serves on it. Presently she is chairperson of the denominational affairs committee, a body she has been part of for five years.

The award was established by the board of trustees in 1973 to affirm UUs whose actions inspire, support and express Unitarian Universalism but who are not generally eligible for recognition in the existing denominational framework.

In addition to serving Northwest Church, she has been on the Unitarian Universalist District of Michigan board for two years and is now a candidate for vice president of the district.

Mrs. Storer has been an active member of the church for 20 years. She has served on the church board of directors and church council.

She is chairperson of the developmental needs committee, publicity chairperson, and Michigan correspondent for UU World, a denominational newspaper.

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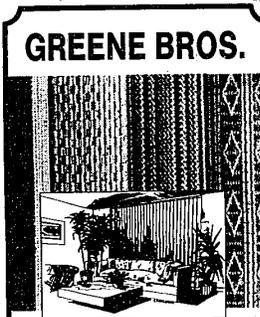
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