

# Who Wrote Shakespeare?

## Executive Summary

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This paper compares William Shakespeare of Stratford, Edward de Vere (Earl of Oxford), Sir Henry Neville, and all other possible principal authors. A principal supplies most original composition; collaboration and later revision remain possible under each explanation. The percentages express the author's conditional historical judgment, not measured frequencies or the consensus of Shakespeare scholarship.

## The reference assessment

| Principal-authorship explanation | Reference posterior |
|----------------------------------|---------------------|
| Sir Henry Neville                | 63.6%               |
| Edward de Vere, Earl of Oxford   | 17.4%               |
| William Shakespeare of Stratford | 8.1%                |
| All other explanations combined  | 10.9%               |

The model begins at 10% Stratford, 39% Oxford, 31% Neville, and 20% other possibilities. The 10% Stratford starting share includes the general cost of concealment and a skeptical assessment of his documentary profile. Conditional evidence weights yield roughly 64% Neville, 17% Oxford, 8% Stratford, and 11% other explanations. The starting 10% and resulting 8.1% are distinct.

## Computational research weighs against Marlowe

Two new numerical investigations, conducted with ChatGPT (OpenAI) and Claude (Anthropic), test whether Marlowe's habits persist in later Shakespeare. ChatGPT analyzed 125 play texts, about 2.5 million dialogue tokens, with whole-play and related-play holdouts. Claude analyzed 471 texts, about 8.9 million tokens, and compared stylistic change across nine long-career dramatists. These studies executed quantitative tests rather than relying on impressions of literary resemblance.

Neither supplies a robust, persistent late-Marlowe signature. ChatGPT's principal methods assigned no play dated 1600-1613 to Marlowe; its passage-trained model found no Marlowe winner in 338 later rolling windows. Claude's reported Marlowe-to-late-Shakespeare distance exceeds every same-author function-word benchmark. By contrast, the Shakespeare-labelled corpus retains recognizable continuity.

## What the Marlowe result means

A survival theory needs strong positive continuity to overcome the documentary record of Marlowe's death in 1593. The studies supply no such support and weigh against him as the continuing principal. Marlowe remains below 1% within the residual category, as a historical judgment informed by the tests. Possible early collaboration on Henry VI is disputed and is a separate question from survival and later principal authorship.

The conclusion is qualitative. Known Marlowe plays are recognized unevenly, rolling windows overlap, the studies share sources and techniques, and Claude's text preparation repeats some dialogue after embedded stage directions. The paper therefore derives no historical likelihood ratio or numerical authorship probability from either study. Stylistic coherence supports a continuing dominant profile but neither identifies that profile as Neville nor proves a single human author.

## Oxford's chronology and continued development

Oxford died in 1604. Later source use and production require stored manuscripts, revision, or additional composition. Continued stylistic development poses a related difficulty: the changing yet recognizable profile must also be explained by the release order of earlier manuscripts or by later writers extending that trajectory. First performance and publication do not, by themselves, establish composition dates.

The final paper treats these observations as related but distinct, assigning Oxford 0.35 for late sources and production and a modest 0.75 for continued development. Some dates partly rely on style, so the second factor is deliberately limited. Removing it raises Oxford's posterior to 21.9% and lowers Neville's to 60.1%. Both Neville and Stratford were alive during the late period; the point favors both over Oxford without identifying either as the writer.

## Why Neville leads, and what could change the result

Neville combines documented learning, continental experience, a French embassy, extensive correspondence, specific letter-to-play parallels, and a lifespan matching the received chronology. Literary tributes, source access, and transmission connections develop his case. Its weaknesses remain substantial: no acknowledged verse or drama, no unambiguous contemporary attribution, selected and dependent parallels, an embassy workload, and physical evidence awaiting specialist authentication.

Stratford retains the strongest direct attribution network; Oxford retains poetry, patronage, literary reputation, and Italian travel. Bacon's Northumberland association, *Promus* parallels, and proposed contributions receive qualitative assessment. Within the reference model his probability cannot exceed the residual's 10.9%; that limit reflects the starting allocation and pooled factors, rather than a completed Bacon assessment. Association or contribution does not establish principal authorship.

The ranking depends on explicit assumptions. A 50% Stratford prior and a 4:1 attribution-record advantage yield about 68% Stratford. Under the paper's skeptical Neville scenario, Oxford leads. The most useful next evidence would be controlled correspondence comparisons, blinded handwriting analysis, stronger manuscript provenance, externally anchored chronology, and fully validated computational replication.

**Research basis:** This summary follows Rodney Malpert's paper dated October 10, 2026, including its historical sources, computational studies, methodological qualifications, reference model, and sensitivity tables. Research and analytical assistance: ChatGPT (OpenAI) and Claude (Anthropic).

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