Ralph 'Raffe' Sheldon (1537-1613), is a man known now mostly for his magnificent Sheldon silk tapestry maps and his Catholic recusancy. The Sheldon tapestry maps were featured as part of the wonderful show at the British Museum in 2012 about Shakespeare's World.

So, why is he a candidate for the Shakespeare authorship?

Key to the Sheldon case as author is the collection of serious evidence of his relationship to the Shakespeare works. Most obviously, there is a very special First Folio – apparently the first copy of the first completed Folio – presented as a gift to the Sheldon family in 1623. There is an annotation by the big theater fan John Harington that seems to equate him with "Will." His life can be shown to match all parts of the Shakespeare oeuvre and all the accepted contemporary commentary about the author.

In general, any candidate for Shakespeare authorship should most likely be from Warwickshire or thereabouts: Sheldon was from a wealthy family with vast properties in Worcestershire and neighboring Warwickshire. Further, any candidate must explain two basic things: first, why the Shakespeare plays ended around 1613/4; and second, why the identity of the author has been so deeply disguised for over 400 years. Sheldon died in March 1613, and he was prosecuted for years as a recusant Catholic – an active papist whose identity, if known publicly, would cause serious political damage to the principal patrons of his drama, the Queen and the Earl of Leicester.

However, it is his unique access to the highly esoteric sources that the author used to construct his plays -- sources discovered by Shakespearean scholars like Geoffrey Bullough and Kenneth Muir -- that actually provides compelling direct evidence of authorship.

As this theory of Sheldon as author has evolved, it has seemed easiest to summarize it as the 'Anti-Bin' theory. Why?

By mid-20th century Shakespearean scholars found themselves in a jam. Their own investigative efforts had unearthed clear proof that not only did Shakespeare not rely solely on Holinshed but, amazingly, he used all variety of

both domestic and foreign sources, with early anonymous plays constructed suspiciously like the early Shakespeare plays. The great Shakespearean editor J. Dover Wilson admitted that this led to the obvious question: "Was Shakespeare a profound historical scholar or merely the reviser of such a scholar's plays?"

Wilson, like the other scholars of the day, opted for the latter choice. But how did this theory work? It required (essentially) the fiction of a bin (or some sort of depository) in some playhouse, a bin through which the newly arrived young man from Stratford could rummage to find his new plays, polish them up, get them produced (again), and voila! become the "most excellent" Shakespeare by 1598.

This theory takes the opposing position. It proposes that one man, Sheldon, wrote not only the early plays but all the Shakespeare works, beginning c.1560 with the first early stage performance of *Romeo & Juliet* and ending with his death in March 1613 and his collaborations with John Fletcher on the last two plays *Henry VIII* and *The Two Noble Kinsmen*.

His work was recognized privately when the publishers of the First Folio presented what appears to be the first copy of the first completed Folio as a gift to the Sheldon family in 1623. But publicly, he was an enigma his entire life and thereafter. Although a strong English patriot he was also a practicing Catholic married to Anne Throckmorton, of the militantly Catholic side of the Throckmorton family. To maintain his principled stance on his private religion, he surrendered his public place as an playwright of much beloved & acclaimed plays, forced to live -- as the writers who called him Labeo pointed out -- like a cuttlefish, under perpetual disguise to protect both his work and his monarch.

In this website, I have included a number of papers focusing on various aspects of the Sheldon case, as well as a digital version of my book, *Was Shakespeare A 'Hydden Man'?: An Elizabethan Jigsaw Puzzle* (2024). I would welcome your comments on any part of this theory – you can leave a note on the website or contact me directly at nancymaude@gmail.com.