

Shakespearean Authorship Trust



Mary Sidney Herbert, the Countess of Pembroke

Dates:

1561 to 1621

Mary Sidney was the most educated woman in England, comparable only to Queen Elizabeth. She was fluent in Italian, French, and Latin; played the lute and virginals; sang; had all the refinements of an aristocratic woman, such as medical training, falconry, hunting, court life, etc. She had an alchemy laboratory and was close with the leading “magicians” of the day, including John Dee and Giordano Bruno.

For two decades Mary Sidney developed and led the most important and influential literary circle in English history, now called Wilton Circle. She is the first woman to publish a play in English (closet drama) and the first woman to publish an original pastoral piece in English. She translated and published work from French and Italian. Sister to Sir Philip Sidney, she published his sonnet sequence that created the passionate vogue for sonnet writing.

Scholars of Mary Sidney agree that her mission in life was to create great works in the English language, although as a woman she would have never been allowed to publish work for the public stage. Many of the original sources for the plays were written by herself, or her brother, writers in her circle, or were dedicated to her, and she was fluent in the three languages in which two dozen of the source materials were written. She sponsored an acting troupe and participated in courtly theatre throughout her life. Her life parallels the love story shown in the sonnets in that she had a long-term affair with a younger man who for a time she thought was having an affair with a dark-haired, dark-eyed woman. Mary Sidney died in her London home two months after the First Folio went to press.

History of the Mary Sidney Herbert Authorship Theory

When was Mary Sidney first identified as the possible author of all or part of the writings of Shakespeare?

1931.

Who first identified Mary Sidney as a candidate for the authorship of the Shakespeare canon and who has carried out significant research?

Mary Sidney Herbert, the Countess of Pembroke, was first identified as the possible author of part of the Shakespearean canon in 1931 in a book by Gilbert Slater, ***Seven Shakespeares***, published by Cecil Palmer in London. Slater devotes a chapter to the feminine attributes in the plays, especially the later plays, as well as the intimate connections to Wales and the Welsh in the plays and in Mary’s life, and the depth of knowledge that was commensurate with her education. He believed that Mary Sidney was the literary executor of Oxford’s work as author, that she added to and completed his unfinished work.

In Who Wrote Shakespeare, published in 1996 by Thames and Hudson, John Michell devotes one paragraph to the possibility of Mary Sidney as author.

Both Slater and Michell include Mary Sidney in possible groups of authorship, and both find Ben Jonson’s allusion to “Sweet Swan of Avon” to apply most appropriately to Mary Sidney.

In 2006, Robin P. Williams published ***Sweet Swan of Avon: Did a Woman Write Shakespeare?***, the first comprehensive look at the documented evidence that ties Mary Sidney Herbert, the Countess of Pembroke, to the authorship.

Relevant publications

Robin P. Williams, *Sweet Swan of Avon: Did a Woman Write Shakespeare?*, published by Wilton Circle Press in 2006.

www.MarySidney.com

Fred Faulkes, *Tiger's Heart in Woman's Hide*, the first of a fifteen-book series called "The Tiger Heart Chronicles". First volume published in 2007.

Jonathan Star, analysis of Ben Jonson's eulogy to the author and more; 2008.

MarySidney.weebly.com

The Mary Sidney Society publishes a journal, *The Cygnet*.

Articles about Mary Sidney as author have appeared in Newsweek (both in the States and abroad), Wiltshire Life, Zeitung, Herald Tribune, and other magazines and newspapers around the world. Mentions of her in general authorship articles is becoming more common.

Societies attached to the candidacy

Mary Sidney Society, founded April 23, 2004

www.MarySidney.com

Currently over 200 members, several of whom are working on articles or film projects about Mary Sidney as author.

www.shakespeareanauthorshiptrust.org.uk