

Was Shakespeare a Sicilian?

By

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Don't Laugh!

In 2002, a retired teacher of Italian literature, Martino Iuvara, published "Shakespeare era Italiano" (Ispica, Ragusa, Sicily), claiming that William Shakespeare was really Michelangelo Florio Crollanza (or "Scrollanza" to be more accurate), born in Messina in 1564, to Calvinist parents who fled to Treviso near Venice to avoid the Inquisition. While there they bought Casa Otello ("Othello") named after a Venetian gentleman who, according to local legend, killed his wife out of jealousy. (Really?)

As a young man, Scrollanza studied in Venice, Mantua and Padua, then travelled throughout Europe and eventually was befriended by the philosopher Giordano Bruno, who in turn was friends with William Herbert, the Earl of Pembroke. In 1588, Scrollanza went to England to live with his mother's English cousin in Stratford, whose family had already changed their last name to Shakespeare. When their son William died prematurely, Michelangelo took his first name, and became the William Shakespeare of legend!!

Isn't that fantastic??

Nevermind that this Shakespeare would have had to learn "English as a Second Language" so rapidly and accurately as to be able to write such marvelous poetry and dramas as are today attributed to him. Or maybe not! Maybe those who claim that these works were really written by Edward De Vere,

Earl of Oxford and friend of Shakespeare, who actually travelled throughout Italy and knew it well but was unable to publish in his own name because of his family status—maybe they are right after all!

While as many as six plays by Shakespeare (or De Vere) were set in Italy, only one had its background in Sicily: “The Winter’s Tale,” (1604? first published in 1623), possibly the last of his works.

The Winter’s Tale

In this play King Leontes, King of Sicily, begs his friend, King Polixenes of Bohemia, to stay a while longer in Sicily, even though he had been away from his own country for nine months. But when Hermione, Leontes’ pregnant wife, pleads with Polixenes and he agrees, Leontes begins to suspect that they are lovers. When his servant, Camillo warns Polixenes that Leontes has ordered him to poison his guest, Polixenes and Camillo flee the island immediately.

Furious, Leontes publicly accuses Hermione of infidelity and declares the child she is bearing to be illegitimate. He throws her in prison but at the urging of his nobles sends two of their number to Delphi (Delos?) to ask the Oracle if he is correct. While in prison, Hermione gives birth to a baby girl and her friend, Paulina, the wife of Lord Antigonus, brings the child to Leontes, hoping to change his mind. Leontes angrily orders Antigonus to take the infant to an isolated spot and abandon her to the elements.

When the nobles return from Delphi they find that the King has decided to put Hermione on trial publicly for her misdeeds. She insists she is innocent and demands that the words of the Oracle be read out in court. The Oracle declares that

Hermione and Polixenes are innocent, Camillo is an honest man and that Leontes will have no heirs until his lost daughter is found. Leontes refuses to believe the Oracle and shortly afterward his only son Mamillius dies of a sickness believed to have been brought on because of the accusations against his mother. When hearing the news of Mamillius' death, Hermione herself swoons and dies in grief, and Leontes soon afterward repents.

Antigonus meanwhile abandons the baby on the coast of Bohemia, calling her Perdita, a name given her by Hermione in his dream. He places a sack of gold beside the baby to indicate she is of noble birth. A storm rises up causing Antigonus' ship to sink and Antigonus himself is killed by a bear. The baby is found by an old shepherd who takes her to live with him and his son.

Sixteen years later, at the court of Polixenes in Bohemia, Camillo asks if he may return to his homeland of Sicily. Polixenes refuses and tells him that his son, Florizel, wishes to marry a shepherd girl, Perdita. He suggests that they dress as shepherds and attend a sheep-shearing festival where the two are to be betrothed. At the festival, Florizel, also disguised as a shepherd with the name of Doricles, and Perdita undertake the ceremony of betrothal, and are immediately threatened by Polixenes with torture and death if they are ever seen together again.

Nevertheless, Camillo helps the two secure a boat to Sicily and the old Shepherd and his son join them. Leontes is still repenting his sins when the ship arrives. Florizel pretends to be on a mission from his father but when Polixenes and Camillo arrive as well, all disguises are dropped and they all forgive each other's offenses. They then go together to the home of Hermione's friend, Paulina, who rescued the baby from prison,

and see the recently completed statue of Hermione. Leontes breaks down when he sees it, and suddenly, the statue comes to life. She lives!!

The play ends with Paulina and Camillo also becoming engaged and everyone celebrates the miracle.

Question: Did Paulina revive Hermione from her swoon sixteen years earlier and hide her from sight until she could be brought forward at a more propitious time to re-unite her family?? I don't know. Scrollanza/Shakespeare doesn't say.