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# A Question of Authorship

A Short Comedy by  
Dan Weatherer

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# A Question of Authorship

by Dan Weatherer

## **CHARACTERS**

### **5M**

Arthur Miller  
William Shakespeare  
Sir Francis Bacon  
Christopher Marlowe  
William Stanley

## **SETTING**

Heaven

## **SYNOPSIS**

Five of history's greatest playwrights meet to discuss the origins of the work penned in Shakespeare's name.

William Shakespeare, the finest writer of our time; or collection of writers, for there is some debate as to whether one man can lay claim to the entirety of his works.

Tired of the controversy, playwright Arthur Miller assembles those claiming to have penned the works of Shakespeare, so that they may state their case, and the matter will be settled once and for all.

Heaven braces itself for an almighty showdown...

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AT RISE:

*Heaven. ARTHUR MILLER, SHAKESPEARE, SIR FRANCIS BACON, CHRISTOPHER MARLOWE and WILLIAM STANLEY, are sitting at a table. MILLER pours himself a glass of whiskey. Everyone else has a full glass. MILLER sits centrally. Stage left is SHAKESPEARE and BACON. To Miller's right sit STANLEY and MARLOWE.*

MILLER

Thanks for taking time out of your busy schedules to see me.

BACON

Not at all kind sir, the pleasure I can assure thee is all mineth.

SHAKESPEARE

You can knock that off for a start, Bacon. Mr Miller isn't here for the tourist spiel.

MARLOWE

*(Scoffs)*

Idiot.

*MARLOWE takes a large sip of whiskey.*

STANLEY

*(To SHAKESPEARE)*

There's no need to be rude, William.

SHAKESPEARE

*(Mocking on the "WILL")*

Oh, do shut up Will.

MILLER

Now gentlemen, please. Let us at least try to be civil. There is much to discuss and . . .

MARLOWE

*(To MILLER)*

I'll take another dram.

*MARLOWE shoves his empty glass towards MILLER.*

MILLER

True enough to form, Christopher.

MARLOWE

Less talking, more pouring.

*MILLER pours MARLOWE a measure of whiskey and passes it back via STANLEY.*

BACON

*(To MILLER)*

Forgive me. May I ask as to why you requested our presence?

*MARLOWE downs his whiskey, slams his glass onto the table and gestures for the remainder of the bottle. MILLER ignores him.*

MARLOWE

Hear, hear!

*MILLER takes a sip from his whiskey and places it on the table.*

*MARLOWE reaches for the bottle and pours himself another whiskey.*

MILLER

Of course. Let's get right to it. It's a question that I have often pondered and I know it troubles a fair number of people down there . . .

*MARLOWE raises his glass.*

MARLOWE

Cheers! *(Downs the whiskey)*

SHAKESPEARE

*(Groans)*

Oh, not this again!

*MILLER produces a handful of books from beneath his chair. He places one on the table.*

MILLER

It's simple, really. I wish to know who wrote this?

*SHAKESPEARE, MARLOWE, BACON and STANLEY look at the book.*

ALL EXCEPT MILLER

I did!

MILLER

You all wrote Romeo and Juliet?

ALL EXCEPT MILLER

No. I did!

*MILLER places another book on the table.*

MILLER

How about Hamlet?

ALL EXCEPT MILLER

I did!

*MILLER places the third book on the table.*

MILLER

And Othello?

ALL EXCEPT MILLER

I did!

STANLEY

Actually sorry, I didn't write that one. My mistake. But I did write Twelfth Night so there's that. . .

*BACON stands in anger.*

BACON

Liar! *(To MILLER)* Stanley never penned a play worthy of note in his life! *(To STANLEY)*  
Thou art a flesh-monger, a fool and a coward!

SHAKESPEARE

*(To BACON)*

Nice. Measure for Measure. You really must have written it to quote it so eloquently?

MARLOWE

Sit down Bacon, before you hurt yourself.

*BACON sits.*

STANLEY

*(Hurt)*

Not true. I thought Macbeth was worthy of note.

*BACON stands.*

BACON

*(Enraged)*

Liar! Thou art as loathsome as a toad!

SHAKESPEARE

*(To BACON)*

Oh, following up with a bit of Troilus and Cressida now. Well, that's me sold. How about you sit down and let the rest of us get a word in? As for you. . . *(Turning to STANLEY)*  
Signing yourself as W.S was never going to fool anyone. I mean honestly now, that has to be the weakest claim in the history of anything!

*BACON sits.*

STANLEY

But I . . .

MILLER

*(Interrupting)*

Now gentlemen, please. We could quarrel and bicker until the end of days but that really isn't going to get us anywhere now is it?

MARLOWE

Get rid of him I say. *(Points to STANLEY)* That one, I mean. Willie wannabe.

*BACON stands.*

BACON

*(Forceful)*

Indeed.

*BACON sits.*

SHAKESPEARE

Agreed.

MILLER

*(To STANLEY)*

In the interest of moving the argument along, it seems that your claim as author to the works of Shakespeare is rejected. I must say it was always a flimsy argument at best. I'm surprised it survived as long as it did! Wouldn't you agree?

STANLEY

*(Sulking)*

Well. . . we do have the same initials. You cannot dispute that?

SHAKESPEARE

Yes, you and several hundred thousand others.

*STANLEY finishes his drink.*

STANLEY

That many, huh? *(Stands)* I've got to go anyway. I have a first draft that needs my attention. It's a tragedy based on. . .

MARLOWE

*(Interrupting/Dismissive)*

Yes, yes. Good luck with that.

*STANLEY looks to the group.*

STANLEY

I'll see you. . .

SHAKESPEARE

*(Interrupting)*

So long, Will!

STANLEY

Yeah. Bye.

*Exit STANLEY. BACON stands.*

BACON

*(To MARLOWE)*

You may follow him, Marlowe. You are nothing but a drunk and a rakehell. I know not how you came to be the leading playwright of the day, such was the filth that you peddled!

MARLOWE

Rakehell? He's at it again! Have you spoken to anybody in the last hundred years?

BACON

Of course, I have! It's just that old habits die hard and you are a scheming rakehell. I can think of no other word that describes you better.

*MARLOWE stands.*

MARLOWE

I'll not stand for this. (Looks down at feet) Though remarkably, I am still able. *(To SHAKESPEARE and BACON)* I bested you in life, that'll do for me.

*MARLOWE snatches up the bottle of whiskey.*

MARLOWE, *Continued*

*(To MILLER)*

Nice meeting you, Art. Excellent work on *The Crucible*. *(To SHAKESPEARE and BACON)* Ladies.

*Exit MARLOWE. MILLER and SHAKESPEARE look at BACON. BACON sits.*

MILLER

Well, that leaves the two most likely candidates?

BACON

As it ought.

*SHAKESPEARE snorts in derision.*

BACON, *Continued*

What of it, man?

SHAKESPEARE

Look, it's like this. You have ridden my coat tails for centuries now. Don't you think it's time to admit the truth?

BACON

Indeed. *(To SHAKESPEARE)* So you concede that I penned the works in your name so that I might comment on the social policies of our day without fear of reprisal?

SHAKESPEARE

No, far from it. Though I will admit that you are a fraud and a coward.

*BACON stands.*

BACON

*(Enraged)*

Outrageous! You are the son of an illiterate wool trader! You had little in the way of education! Ha! You were a failure of an actor at best! Nobody mourned your death. Nobody sang praise of your genius. You died penniless and unknown. I shall wager that you are not able to pen your own name!

**This is Not the End of the Play**  
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