

RESEARCH ARTICLE	Some facts and problems connected with the biography of William Shakespeare	
Khayala Ibrahimova, Agamirza	Dr.	
	Azerbaijan University of Languages	
	Azerbaijan, Baku	
	Email: Ibrahimovaxeyale@yahoo.com	
Doi Serial	https://doi.org/10.56334/sci/8.7.55	
Keywords	Detailed research, history and fiction, biography as an artistic form, the vexed question of the “celebrity” life, competing versions, the earliest biographical references to Shakespeare	
Abstract		
The article considers the main problems of study of the biography of the distinguished English playwright and poet William Shakespeare, based on the biographic novel «Shakespeare: The biography» written by the modern English writer and the author of world bestsellers - Peter Acroyd. By analyzing some scientific-research works, textbooks, and monographic publication, connected with William Shakespeare’s biography, the author of the research proposes her own concept in the study of live and creative activity of the great poet on base of historically established facts. However, a great deal of scientific researches, containing additional evidence and some clarifications on indicated facts, are written in the Azerbaijan literature science. By all these and many other issues, the author of the article presents established facts and persuasive arguments. Thus, it is underlined, that multiple archive and historic-literature sources, displaying significant scientific interest for future researches in the area of Azerbaijan-English literature relationship were applied in Peter Acroyd’s biographic novel «Shakespeare: The biography».		
Citation		
Ibrahimova Kh.A. (2025). Some facts and problems connected with the biography of William Shakespeare. <i>Science, Education and Innovations in the Context of Modern Problems</i> , 8(7), 526-530; doi:10.56352/sci/8.7.55. https://imcra-az.org/archive/365-science-education-and-innovations-in-the-context-of-modern-problems-issue-7-volviii-2025.html		
Licensed		
© 2025 The Author(s). Published by Science, Education and Innovations in the context of modern problems (SEI) by IMCRA - <i>International Meetings and Journals Research Association</i> (Azerbaijan). This is an open access article under the CC BY license (http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/).		
Received: 19.02.2024	Accepted: 11.05.2025	Published: 30.05.2025 (available online)

Introduction

The works, dedicated to studies on life and creative activity of the prophet- playwright and the poet and the theatre writer of the English Renaissance William Shakespeare (1564-1616), have caused an interest, both of public, scientific audience and humans. One of main criteria, gaining an international reputation for the English writer, whose name and works were publicly learnt by heart, is depiction with might of skillful artist of national ideas, causing all humans thinking and agitating from time to time and disclosure in front of spectators of his human-

istic dramatist attitude at settlement of fate changing problems of heroes, newly shaped dramatic plays, creation of poems and sonnets.

The famous English scientist, the writer, the poet and the biographer Peter Ackroyd (born in 1949), who mentioned benefiting from publications, works of scientists and biographers, such as Katherine Duncan - Jones (“Ungentle Shakespeare: Scenes from his Life”), Anthony Holden (“William Shakespeare: His Life and Work”), Park Honan (“Shakespeare: A Life”), Eric Sams (“The Real Shakespeare”), Stanley Wells (“Shakespeare: A Dramatic Life”), Richard Wilson (“Will Power: Essays on

Shakespearian Authority”), Michael Wood (“In Search of Shakespeare”), including researches, conducted during the last decades and monographic publications in the literary criticism of the World, Great Britain and the US, published the novel “Shakespeare: The Biography” in 2005 in London in the public office “Vintage Books” (1).

In the ninety first section of the 9th part of his biographic novel, containing 546 pages the writer and the biographer Peter Ackroyd confirms the extent of correspondence of logics of Emerson’s judgment “Shakespeare is the only biographer of Shakespeare” (6, p.487) in the book of the US Shakespeare scholar S.Schoenbaum, (“Shakespeare’s Lives”).

Originally, it is narrated, that creation of biographical evidence on William Shakespeare started half century later after his death. And, as Peter Ackroyd mentioned about this biography, “... no scholar or critic bothered to discuss Shakespeare with any of his friends or contemporaries.” (1, p.487).

Mysterious narration written essays on William Shakespeare’s life and creative activity didn’t evade reader’s and researcher’s attention. First of all, this is connected with significant achievements in art, which were gained in the world by the great playwright.

Some words about William Shakespeare’s life

After William Shakespeare’s death (1616) two of his friends-actors John Heminges and Henry Condell prepared commemorative edition, in memory of the great playwright. For the first time it was published in 1623. Approximately, for three hundred years period Shakespearian canon, got excellent reputation, as the precise version. When the biographer Peter Ackroyd raised issue on initial biographic references, relating to William Shakespeare, John Aubrey told about some biographic notes, not published during his life period and some interesting judgments and facts about this in Ben Johnson’s work “Timber: or, Discoveries Made upon Men and Matter” (1641). Some points of playwright’s biography are recalled with historic chronological sequence in Jacob Tonson’s edition of the “Works of Shakespeare” in the preface of Nicholas Rowe’s prefatory “Life”.

However, it would be more correct and more well-grounded to adhere the study of William Shakespeare’s biography mostly to the second half of XIX century. Especially, Edward Dowden’s study “Shakespeare: A Critical Study of His Mind and Art” was published for the first time in 1875.

William Shakespeare’s creative activity played an important role in literary and cultural life of Azerbaijan, his

numerous plays, poems and 154 sonnets were translated into Azeri Turkish, several monographic studies were conducted. Study of William Shakespeare’s life and creative activity by the linguist and the literary critic Ismikhhan Rahimov by means of scientific proofs and researches about below mentioned judgment draws attention. He writes: nobody, among the persons, writing about Shakespeare’s life in “XVII-XVIII centuries, had doubts about appertaining of works connected with his name to William Shakespeare, by origin from Stratford” (5, p.9).

Then, suddenly, the author of the study, indicating doubt cast to the personality of William Shakespeare in the XIX century, for the first time in study of US researcher-scientist Deliya Beckon called “Revealing of philosophy of Shakespeare’s plays”, indicates on his attempts to prove that those plays were written by the philosopher and the state figure Francis Beckon and writes: “... while the number of those, who wish to deny Shakespeare, is increasing, his period, creative activity is studied more thoroughly, which is helpful for detailed study of multi-sidedness of Shakespeare’s creative activity, his personality” (5, p.10).

Peter Ackroyd writes: “On the occasion of the Shakespeare Jubilee, in the summer of 1769, a painting before the windows of the room, where the dramatist was supposed to have been born; it displayed the image of the sun breaking through clouds. It is a wonderful emblem of birth” (1, p.487-488).

It isn’t Peter Ackroyd’s imagination, simply, it draws attention, as one narration, gained by him from certain sources.

Independent of extent of height of evaluation of William Shakespeare’s art and genius by Peter Ackroyd, he disclosed, that he wrote some plays jointly with some writers, who gained fame in the area of theatrical art. Then bringing to the forefront, the plays of great playwright called “All is True” and “The Two Noble Kinsmen” written jointly with John Fletcher, he indicates: “There seems to be no doubt, however, that “The Two Noble Kinsmen” was the next collaboration between William Shakespeare and John Fletcher. On the title page of the first edition, published in quarto form in 1634, it is described as being “presented at the Blackfriars by the Kings Maiestie servants, with great applause: Written by the memorable Worthies of their time: Mr. John Fletcher, and Mr. William Shakespeare. Gent.” It is worth noting that Fletcher’s name is mentioned first” (1, p.474).

Naturally, while speaking of William Shakespeare’s genius, signatures or service of writers, cooperating with him, are receded to background by unknown reason. However, one mustn’t evade such truth. While gaining William Shakespeare’s world reputation, it is necessary to acknowledge the importance of John Fletcher’s role in

many works, created through his efforts and talent.

Recollecting the Nickolas Rowe's name, as the first Shakespeare's biographer, the researcher and the scientist Ismikhhan Rahimov presented the below mentioned judgment to the Azeri Turkic reader: "Though previously, there were people, who got interested in Shakespeare's life in England, personality, family and creative activity, but Nickolas Rowe, was the first one, who wrote his biography for the first time. In 1709 he prepared Shakespeare's works in six volumes and published them, including his biography. In contrary to previous inventions and tales, N.Rowe refers mostly to true data. By his request the actor Betterton goes to Stratford and collects thorough information about Shakespeare" (5, p.8).

Peter Ackroyd also indicates verity of such judgment. He writes: "Shakespeare's first biographer, Nicholas Rowe, writing at the beginning of the eighteenth century, states that John Shakespeare "had bred him, 'tis true, for some time at a Free-School, where 'tis probable he acquired that little Latin he was Master of..." (as a matter of fact, this citation is taken from Chambers "Shakespeare: Facts and Problems". Volume Two, page 264) (1, p.53).

In many different literature encyclopedia of Britain Nicholas Rowe (1674-1718) is presented, as a playwright. His highest achievement in the area of art is "She - Tragedies" (his own phrase) and he acted, as the editor of the first modern publication of Shakespeare's works in 1709, and naturally, at later stage, individually, his book "Some Account of the Life of Mr. William Shakespeare" was published separately in London in 1848.

The period, exceeding 90 years separates William Shakespeare's death date from the Nicholas Rowe's publication (1709). Facts and events, presented and explained in his biography seem to be more convincing. Peter Ackroyd also preferred the properties of the Nickolas Rowe's biographic novel.

In the below mentioned judgment of the Shakespeare's biographer Nicholas Rowe Peter Ackroyd considers calling the period covering 3 years of his life from 1613, the period of some kind of calmness and playwright's talks with his friends, as natural one.

"Latter part of his life was spent, as all Men of good Sense will wish theirs may be, in Ease, Retirement, and the Conversations of his Friends. He had the good Fortune to gather an Estate equal to his Occasion and, in that, to his Wish; and is said to have spent some Years before his Death at his native Stratford" (1, p.476).

Peter Ackroyd pointing out that: "He came back because he knew that he was dying. He came back in order to re-

vise his plays for future publication (1, p.476), expresses his attitude and explanation to above mentioned judgment, abstained from presentation of thorough explanation of the last three years of playwright's life.

Numerous references applied by Peter Ackroyd in biographic novel, or the work of Sir Edmund Kerchever Chambers (1866-1954) "William Shakespeare: A Study of Facts and Problems" (2 vols, 1930) among other sources occupies a special place. Sir E.K.Chambers, who lived for eighty eight years, is known in the cultural (and literature) history of Great Britain XIX and XX centuries, mostly as the outstanding scientist of William Shakespeare's life and creative activity. His biographic works, named S.T. Coleridge, Matthew Arnold written in biographic genre are also distinguished by occupying of certain place among the art monuments.

Along with Sir E.K.Chambers, the researcher- scientist Ismikhhan Rahimov in his study too, base on certain thoughts and facts of Shakespeare's biography researcher Edmond Malone (1741-1812), writes: "Some biographers claim on illiteracy of Shakespeare's father and indicate, that, instead of putting his signature on documents, as John Shakespeare, he drew a line. Another researcher Smart speaks against this idea and indicates that, if this would have been the case, then he wouldn't be assigned twice the position of the treasurer at the city municipality" (5, p.8).

With purpose of shedding the light to this issue, it is sufficient to pay attention to below mentioned notes in the Peter Ackroyd's biographic novel, he writes: "So John Shakespeare was a canny and prosperous businessman. There has been much speculation, however, about his literary. He signed with a mark rather than a signature, which suggests that he could not write" (1, p.22).

At the later stage the author mentions: "The fact that John Shakespeare could not write, however, does not necessarily imply that he could not read. Reading and writing were taught separately, and were considered to be different skills. It would in any case have been difficult for him to engage in his multifarious trades businesses without being able to read" (1, p.22).

Thus, in Peter Ackroyd's biographic novel of William Shakespeare it is possible to state, explaining by means of evidence and proof the event and the fact, which might cause any dispute, reader's elevated spirit and satisfaction is formed.

London theatre stage needed new voice, new breath. Connected with great desire and young love to the theatre William Shakespeare, when Thomas Kid and Christopher Marlowe were younger than 23 or 24 years old (Wil-

William Shakespeare also was at the same age – Kh.I.) the great playwright of future Shakespeare, acting, as an actor in the plays, was somehow “imitating” and wrote some kind of parodies. Peter Ackroyd mentioned that neither Thomas Kid, nor William Shakespeare had University education, both of them were branded by “university wits”, as low educated and were subjected to criticism.

However, the biographer mentioning, that Christopher Marlowe influenced strongly on William Shakespeare's creative activity, writes William Shakespeare influenced on his historical play named “Edward II” and wrote: “Tamburlaine” (Marlowe's “Tamburlaine the Great” – Kh.I.) influenced the shape of Shakespeare's history plays, and the history plays in turn seem to have affected Marlowe's composition of “Edward II” (1, p.139).

Along with reflection of selected historical facts, Peter Ackroyd considers them mostly from logical view point. Afterwards he writes: “As has already been observed, the young Shakespeare no doubt also acted in “The Jew of Malta” and “Massacre at Paris”. That he was mightily impressed and influenced by Marlowe is not in doubt; it is also clear that in his earliest plays Shakespeare stole or copied some of his lines, parodied him, and generally competed with him. Marlowe was the contemporary writer who most exercised him. He was the competitor... But Shakespeare's muse was an envious one, ready to deflate or destroy any contestant” (1, p.140).

While commencing the talk about Shakespeare's biography, Peter Ackroyd calls the period, covering his age from 20 up to 28, as some biographers traditionally call, the “lost years” (1, p.96). In our opinion, biographic information and explanations just as well, relating to the last three years of playwright's life, the period from 1613 to 1616, form reader's partial impression. This period covers the years, when William Shakespeare moved away from creative activity, experienced physically exhausted period of elderly age and became the initiator of care for his health and family.

One of elements, attracting attention in Peter Ackroyd's novel “Shakespeare: The Biography” is also connected with William Shakespeare's play, titled “Cardenna”, which was jointly staged with John Fletcher on 8th June 1612, at Whitehall. That play was registered for publication under title “The History of Cardenio” (by Mr. Fletcher and Shakespeare). As the writer-biographer Peter Ackroyd mentioned, jointly with Fletcher Shakespeare had collaborated on several plays for the King's Men at that period. However, names of plays didn't reach our present days (1, p.465).

In the 1st part of Cervantes's “Don Quixote” we encounter with image of Cardenio. This, is undoubtedly, based on

hero “Don Quixote”, whose name was mentioned in the masterpiece of creative activity of the famous Spanish novelist and playwright Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra (1547-1616) in the 1st part published in 1604. The most interesting point is, the masterpiece, called “Cardenio”, like William Shakespeare's plays “Much Ado About Nothing”, “The Tempest”, “The Winter's Tale”, “Othello” was played continuously starting from Christmas holiday 1612 up to 20 May 1613 by the King's Men. Peter Ackroyd said, on occasion of wedding and marriage of the Princess Elizabeth, the daughter of English and Scottish King James this play was played by King's men not less than 14 times and they were given significant sum of £153 6s 8d for these plays (1, p.466).

Let us draw our attention to the below mentioned notes, concerning events, embodied in William Shakespeare's biography and literary creative activity, which is reflected in the Azerbaijan literary critics: “Later, some new information about Shakespeare's family life appeared too. The fact of his love to the “dark lady” wasn't clarified. It was defined, that his social position was at sufficiently high level. They said, among his close acquaintances not only names of countesses, but even queen Elizabeth's name was mentioned” (5, p.9).

For more precise and conceiving facts and presumptions in reader's perception, broad erudition, true and verified sources are required from the researcher. Though the great scientist, skillful researcher of William Shakespeare's creative activity Ismikhhan Rahimov gave preference to logical, abundant facts and suppositions, in some cases he admitted judgments, causing the reader's confusion. By referring from this view point to Peter Ackroyd's biographic novel, integrating in itself historical and literary facts, we would like to shed the light to certain extent, on those issues.

First of all, in the beginning of the study the reader gets deceptive thought on point, that William Shakespeare was forced to marry officially with Anna Hathaway and from this marriage he had “daughter, called Susannah and twin sons by names Judith and Hamlet” (5, p.6-7).

Conclusion

The true fact of birth of his first child, daughter Susannah in May 1583, and his twins, Hamlet and Judith in February 1585 (1, p.93-95) depicted in the biographic novel about Shakespeare may be accepted, as a correct version. As for the clarification of the fact of William Shakespeare's love to the “dark lady”, we would like to note, the point of clarification of this issue in Peter Ackroyd's novel is undeniable.

We introduce several selected points of Peter Ackroyd's

detailed explanations on the “dark lady”: “The “Dark Lady” has been variously identified as Mary Fitton, Emilia Lanier, and a black prostitute from Turnmill Street in Clerkenwell” (1, p.288).

Afterwards, the biographer’s attempt to identify the “dark lady, as Emilia Lanier’s image, attracts the attention: “Emilia Lanier was certainly well known to Shakespeare... She was a poet, too, who at a later date dedicated one of her volumes to the Countess of Pembroke. Born Emilia Bassano, she was the illegitimate daughter of Baptist Bassano, one of a Jewish family from Venice who had become the court musicians... Members of the Bassano family accompanied the performances of Shakespeare’s plays in the royal palaces. They were dark-skinned Venetians... It cannot be known, if she ever became Shakespeare’s lover and, even if she was, whether she is memorialized as the faithless lady of the sonnets” (1, p.289).

Thus, the case was, the fact of definition of the dark lady, as Emilia Lanier, being by origin from Venezuela and leaving some traces in William Shakespeare’s biography. Nevertheless, the researcher Simon Foreman put forward the proposed detail, that birthmark was in the lower part of throat of Emilia Lanier. Peter Ackroyd also referring to this fact, looked for new ways to confirm that it was Emilia Lanier, “a dark lady” from Venezuela, when William Shakespeare in “Cymbeline” presented description of such birthmark on bosom of a beautiful lady, called Imogene and undoubtedly, when he lavished praises for the sake of black colored beauty.

The famous Russian scientist Dmitri Mikhailovich Urnov wrote biographic studies on William Shakespeare: “Resting on completely open archive, recognized historicism became the norm of study of the writer’s biography. Starting from the Shakespeare’s biography, studies have possessed the completeness on coverage of the writer’s personality- against the background of epoch, being at relationship with cultural and domestic surrounding and, mainly, the thing which didn’t occur before, with the most potential completeness of mastering of the writer’s internal world. Besides, not personality, but the writer’s creative activity becomes the writer’s main subject” (7, p.12).

Thus, turning into a new study subject of literature science of the novel “Shakespeare: The Biography”, occupying for the last decade a specific place among researches and biographic novels devoted to William Shakespeare, is not accidental. Bringing to the topic of the work of any fact or event about the thinker, the English poet and the playwright for the world and Azerbaijan reader, wishing to learn it and expression of its opinion by the literature theoretical thought must be continuously in the center of attention.

References

1. Ackroyd, P. (2005). Shakespeare: The Biography. London: Vintage Books.
2. Duncan-Jones, K. (2001). Ungentle Shakespeare: Scenes from his Life. London.
3. Greenblatt, S. (2004). Will in the World: How Shakespeare became Shakespeare. London, 2004.
4. Khalilli Sh. (2009). Shakespeare’s Sonnets. Baku, 2009.
5. Rahimov I. (2004). One of genius who “shook” the world – William Shakespeare. Selected works. In two volumes. I volume. Baku, Leader public office.
6. Samuel J. O. (2025). A corpus-based analysis of (im)politeness metalanguage and speech acts: The case of insults in Shakespeare’s plays, *Journal of Pragmatics*, Vol. 235, pages 132-144, ISSN 0378-2166, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pragma.2024.11.011>, <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0378216624002224>
7. Schoenbaum, S. (1991). Shakespeare’s Lives. New edition. Oxford.
8. Simonton D.K. (2011). William Shakespeare 1564 “1616: English dramatist, poet, and actor Author of 37 plays 154 sonnets, Editor(s): Mark A. Runco, Steven R. Pritzker, Encyclopedia of Creativity (Second Edition), Academic Press, Pages e72-e75, ISBN 9780123750389, <https://doi.org/10.1016/B978-0-12-375038-9.00198-1> (<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/B9780123750389001989>)
9. Urnov D.M. (1979). English critics and literary process. The Idea of Literature. The Foundations of English Criticism. Moscow: Progress Publishers.