

- #8b (de Vere was the natural son of Princess Elizabeth, median 2.7). Twenty-five disagreed, one agreed and eleven were uncertain.
- #21 (The Sonnets were published substantially in correct order, median 7.2). Twenty-five agreed, three disagreed and nine were uncertain.
- #31 (Many academics have private doubts about authorship, median 7.2). Twenty-four agreed, one disagreed and twelve were uncertain.

Areas without Consensus

For the remainder of the statements the weighted median was between 3.1 and 6.9. In some cases this was because a plurality of responses were in the “uncertain” range, and in some cases substantial numbers of persons agreed and disagreed with a particular statement.

- #14 (de Vere is buried in Westminster Abbey, median 6.8). Twenty agreed, one disagreed and sixteen were uncertain.
- #10 (de Vere was the biological father of Anne Cecil’s first child, median 6.9). Twenty-four agreed, six disagreed and eleven were uncertain.
- #4 (Shakespeare of Stratford served as a literary “front man,” median 6.6). Twenty-two agreed, seven disagreed and ten were uncertain.
- #18 (The *V&A* and *Lucrece* dedications to Southampton were for political reasons, median 6.5). Twenty-one agreed, seven disagreed and eight were uncertain.
- #24e (The Dark Lady is someone other than the four candidates named in prior statements, median 3.7). Seventeen disagreed, five agreed and twelve were uncertain.
- #25a (The main story of the Sonnets is homosexual love and romance involving real persons, median 3.4). Twenty disagreed, eight agreed and nine were uncertain.
- #7a (de Vere did not want his authorship revealed after his death, median 5.6). Fourteen agreed, ten disagreed and sixteen were uncertain.
- #11 (de Vere had a sexual relationship with the Queen, median 5.9). Sixteen agreed, six disagreed and seventeen were uncertain.
- #26 (The principal story of the Sonnets is politics and succession, median 5.9). Eighteen agreed, thirteen disagreed and seven were uncertain.
- #25c (The principal story of the Sonnets is both heterosexual and homosexual love among real persons, median 5.7). Sixteen agreed, sixteen disagreed and ten were uncertain.
- #17c (Southampton was the son of de Vere and the Queen, median 5.6). Sixteen agreed, fifteen disagreed and seven were uncertain.
- #17b (Southampton was the son of de Vere, median 5.5). Fourteen agreed, twelve disagreed and ten were uncertain.

- #17d (Southampton was not de Vere’s son, but the object of his homosexual infatuation, median 4.4). Seventeen disagreed, eleven agreed and eight were uncertain.
- #16 (Southampton was the natural son of the 2nd Earl of Southampton and his wife, median 4.8). Ten agreed, thirteen disagreed and fourteen were uncertain.
- #24d (The Dark Lady is Penelope Rich, median 4.9). Seventeen disagreed, eleven agreed and seven were uncertain.
- #24a (The Dark Lady is Queen Elizabeth, median 4.8). Fourteen disagreed, eleven agreed and eight were uncertain.
- #25b (The principal story of the Sonnets is heterosexual love involving real persons, median 4.9). Twelve disagreed, six agreed and nineteen were uncertain.
- #17a (Southampton was the son of Queen Elizabeth, median 5.0). Fifteen disagreed, thirteen agreed and nine were uncertain.
- #9 (de Vere’s father died of natural causes in 1562, median 5.0). Eleven disagreed, eight agreed and twenty were uncertain.

Analysis

Once again there were some significant changes in the responses compared to the prior survey. In what could be viewed as moving toward greater consensus, in 2017 responses to fourteen statements were within the “Areas of Greatest Consensus;” in 2014 only eleven statements fell into that category. Compared to 2014 responses, the median shifted by 1.0 or more in thirteen cases (and in eleven cases the shift was toward consensus). In 2014, when compared to the 2011 survey, the median shifted by 1.0 or more in eleven cases (and in eight of those cases the shift was away from consensus).

The biggest shift was in **Statement 22** (that the Sonnets dedication is a word puzzle), where the median shifted from 5.5 in 2014 (no consensus) to 8.3 in 2017 (firmly within the areas of greatest consensus).

The second biggest shift was in **Statement 17c** (Southampton was the son of Oxford and the Queen), where the median shifted from 3.5 in 2014 (tending toward disagreement) to 5.6 (uncertainty).

Other median shifts of 1.0 or more were in **Statement 14** (Oxford is buried in Westminster Abbey), with a shift from 5 in 2014 to 6.8 (tending toward agreement). It may well be that the big shifts in Statements 22 and 14 are due to Alexander Waugh’s presentation on those topics at the Conference (see *Newsletter*, Fall 2017, pp. 31-32).

In **Statement 28** (we don’t know what the Sonnets are about), the median shifted from 4.5 in 2014 (uncertainty) to 2.9 (tending toward disagreement).

With regard to **Statement 10** (that Oxford was the biological father of Anne Cecil’s oldest daughter) the median shifted from 5.5 in 2014 (uncertainty) to 6.9 (tending toward agreement).

In **Statement 7b** (that Oxford's posthumous literary anonymity was arranged by his children and others) the median shifted from 7 in 2014 (agreement) to 8.3 (strong consensus).

In **Statement 24a** (the Dark Lady is Queen Elizabeth) the median moved from 6.0 in 2014 to 4.8 (both within the range of uncertainty).

In **Statement 24b** (the Dark Lady is Emilia Bassanio) the median shifted from 3.5 in 2014 (tending toward uncertainty) to 2.4 (disagreement).

In **Statement 25b** (the main story of the Sonnets is heterosexual love) the median shifted from 6.0 in 2014 to 4.9 (both within the range of uncertainty).

In **Statement 4** (Shakespeare of Stratford was a literary "front man") the median shifted from 5.5 in 2014 (uncertainty) to 6.6 (tending toward agreement).

In **Statement 7a** (Oxford did not want his authorship known even after his death) the median shifted from 4.5 in 2014 to 5.5 (both within the range of uncertainty).

In **Statement 17a** (Southampton was the son of the Queen) the median shifted from 4.0 in 2014 to 5.0 (toward greater uncertainty).

Finally, in **Statement 6** (Oxford's authorship role was widely known in Court) the median shifted from 7.5 in 2014 (agreement) to 8.5 (strong consensus).

Summary

As in prior years, Oxfordians remain in general agreement on the outlines of the Authorship Question, but disagree about particulars.

- **Authorship:** There continues to be strong consensus that Oxford alone is the principal author of the Shakespeare canon, that his authorship was known within Elizabeth's court and among his fellow writers, and that his literary anonymity was arranged by his daughters with assistance from Pembroke, Montgomery and Ben Jonson. There is also continuing consensus that Shakespeare of Stratford wrote no literary works, and a growing consensus that he served as a literary "front man." There continues to be a lack of consensus about whether Oxford wished for his authorship role to be known after his death.
- **Oxford's Biography:** There continues to be strong consensus that he was the natural son of the 16th Earl and his wife, and that he died in 1604. There is a greater consensus that his £1,000 annual grant was for literary activities, and greater agreement that he wrote many other literary works. Opinions that he was the father of Anne Cecil's first daughter have shifted from uncertainty closer toward agreement, but it cannot be said there is "consensus." The same can be said about beliefs that he is buried in Westminster Abbey. Whether he had a sexual relationship with the Queen remains

unclear to Oxfordians—sixteen thought so, but seventeen were uncertain and six disagreed.

- **Southampton:** Again, very little agreement about him. There continues to be consensus that he is "Mr. W.H." of the Sonnets dedication, and that Oxford played a role in sparing his life following his 1601 treason conviction. As to everything else there is no consensus, though it should be noted that, as to whether he's the son of Oxford and the Queen, opinions moved from "tending toward disagreement" in 2014 to "uncertain" in 2017.
- **The Sonnets:** There was some movement toward greater consensus here. There continues to be consensus that they're published in correct order, that the "Fair Youth" is Southampton, and that they are not simply literary (i.e., fictional) works. The largest area of movement concerned whether the Dedication is some sort of word puzzle, where there is now strong consensus (compared to uncertainty in 2014). As to what is the principal story of the Sonnets, there was greater disagreement with the statement that "we don't know what they're about" than in 2014; but there continues to be no consensus about whether the story is political, is one of heterosexual love, homosexual love, or heterosexual and homosexual love. "Politics and succession" leads slightly (at 5.9), but it's well within the range of uncertainty and is down from 2014 (6.5). As to the identity of the Dark Lady, Queen Elizabeth and Penelope Rich are the favored candidates (Penelope Rich was added this year; it's the only new statement on the survey), but the medians are squarely in the range of uncertainty. In any event, they appear to be stronger candidates than Elizabeth Trentham (more or less steady at 2.4 in the range of "disagreement") and Emilia Bassanio (whose popularity fell from 3.5 in 2014 to 2.4). Curiously, few persons maintain that the Dark Lady is someone other than one of the above four.
- **Other matters:** Opinions here continue essentially unchanged. There is strong consensus that the illustration on the title page of *Minerva Britanna* alludes to authorship, and that the publication of the Folio was arranged by Oxford's children and by Pembroke and Montgomery, with Ben Jonson's assistance. There was slightly less strong consensus that many academics privately harbor doubts about Shakespeare of Stratford as author, though the median remained about the same as in 2014.

