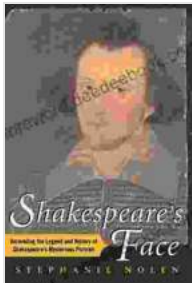


# Unraveling the Legend and History of Shakespeare's Mysterious Portrait

## A Glimpse into the Bard's Enigma

William Shakespeare, arguably the greatest playwright and poet in the English language, remains an enigmatic figure. Despite his literary brilliance, much of his personal life and appearance remain shrouded in mystery. Among the tantalizing artifacts that have fueled centuries of speculation is the famous Chandos portrait, often considered the most iconic depiction of the Bard.



## Shakespeare's Face: Unraveling the Legend and History of Shakespeare's Mysterious Portrait

by Stephanie Nolen

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### **A Royal Patron and a Symbolic Masterpiece**

The Chandos portrait, dating back to around 1600, is believed to have been commissioned by William Herbert, 3rd Earl of Pembroke. Herbert, a patron of the arts and a close associate of Shakespeare, is thought to have commissioned the portrait as an expression of his admiration for the playwright's talent.

The portrait depicts Shakespeare in a three-quarter pose, dressed in a black doublet and white ruff. His右手 rests on a piece of paper, hinting at his role as a writer. The portrait is notable for its realistic depiction of Shakespeare's features, giving us valuable insights into his appearance.

Art historians have also explored the symbolic meanings embedded within the portrait. The white ruff, for example, was often associated with purity and virtue, suggesting a positive portrayal of Shakespeare. The piece of paper in his hand may symbolize his literary pursuits or his role as a chronicler of human experience.

### **Debating the Artist's Identity**

While the Chandos portrait is widely accepted as an authentic depiction of Shakespeare, its attribution remains a subject of debate. The portrait is not signed, and no definitive evidence points to its creator. Several artists have been proposed as possible candidates, including Nicholas Hilliard, John de Critz, and Isaac Oliver.

One of the leading contenders is Nicholas Hilliard, a renowned miniaturist and goldsmith known for his portraits of Queen Elizabeth I. Hilliard's style is evident in the delicate brushwork and attention to detail in the Chandos portrait.

Others attribute the portrait to John de Critz, a Flemish artist who worked in England during Shakespeare's time. De Critz was known for his realistic portraits and his association with the Earl of Southampton, another of Shakespeare's patrons.

The debate over the artist's identity adds to the enigmatic nature of the Chandos portrait, making it a subject of ongoing research and speculation.

## The First Folio and Beyond

The Chandos portrait gained widespread recognition in the 17th century when it was used as the frontispiece for the First Folio, the collected edition of Shakespeare's plays published in 1623. This prominent placement solidified the portrait's status as the definitive image of the playwright.

The portrait's popularity and influence have extended far beyond the First Folio. It has been reproduced countless times in books, magazines, and other publications. The image has become synonymous with Shakespeare and has shaped our collective imagination of the Bard.

## Other Notable Portraits

While the Chandos portrait is the most famous depiction of Shakespeare, other portraits have also contributed to our understanding of his appearance. These include:

- **The Droeshout engraving:** This engraving, published in the First Folio, is a stylized and less realistic depiction of Shakespeare. It shows him with a receding hairline, a small mustache, and a more youthful appearance.
- **The Janssen portrait:** This 17th-century portrait, attributed to Gerard Janssen, depicts Shakespeare as an older man with a long beard. It is considered less reliable than the Chandos portrait but offers an alternative perspective on Shakespeare's appearance.
- **The Ely Palace portrait:** This portrait, discovered in 1892, zeigt Shakespeare in a later stage of life, with a white beard and a stern expression. Its authenticity has been questioned, but it provides an intriguing glimpse into the aging playwright.

## **Modern Techniques and New Insights**

In recent years, modern technologies have been employed to study the Chandos portrait and other depictions of Shakespeare. X-rays have revealed hidden details in the paintings, including underdrawings and changes made by the artists. Scientific analysis has also provided insights into the materials and techniques used in the portraits.

These ongoing discoveries continue to shed light on the history and authenticity of the Chandos portrait and other images of Shakespeare. They contribute to our ever-evolving understanding of the Bard and the enigmatic world in which he lived.

## **A Legacy of Mystery and Inspiration**

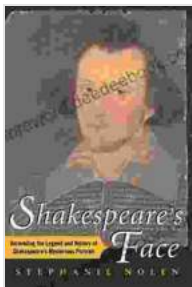
The Chandos portrait of William Shakespeare remains a captivating and enigmatic artifact, providing tantalizing glimpses into the life and appearance of one of the greatest literary figures in history. Its origins, symbolism, and controversies have been the subject of centuries of speculation and research.

While the mystery surrounding the portrait may never be fully resolved, it continues to inspire artists, scholars, and the public alike. It serves as a reminder of the enduring legacy of Shakespeare and the power of art to capture the essence of a legendary figure.

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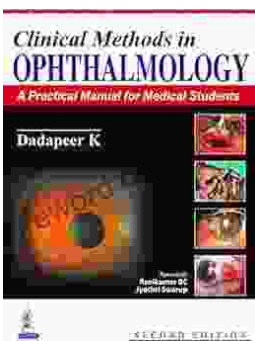


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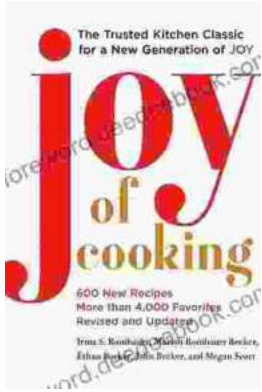
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