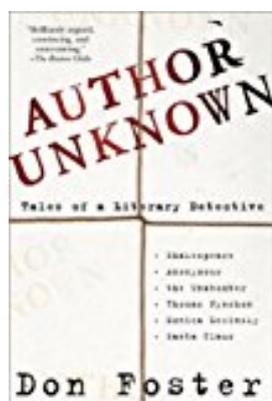


# [PDF] Author Unknown: Tales Of A Literary Detective

Don Foster - pdf download free book

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**Books Details:**

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**Description:**

This fascinating book describes how an English professor became a detective, sort of. Don Foster still teaches literature at Vassar College, but he's recognized as an expert in attributional theory--the idea that everybody has literary fingerprints, or, as he puts it, "no two individuals write exactly the same way, using the same words in the same combinations, or with the same patterns of spelling and punctuation." Foster is now an expert at identifying anonymous authors. He fell into this line of

work accidentally. As a graduate student who spent his days reading forgotten Elizabethan texts, Foster stumbled upon "A Funeral Elegy" by one "W.S." Through careful research, recounted in *Author Unknown*, he showed that it was, in fact, a long-lost poem of Shakespeare's. His claim was controversial; a chapter on this experience is as much a lesson in academic politics as attribution theory. "To propose an addition to the Shakespeare canon is like announcing that you've found a lost book of the Bible, due for inclusion in future editions," he writes. "History shows that it is usually the attributor who gets burned." For Foster, however, it became a launching pad.

In what is his most interesting chapter, Foster explains how he deduced Joe Klein was "Anonymous," the author of the bestselling book . He also became involved in the Unabomber case and a search for the identity of the mysterious novelist Thomas Pynchon. Foster is sometimes said to use computer programs to determine an author's identity, but this is only partly true: he employs searchable databases, and then conducts all of the comparative analysis himself. "Give anonymous offenders enough verbal rope and column inches, and they will hang themselves for you, every time," he writes. The first three chapters--focusing on Shakespeare, Klein, and the Unabomber--are the best part of the book; the rest of it, at times, feels like filler. Yet as a whole, *Author Unknown* is a compelling blend of autobiography, detective story, and literary analysis. --*John J. Miller* --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

**From Publishers Weekly** HThe Elizabethan scholar from Vassar College who unmasked Joe Klein as the "Anonymous" who wrote *Primary Colors* now shakes up Yuletide verse with a reattribution of "A Visit from St. Nicholas." The selected cases of literary detection that lead up to this final surprise are the scholarly equivalent of FBI psychological profiler John Douglas's *Mindhunter*. Foster's textual forensics have put "A Funeral Elegy" by "W.S." into the Shakespeare canon and helped put Unabomber Ted Kaczynski in prison. His accounts of his high-profile roles in transatlantic Shakespearean squabbles and journalistic whodunits are both personable and page-turning. Whether it's because the statistical side of Foster's methodology is rather technical or that his critics have dismissed him as a "professor with a computer program," he mostly sticks to describing the fingerprints of word choice and telltale punctuation rather than lexical databases and verbal probabilities. In his case for a Scots-Dutch Revolutionary War major, Henry Livingston Jr., as the author of "A Visit from St. Nicholas" and against puritan Manhattan professor Clement Moore, to whom it is traditionally attributed, he argues from not only lively biographic inference but also such small, telling details as the adverbial use of "all" and the Scottish origins of "snug." While lexicophiles will enjoy such minutiae, any book lover can savor the irony of how an Elizabethan elegy eventually put a literary scholar on the trail of a serial murderer. (Nov. 7)

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