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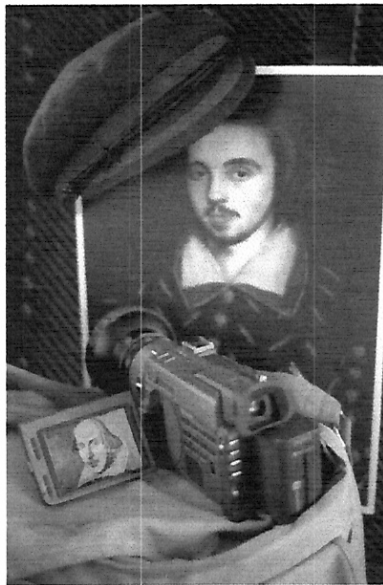
**Australian Film Finance Corporation**

**Presents**

**The Helpful Eye and**

**Chili Films Production**

# **Much Ado About Something**



**Produced by**

**MICHAEL RUBBO**

**PENELOPE McDONALD**

**Written and Directed by**

**MICHAEL RUBBO**

**93 mins Documentary**

**Produced by The Helpful Eye and Chili Films Pty Ltd in association with  
Australian Broadcasting Corporation and financed with the assistance of  
the Australian Film Finance Corporation.**

***THE HELPFUL EYE and CHILI FILMS Production  
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# Much Ado About Something

## Synopsis

For 150 years, renegade scholars have been asking embarrassing questions about Shakespeare. Other writers have been proposed as the real author of the works. Of these, the most interesting is Christopher Marlowe, born in the same year as Shakespeare and already a famous playwright at the time in 1593 when Shakespeare first appears on the scene.

Most scholars agree that Shakespeare was profoundly influenced by Marlowe, some go further and say that Marlowe was in fact the hidden hand behind the Bard. But history tells us that Marlowe died in a fight in 1593. Only, if this is not true, could Marlowe be this hidden hand.

"Much Ado About Something" finds out who this amazingly modern man, spy, atheist, homosexual really was. It then delves the weaknesses in Shakespeare's biography to see why he should be questioned. Finally it investigates Marlowe's supposed death at the age of 29, finding that indeed he could have lived to be the hidden hand behind Shakespeare.

"Much Ado About Something" creates tremendous excitement in those that see it, both for its riveting story and its audacious proposition.

**Sydney Morning Herald, 16 April 2001**

*'Rubbo has managed to condense a complex, extraordinarily detailed argument into two engaging, thought-provoking hours. Whether you accept the argument or not - and it is very persuasively argued - Rubbo marshalls the evidence lucidly and with zest. And he comes to his own original, and contentious, conclusion.'* Suzie Baldwin

**Globe & Mail, Toronto, Sunday September 5<sup>th</sup> 2001**

*"What a joy to find Michael Rubbo behind the camera again, and in fine form. Way back in 1974, while toiling for our own NFB, he made Waiting for Fidel - the original "stalk-umentary," it greatly influenced the work of Michael Moore and Nick Broomfield. Here, he's turned his playfully intelligent mind to that most stubborn of questions: Did Shakespeare write Shakespeare? Playing the devil's (actually, Christopher Marlowe's) advocate, Rubbo builds a fascinating case, then presents the evidence to a gaggle of professionally serious scholars, who huff and puff and look hilariously buffaloed. The result is a fluid mix of whimsy and substance, a wicked piece of anti-Bardolatry that doubles as a classic ode to Horace: It delights and instructs. - R.G."*

**Variety Review, David Stratton Attached**

# Much Ado About Something

## Director's Notes

My interest in the Shakespeare authorship controversy began in a rain forest in far north Queensland. I was visiting the British playwright, Tony Shaffer at his jungle retreat. Over dinner, Shakespeare came up, and Tony said rather bluntly, "Of course William did not write all that stuff." I expressed surprise and was then taken to his den, a sort of tree house high in the dark jungle and handed a battered book. "You can't take this away. It's rare and out of print, but find it and you will know the truth." The book, 'The Murder Of The Man Who Was Shakespeare', was by an American, Calvin Hoffman.

With some difficulty I got the book, and reading it all though the night, was convinced like Shaffer, that Calvin had exposed what might be the biggest cover up in literary history. I was a bureaucrat at the time with no way of traipsing round the world to explore cinematically what others thought of Calvin's theory. But when my job with Australian TV, The ABC, came to an end, I set off with a mini DV camera to find out what the Shakespearean establishment thought of this theory. My timing was fortuitous. The orthodox scholars, who normally refuse to admit there is any reason to be sceptical about Shakespeare's credentials, were somewhat more open. This was in part because I prepared myself thoroughly for each encounter. For several years I read about almost nothing else. I found there were hundreds of books doubting Shakespeare, that there were three main challengers, and that the most interesting as Hoffman claimed, was Christopher Marlowe. Thus prepared, I was able to debate and turn the encounters with the establishment scholars into lively exchanges. Throughout Calvin's theory was my guide. I found archival footage of the man trying to open a tomb in a Kent church, and though he had died in the late 80's, I found that his disciples were still active around the world.

The story falls into three parts. The first is these disciples, often eccentric and amusing, but who, as they talk, paint an impressive picture of Marlowe as the rival Elizabethan playwright who could have written Shakespeare's plays. This is confirmed by the orthodox scholars, who while disparaging Hoffman's conclusions rank Marlowe very high. The second part looks at whether there is really any reason to doubt Shakespeare. Audience testing showed me that, while this might logically seem to be the question to address first, it somehow seemed mean spirited and petty to attack the bard right off the top. It was necessary to build up Marlowe first, and then have him available to lend a hand as it were, if William proves to be in trouble.

Part two mounts a powerful case against Shakespeare. There are many puzzles in his biography revealed, but the main doubt comes from his lack of education. The plays and poems are extremely erudite, and there is no evidence of William ever being educated. Part two finishes with the viewer convinced the bard is in deep trouble.

It was only then in the third part I could address the main weakness in the Hoffman argument. According to the historical record Marlowe died in 1593 at the age of 29, and was thus not available to be the hidden hand behind the Bard. Following Hoffman's lead, the film does a forensic investigation of the circumstances surrounding Marlowe's supposed death in a knife fight, and concludes, like Hoffman, that it was probably a fake death so that Marlowe could escape the clutches of the English inquisition. That if he did so, he may have gone to live incognito in Italy where he could have well written the plays we know as Shakespeare's. Shakespeare plays the role of front man, delivering the masterpieces to the London stage. All supposition, but lively stuff!

The real coup came at the end of the two year shoot. I had heard rumours that Mark Rylance, Artistic Director of Shakespeare's Globe theatre, was a doubter. For a year, I had tried to get an interview with Mark, and at the eleventh hour, it was granted. With this great Shakespearean actor saying he's not convinced Shakespeare's properly credited, *Much Ado About Something*, moves decisively out of the crackpot zone.

In putting the story together, my strategy was to treat it as a great detective story. This meant giving plenty of screen time to the opposing views, and also treating the subject with as much humour as I could muster. I decided too that, since my interest had begun very personally, it should be told as a personal journey, a sort of road movie into the 16th Century.

Michael Rubbo, September 2001

# Much Ado About Something

## Technical Specifications

Running time:	93 minutes
Gauge:	Master Digital Betacam, Submasters SP Beta
Sound:	Stereo
Completion date:	4 September 2001
Broadcast:	ABC (date tbc), BBC (date tbc) PBS (date tbc)
World Premiere:	Toronto International Film Festival - September 2001
US Premiere:	Film Forum - New York - February 2002

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## Festival Screenings

Toronto International Film Festival	September 2001	Canada
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# Much Ado About Something

## Principal Crew Biographies

### Michael Rubbo - Director/Producer/Writer

Michael, studied Anthropology at Sydney University, studied Film at Stanford University, California, going on to develop a career as both a filmmaker and teacher. For 20 years he worked as a documentary film producer at National Film Board of Canada. He has directed over 40 films with many of these winning international prizes. **The Little Box that Sings** (ABC) is his most recent documentary as writer and director prior to **Much Ado About Something**. His films are in the collections of the Museum of Modern Art (MOMA) New York.

Over the years, Michael has been a Producer for the United Nations for the Habitat conference, worked as the Professor of Film, Harvard University and a senior teacher Australian Film, Television and Radio School. (AFTRS)

Michael has also directed and written 4 children's feature films including Emmy award winning **Vincent and Me**. More recently he had taken a leading role as the Head of Documentaries, ABC Television, instigating and running the **Race Around the World** series.

Michael is now in independent production, making documentaries with mini DV equipment.

### Penny McDonald - Producer

Penny has variously produced, directed and written many documentaries and dramas over the past 15 years, including producing the critically acclaimed and award winning **Night Cries** (Dir. Tracey Moffatt), **Payback** (Dir. Warwick Thornton), **My Bed Your Bed** (Dir. Erica Glynn), **Photographic Memory** (Dir. Warwick Thornton) and **Too Many Captain Cooks** (Dir. Penny McDonald.) She recently produced 12 new multi-media programs that are exhibited in the newly opened National Museum of Australia. The permanent exhibit presents the history of Indigenous Australians to visitors from Australia and overseas.

### Jane St Vincent Welch - Editor

Jane has been editing documentaries for 12 years. Films such as **To Get Rich is Glorious** (ABC), **The Ghan - a spiritual journey** (Channel 9/PBS), and the **Queenslander - Stories of the Tropical North** (PBS). She lives in Sydney with her husband, filmmaker Nick Torrens, 2 children and an Avid express. She enjoyed cutting **Much Ado**, a rollicking yarn with a twist... that it might be true!

# Much Ado About Something

## Cast & Crew

Written/Directed/Narrated/Filmed/Recorded  
Producers

Editor

Original Music by

Sound Design

Assistant Director

Additional Production Management

Production Assistant

Research

Archival Footage Clearances

Additional Camera

Special thanks to interviewees

Michael Rubbo  
Michael Rubbo  
Penelope McDonald  
Jane St Vincent Welch  
Christopher Gordon  
Mike Gissing  
Katherine Korolkevich-Rubbo  
Jacqui North  
Vanessa Sulman  
June Everett  
Roberta Garini  
Lousia Merlin  
Lorelle Harker  
Catherine Richardson  
Fotini Manikakis  
Peter Coleman  
John Baker  
Prof. Jonathan Bate  
Peter and Frieda Barker  
Bill Browning  
Callum Coates  
Rev. Graham Corneck  
Dr Wolfgang Deninger  
Peter Farey  
Dr Daniela Ferrari  
Prof. Andy Gurr  
Sue Hunt  
John Hunt  
John Michell  
Charles Nicholl  
Anne Oakley  
Caroline Ovenden  
Paul Pollak  
Jan R Piggott  
Mark Rylance  
Prof. Stanley Wells  
Dolly Walker Wraight



## MUCH ADO ABOUT SOMETHING

(DOCU - AUSTRALIA)

An Australian Film Finance Corp. presentation of a the Helpful Eye and Chilli Films production, in association with the Australian Broadcasting Corp. (International sales: Film Transit, Montreal.) Produced by Michael Rubbo, Penelope McDonald.

Directed, written by Michael Rubbo. Camera (color), Rubbo; editor, Mary Jane St. Vincent Welch; music, Christopher Gordon; sound, Michael Gissing. Reviewed at Toronto Film Festival (Reel to Reel), Sept. 10, 2001. Running time: 93 MIN.

By DAVID STRATTON

**A**las, poor Will Shakespeare: Even the director of London's Globe Shakespeare theater, Mark Rylance, has doubts about the authorship of the plays that are loved around the world. Was Christopher Marlowe the real author of "Hamlet," "Othello" and all the rest? Probably, concludes docu-director Michael Rubbo at the conclusion of this utterly fascinating, playfully probing mystery story. A must for fans and TV programmers, with an excellent shot at theatrical in some territories, this educational charmer is both an eye-opener and a delight.

Rubbo became interested in the authorship of the plays after reading "The Murder of the Man Who Was Shakespeare" by American Calvin Hoffman. Hoffman, an eccentric who died in the late '80s, was convinced that Christopher Marlowe was the true author of the Bard's plays.

Rubbo, armed with a tiny digital Betacam, started talking both to supporters of Shakespeare and to members of the Marlowe society, especially the fiercely pro-Marlowe Dolly Walker Wright. These interviews are filmed in an engagingly casual manner, with Rubbo himself occasionally appearing on camera.

Marlowe and Shakespeare were born the same year, 1564, but were raised very differently. Shakespeare's education, if he had one, would have been in a local school in Stratford-on-Avon, whereas the brilliant Marlowe won a scholarship to Cambridge. Marlowe's plays, including "Dr. Faustus," were highly regarded before Shakespeare arrived on the scene.

Marlowe was allegedly killed in a brawl in a riverside tavern in 1593, at the age of 29 — about the time Shakespeare's work began to be noticed. Rubbo's film comes up with two basic theories. The first is that Marlowe, who had worked as a British spy, faked his own death; fled to Italy (which Shakespeare never visited), hence the strong Italian content of so many of the plays (and recurring themes of exile, impersonation, etc.); and sent manuscripts to Shakespeare, who signed his name to them and produced them. In other words, Shakespeare was merely a front for Marlowe.

The alternate theory concedes that Shakespeare and Marlowe might have collaborated, with Marlowe writing the "higher" plays and roles, and Shakespeare providing the low comedy, including characters like Falstaff.

If all this sounds like a dry argument, it isn't the way Rubbo handles it. For a rather academic subject, the film bubbles with humor. Experts disagree, there's even dissension between a husband and wife — he's for Marlowe, she's for Will. But Rubbo's

chief coup is getting the Globe's Rylance (star of the current erotic pic "Intimacy") to speak about his increasing view that Shakespeare simply wasn't equipped to have written the plays.

The interviews are smoothly cut together, and augmented with clips from Shakespeare-related films, including "Shakespeare in Love" (in which Rupert Everett appeared as Marlowe), Zeffirelli's 1968 "Romeo and Juliet" and some TV productions. There are also some enacted scenes, and a hilarious sequence in which one actor playing Shakespeare and another playing Marlowe read almost identical lines

from the work of the two playwrights; there are almost a hundred samples of these so-called "parallelisms."

"Much Ado About Something" is a very tasty inquiry into the authorship of the world's most enduring literary classics.

'Much Ado About Something' is an educational charmer that is both an eye-opener and a delight.