

## **The Shakespeare Club of Stratford-upon-Avon**

**The 885<sup>th</sup> meeting of the Shakespeare Club took place at Mason Croft on Tuesday 11 March 2014.** The meeting was chaired by Lady Deborah Follett who introduced Professor David Schalkwyk, Head of Global Shakespeare, a partnership between London University's Queen Mary College and Warwick University. Professor Schalkwyk's subject was "Shakespeare's Sonnets: Shakespeare's Voice"

Professor Schalkwyk had attempted to assess the ongoing value of the sonnets by examining current poetry anthologies. He had found that only 26 of the sonnets are ever anthologised, meaning that only 15% of them are perceived as having popular appeal or value.

He refuted the autobiographical interpretations of the sonnets, considering instead whose voice the poems are written in. Who is the "I" of the sonnets? Is it possible that the voice is the voice of whoever is delivering the sonnet, or reading it, or does the sonnet have its own voice?

Professor Schalkwyk proposed that in the sonnets Shakespeare plays with ideas of authorship, poetry and identity. There is always a sense of being in the middle of a discussion between the "I" and "you" or "thou", pronouns that can be appropriated by anyone. Relationships vary at different times, distant or intimate, or indicating hierarchical relationships such as that between master and servant or parent and child.

Academics have tended to say that "I" is the voice of the poet, an assumed identity, not Shakespeare's own voice. Shakespeare and the poet therefore speak in a double voice or persona. A whole range of roles are adopted, and the "I" of the sonnets is sometimes described as an actor taking on a role, the poet adopting the mask of a player.

He examined the often-anthologised sonnet "Let me not to the marriage of true minds", suggesting a reading in which the "I" accuses the "you" of threatening to end the relationship, rather than the definition of true love which it is conventionally taken to be.

Shakespeare's great skill was to be immersed in the life and concerns of people of his time, and this approach resembles the novelist's interest in multiple social interactions more than the singular voice of the lyric poet.

After questions from the audience the meeting finished at 9pm.