

What's in a Name?

Shakespeare, Shake-scene and the Clayton Loan

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Over the years, biographers of William Shakespeare have occasionally disagreed on which historical records to accept or reject. For example, Shakespeare's engagement one day to Anne Whately of Temple Grafton and his marriage bond on the next naming Anne Hathaway of Shottery prompted Sidney Lee (1925; 31) to reject the Whateley-Shakespeare license:

The husband of Anne Whateley cannot reasonably be identified with the poet. He was doubtless another of the numerous William Shakespeares who abounded in the diocese of Worcester. E.K. Chambers (Facts and Problems, 1:18) accepted the Whateley-Shakespeare license; he thought it more likely that a blundering clerk had entered the wrong information.

How does the biographer decide what evidence to accept and what evidence to reject? The question is not exclusive to Shakespeare. Scholars continue to disagree as to whether the "John Fletcher of London" admitted to Cambridge in 1591 refers to the dramatist, who would have been 11 or 12 years old at the time. Alexander Dyce (1:8) leaned toward accepting the record on various grounds, noting that "in those days students were admitted into the universities at a very early age." Chambers (Stage, 3:314) rejected the record because the date of 1591 seemed too early to him. In this case, the words "of London" failed to clarify the matter, since the year of Fletcher's move to London is otherwise not known. Nevertheless, here was a record of a "John Fletcher" — complete with first and last name — in a place where a biographer might reasonably have expected to find one and which had been provisionally accepted by a respected nineteenth century scholar, yet Chambers could not be sure that it referred to the same John Fletcher because there was no corroborating information.

Such standards of proof are occasionally suspended by Shakespearean biographers and replaced with something that looks suspiciously like personal bias. Some name-only records are accepted into the biography while others are usually rejected, and the criteria varies. A case in point is the Clayton loan.

In Will Shakspeare and the Dyer's Hand, Alden Brooks (xii-xv) used the Shakespeare-Clayton loan to show that even so venerated a Shakespearean biographer as Chambers has been guilty of bias. The record in question is dated in 1600 and refers to the recovery of a £7 loan made in 1592. Chambers (Facts

This article has been adapted from Diana Price's Shakespeare: An Unauthorized Biography.

and Problems, 2:52) provided the following account:

in 1600 Shakespeare brought an action against John Clayton and recovered a debt of £7. . . . I agree with Lee 321 that there is no ground for identifying the Willelmus Shackspere of this with the dramatist. The debt was acknowledged in Cheapside on 22 May 1592. No local description is given by which the habitation of the plaintiff can be fixed. The defendant was of Willington in Bedfordshire.

Brooks argued that Chambers misled his readers into thinking that he was "following" Lee, whose revised 1925 edition reads:

Shakespeare inherited his father's love of litigation, and stood rigorously by his rights in all his business relations. In March 1600 'William Shackspere' sued John Clayton 'Yeoman,' of Wellington in Bedfordshire, in the Court of Queen's Bench, for the repayment of a debt of 7l. . . . judgment was given for the plaintiff with 20s. costs. There is nothing to identify John Clayton's creditor with the dramatist, nor is it easy to explain why he should have lent money to a Bedfordshire yeoman. It is beyond question however that at Stratford Shakespeare, like many of his fellow-townsmen was a frequent suitor in the local court of record.

Lee went on to recite a number of Shakespeare's litigious activities comparable to, if not specifically corroborative of the Clayton transaction, suggesting that he did not disqualify the loan out of hand. Brooks could have taken his argument one step further; in fact, Lee (1898; 206) initially accepted the Clayton loan and evidently did not entirely change his mind.

It is the basis for acceptance or rejection that is at issue here. The Clayton loan record names "Willelmus Shackspere" as the plaintiff but contains no age, occupation, spouse, hometown, or signature to further identify him. Nevertheless, Lee initially accepted the record as another example of Shakespeare's "love of litigation," while Chambers rejected it for lack of corroborating information. Yet Chambers accepted the 1613 payment to Shakespeare for the Earl of Rutland's impresa, an account that includes no corroborating information either; the impresa record does not even list the payee's first name:

To Mr. Shakspeare in gold about my Lorde's impreso, xliiiij^s; to Richard Burbage for paynting and making yt, in gold xliiiij^s.

In this case, the presence of Richard Burbage's name clinched the identification of "Mr. Shakspeare" for Chambers (Facts and Problems, 2:153), who rejected Mrs. Stopes's suggestion that John Shakspeare, the royal bit-maker might be the payee. For Chambers, the juxtaposition of the names Shakespeare and Burbage was apparently sufficient as corroborating evidence, even though the record itself made for a rather awkward fit in Shakespeare's biography, impresa-making being "an activity which is most unfamiliar and perhaps seems unsuitable to modern readers" (Bentley, Handbook, 82).

Chambers also accepted Shakespeare's five London tax records, which are essentially lists of names. Historians conclude from the tax rolls that Shakespeare lodged in Bishopsgate before moving to the liberty of the Clink

in Southwark. The attraction of the tax rolls is obvious: Bishopsgate was convenient to the Shoreditch theaters, and Southwark was convenient to the Bankside theaters. However, lists that recite a place of domicile, i.e. tax rolls, matriculation records (such as the one for Fletcher), marriage registers, birth or death registers, etc., have frequently proved insufficient for purposes of identification. For example, the record of marriage in Southwark (1603) of a "William Eglestone" to an Anne Jacob was insufficient for Chambers (Stage, 2:315) to identify the groom with the actor, yet Southwark was where Ecclestone worked. No one questions Shakespeare's tax records, because they seem consistent with other biographical records, but the Clayton loan is just as consistent with Shakespeare's documented life.

The loan was made in 1592, the same year that Shakespeare made his London debut in Groatsworth of Wit; it was transacted in Cheapside, located north of the Thames to the east of St. Paul's. Bishopsgate is closer to Cheapside than to the Shoreditch theaters, so there is no difficulty reconciling Shakespeare's first presumed London domicile with this transaction. Suit for recovery was filed in the Court of Queen's Bench in 1600, so the plaintiff was in London at that time as well; the tax records corroborate William Shakespeare's presence in Southwark in that year. Moreover, the loan is consistent with the allusion to Shake-scene in Groatsworth and with other records of Shakespeare's money-lending and lawsuits to recover debts.

Many of Shakespeare's business records involve mercenary activities. In 1598, Shakespeare was hoarding commercial quantities of grain during a famine. The 1598 Quiney-Sturley letters detail the correspondents' hopes of securing a sizable loan from Shakespeare. In 1604 Shakespeare sold commercial quantities of malt to Phillip Rogers, loaned him two shillings, and then sued to recover £1-5s, 10d plus damages. In 1608, Shakespeare sued John Addenbroke for a debt of £6 plus damages. Addenbroke skipped town, so Shakespeare proceeded against the man who served as Addenbroke's security against default. In 1611, Shakespeare and two others filed a complaint to protect their real estate interests, petitioning for compensation in the event of default by other lessees and sub-lessees. The complaint was essentially a tactic for collecting outstanding, or potentially outstanding moneys owed. In 1614, Shakespeare's was "conniving" over the pasture enclosures at Welcombe. As Robert Bearman (49-59, 76) has shown, Shakespeare put his own interests before those of his community in the matter of the enclosures, again demonstrating his pre-occupation with protecting and increasing his estate. These records show that Shakespeare was viewed by others as a likely source of loans, providing the terms were right. They also show him to have been a tight-fisted and shrewd businessman with a mean streak, a portrait to keep in mind when considering the charge that Shakespeare was a usurer.

In Elizabethan England, usury was a bad word, and branding Shakespeare a usurer may seem radical. However, the explicit charge is found in the pamphlet Groatsworth of Wit. Following Warren Austin's case in favor of Henry Chettle, I will refer to Chettle as its author.¹

Groatsworth of Wit is organized into tales about the character Roberto, a contrite repentance, the famous open letter to three playwrights, and an Aesop's-type fable. The dominant themes, remorse over profligate spending, hatred of poverty, and hatred of usury, unify the sections into a cohesive whole. According to Muriel C. Bradbrook (1962; 65), the excerpt "on Shakespeare, the highest point of [the author's] invective, is not detachable from the rest of the pamphlet, in which the poet tells his life-story as the tale of the prodigal Roberto."

At the beginning of the story, we learn that Roberto's father is a bondsman. Roberto has come to resent usurers and the fortunes they make, but his younger brother is following in his father's footsteps. The brother eventually inherits their father's ill-gotten gains, while Roberto inherits only a groat. After several more episodes, Roberto is feeling sorry for himself when an actor interrupts his train of thought. The actor recruits the destitute Roberto to write plays for him, and the tale ends with a repentance, immediately followed by the letter containing the "upstart crow" diatribe.

The scholar Roberto is intended to represent Robert Greene,² but there is little agreement as to whom "Roberto's actor" represents. Although D. Allen Carroll saw him as more of a "type" or composite character, others have proposed particular candidates, among them William Shakespeare. For example, A. L. Rowse (60) asked:

who was the player with a provincial accent who gave himself the airs of a gentleman? It was just seven years since the birth of Shakespeare's twins at Stratford. 'For seven years . . . absolute interpreter of the puppets' would seem to indicate an apprenticeship of that duration at acting.

Samuel Schoenbaum (150-1) acknowledged Rowse's suggestion "that the unnamed player with gentlemanly airs is Shakespeare" but deflected the passage as a specific satire of Greene and Shakespeare by citing factual discrepancies, noting that "Greene, clearly represented as junior, was actually six years older than Shakespeare." Judith Cook (40) took the other side and supposed that Roberto's actor "is again taken to refer to Shakespeare." Many biographers take no side and simply ignore the fable, turning their attention instead to the letter to three playwrights.

Nearly every Shakespearean biographer quotes a passage from the "upstart crow" letter, but almost all of them cut out the charge of usury. When missing pieces from the letter are reinstated, the salvo leveled at Shake-scene turns out to be an attack against an actor who is a money-lender and, like Roberto's actor, a paymaster of playwrights. The letter was intended to be read immediately after Roberto's tale, and when it is, the common elements between the two sections become obvious.

In his thumbnail account of Robert Greene, Chambers (Stage, 3:324) summarized the pamphlet as a biographical narrative, but only as far as Roberto's tale: "His adoption of his profession seems to be described in The Groatworth of Wit. Roberto meets a player, goes with him, and soon becomes 'famed for an arch-plaimaking poet.'" But the open letter to playwrights carries the tale and the characterization a little further. This upstart actor hired Greene to write plays, loaned him money, and then left him to die in poverty.

The language in the open letter alternates between the singular and the plural, a technique often used to blur satiric material (as Ben Jonson wrote in Timber, "where censure is general, there is no injury to individuals"); it shifts at the phrase "Yes trust them not" and again at "let those Apes" [spelling modernized]:

And thou no less deserving than the other two, in some things rarer, in nothing inferior; driven (as myself) to extreme shifts, a little have I to say to thee: and were it not an idolatrous oath, I would swear by sweet St. George, thou art unworthy better hap, since thou dependest on so mean a stay. Base-minded men all three of you, if by my misery you be not warned: for unto none of you (like me) sought

those burrs to cleave: those Puppets (I mean) that speak from our mouths, those Anticks garnished in our colors. Is it not strange, that I, to whom they all have been beholden: is it not like that you, to whom they all have been beholden, shall (were ye in that case as I am now) be both at once of them forsaken? Yes trust them not: for there is an upstart Crow, beautified with our feathers, that with his Tiger's heart wrapped in a Player's hide, supposes he is as well able to bombast out a blank verse as the best of you: and being an absolute Johannes factotum, is in his own conceit the only Shake-scene in a country. O that I might entreat your rare wits to be employed in more profitable courses: and let those Apes imitate your past excellence, and never more acquaint them with your admired inventions.

Most biographers cut the quote here, if not earlier, but the next sentence reads:

I know the best husband of you all will never prove an Usurer, and the kindest of them all will never prove a kind nurse: yet while you may, seek you better Masters; for it is pity men of such rare wits, should be subject to the pleasure of such rude grooms.

While Chettle's language is not obscure, it may be helpful to offer a paraphrase that irons out the shifts from singular to plural:

You [playwright #3] are no less talented than the other two play wrights. You have been impoverished, as I have, but you don't deserve any better luck than I if you rely on such a despicable prop to support you. Contemptible fellows, all three of you, if you don't learn from my misfortune. The actors are only as good as our words make them, and they owe me. They owe you too, but since I have been deserted by them, (by one in particular) in my time of need, beware. Beware of one untrustworthy actor, the "upstart Crow."³ We make him look good in the roles we write, but this player is callous and duplicitous. He fancies himself able to extemporize lines in blank verse that are as good as any of yours; he even passes off some of your material as his own. And this conceited know-it-all thinks he's the only "Shake-scene" actor in the country. I beg all three of you talented playwrights to re-direct your skills in a more profitable direction, and away from this unscrupulous actor. Let him recite or plagiarize your past plays. Don't give him any new ones. I know that the most financially prudent [most frugal manager of finances] of you would not stoop to usury (i.e., as did Shake-scene), and even the most compassionate usurer is not charitable at all to someone driven to desperation, on his deathbed and needing care. So while you still have a chance to escape my fate, find some paymasters with more integrity. Stay away from actor-paymasters (and usurers like Johannes Factotum), because you three are too talented to be exploited by such contemptuous knaves.

The reinstated passage completes one unbroken paragraph that lambastes Shake-scene not as a budding playwright, but as an actor, paymaster, and money-lender who deserted a writer in his extremity. This Shake-scene is a "Usurer," Greene's erstwhile Master, and now a "Master" for whom the other playwrights work. The letter urged the playwrights to find a more trustworthy "Master":

thou dependest on so mean a stay . . . if by my misery you be not warned . . . trust them not . . . there is an upstart crow . . . never more acquaint them [him] with your admired inventions . . . the best husband of you will never prove Usurer . . . seek you better Masters.

Most biographers interpret the diatribe as a warning to the established playwrights about a novice who presumes to compete with them. But if the passage was a warning about a newcomer who could write better than they, why would the passage advise them to stop writing plays themselves (“never more acquaint them with your admired inventions”)? The “admired inventions” aren’t the problem; the “Puppets” (i.e. one Puppet in particular) are the problem. The passage is telling the three addressees to write for “better masters” and to stop writing for the one with a “tiger’s heart.”

A few critics have argued that Chettle was warning the writers to stop providing plays to ungrateful actors and turn their talents instead to other types of writing. Such an interpretation can work if one ignores the usury reference, the shifts between plural to singular that confirm this outburst as a personal attack, and the two fables on either side of the letter that deliver the same Shake-scene character. Taken in that context, the open letter is not a treatise calling for the liberation of playwrights from their dependency on actors. It is a personal attack, and the epithet “Shake-scene” identifies one of the pamphlet’s principal targets: William Shakespeare. While Schoenbaum (184, 151) acknowledged that “most Elizabethan dramatists . . . eked out their precarious livelihoods — vide Greene — as employees of the players,” he too edited the “upstart crow” letter to avoid revealing that Shakespeare was resented as their disreputable paymaster. The paymaster-cum-usurer is incompatible with the “gentle” Shakespeare of legend, so the “upstart crow” passage has been trimmed to fit. Even the brutal allusion to Shake-scene’s “tiger’s heart” is used only to point to the paraphrase of Henry VI (3), not to a callous and untrustworthy Shake-scene. Yet the tightwad with a mean streak returns in the next fable.

The allegory following the “upstart crow” letter is about a wasteful Grasshopper and a frugal Ant. Bradbrook (1962; 67) described the fable as a “farical afterpiece to his tragic story, [in which] the improvident Poet appears as the Grasshopper, while the provident Ant represents the Player, who refuses succour in time of need.” The Grasshopper, like Greene, dies an impoverished death, and E.A.J. Honigmann (4-6) built a solid case for Shakespeare as the Ant, resented for his business acumen and profiteering:

Is Aesop’s ant a greedy miser, whose thrift is theft? Is it said to work others woe? These surprising charges pick up the very accusations levelled against ‘Shake-scene’. . . . like Shake-scene, it has a tiger’s heart.

Both tales about Roberto and the miserly Ant reinforce and extend the portrait of Shake-scene, and the repeated accusations in all three sections lead to the equation: Roberto’s actor = paymaster = rude groom (painted monster, so mean a stay, Antick, peasant, etc.) = upstart crow = Johannes factotum = Shake-scene = usurer = greedy Ant.

Honigmann (ix) probably did not endear himself to his colleagues by pointing out that “crucial passages from the records have been misread, or have been ignored because they clashed with preconceived ideas.” He certainly broke with tradition when he proposed that (7-8):

in the period 1590-94, when the London acting companies were re-grouping and a new financial strategy was called for, not only Henslowe but others may have emerged as theatrical bankers or paymasters, one for each company; one other, as the far-sighted reader has guessed, being William Shakespeare.

Honigmann (12) further deduced that "Shakespeare's money-lending could have begun as early as 1592" with the £7 loan to Mr. Clayton. But most biographers seem unwilling to follow the trails wherever they may lead, in this case to a usurer.

The Clayton loan not only corroborates the unexpurgated Groatsworth but also adds to what we know about Shakespeare. If Chettle expected some readers of Groatsworth to comprehend a charge of usury against "Shakespeare," it follows that Shakespeare's activities as a loan shark had to be known to some of them by 1592. The Clayton record tells us that Shakespeare had sufficient liquid capital in 1592 to lend £7, and a loan transacted in Cheapside was a commercial loan. According to William Ingram (41), "after 1571 the overt bonding of borrower to lender became a flourishing business in London, and nowhere more than at the church of St. Mary le Bow. . . . facilities for engrossing documents and for administering oaths, and its central location in Cheapside, soon made Bow Church the obligatory place for borrower and lender to ratify their agreements." It would be surprising if a transaction of this magnitude marked Shakespeare's debut as a money-lender, so it raises questions about what he was doing during the so-called "lost years." At the least, it suggests he had already established a lucrative side-line lending money. It is even possible that Shakespeare picked up some tricks of the money-lending trade from his father before he ever left Stratford. Shakespeare's evident accumulation of working capital may also shed light on his sudden appearance as a payee for the Lord Chamberlain's Men in 1595. Payees were invariably shareholders, and shareholders generally provided investment capital (Bentley, Profession of Player, 29-32).

Most biographers evidently do not consider it seemly for a genius playwright, even a shareholding playwright, to moonlight as a usurer. Yet biographers know full well that during his lifetime, Shakespeare turned up in the company of two other usurers. Francis Langley was one, although his money-lending is frequently downplayed in Shakespearean biographies. Langley is more often introduced as the proprietor of the Swan Theater than as a disreputable usurer. In 1596, he and Shakespeare were accused of assaulting William Wayte in Southwark, who petitioned for surety of the peace (another name-only record). Much ink has been spilt to purge Shakespeare of the onus of assault, and many critics have pushed the blame onto Langley and his previous known skirmishes with William Gardiner and Gardiner's stepson, Wayte. Nevertheless, the writ of attachment finds Shakespeare keeping bad company and being accused of ungentle behavior. John Combe was the other usurer with whom Shakespeare was associated; Shakespeare bought real estate from Combe and his uncle in 1602. Combe made his fortune from usury, and according to the Public Records Office (Thomas, 23)

was the richest man in Stratford and well known as a money lender In fact the two men must have been close friends as Combe left Shakespeare £5 in his will and the playwright left Combe's nephew, Thomas, his sword.

Biographers can trace few personal relationships in the life of Shakespeare, but Combe is certainly one of them.⁴

All these pieces hang together, but they deliver a rather unflattering character. This emerging portrait of Shakespeare resonates with any number of satirical allusions, e.g. Sogliardo, Jonson's epigrammatic Poet-Ape, and various characters in the Parnassus trilogy that have been introduced piecemeal in various biographies. However, B. Roland Lewis (2:335) compared Shakespeare's financial and social ambitions with two less well-known allusions; the first is to money-lending actors in Henry Crosse's Vertues Common-Wealth (1603):

these copper-lace gentlemen [meaning, of course, actors and dramatists] growe rich purchase lands by adulterous plays and not [a] fewe of them usurers and extortioners which they exhaust out of the purses of their haunTERS so are theye puft up in such pride as selfe-love as the envie their equalles and scorne theyr inferiours.

Chambers reprinted more of the passage, albeit without comment, in Elizabethan Stage (4:247):

... it were further to be wished, that those admired wittes of this age, Tragædians, and Comædians, that garnish Theaters with their inuentions, would spend their wittes in more profitable studies, and leaue off to maintaine those Anticks, and Puppets, that speake out of their mouthes: for it is pittie such noble gifts, shold be so basely employed, as to prostitute their ingenious labours to inriche such buckorome gentlemen.

Crosse was obviously plagiarizing Groatsworth, but the passage shows that he picked up on the connection between usurers and Puppets. The second allusion is from Thomas Dekker's News from Hell (1606), in which Lewis found a greedy shareholder:

Manie players swarm there [in hell] as they do here, whose occupation being smelt out by the Cacodemon, or head-officer of that country, to be lucrative, he purposes to make up a company and be chief sharer himself.

These thematically related allusions were introduced by Lewis as analogous to Shakespeare's financial and professional progress, but they have rarely been considered for inclusion in Shakespeare's personal portfolio. While many in the theater profession may have had sidelines as money-lenders, there are no other known actor-sharers who also qualified as landholders and who were specifically resented, even despised in print for the greedy methods they used to acquire their wealth. Certainly Edward Alleyn can be eliminated from the running; he was consistently respected in print and his financial records attest to his generosity. We also know, for example, that actor Nicholas Tooley loaned money to his fellows John Underwood and William Ecclestone but forgave both debts in his will, a gesture that suggests friendly lending, not usury. Compare Tooley's provision to one in John Combe's will, which specified that money be lent to needy tradesmen at interest, such interest to benefit the poor. Combe continued to lend money from beyond the grave.

The two allusions that Lewis cited may belong to the same family as

the restored passages from Groatsworth and the Clayton loan. If it seems a stretch to consider such allusions as pointing to Shakespeare, it may be because most readers have been conditioned to think only of “gentle Will.” Yet the ungentle character sketch is consistent with Shakespeare’s undisputed historical records.

Groatsworth was published in 1592; the Clayton loan was made in 1592. Most biographers omit both the loan to Clayton and the reference to usury in Groatsworth, even though the two records reinforce each other. Bentley, Bradbrook, Ivor Brown, Chambers, Marchette Chute, F. E. Halliday, Schoenbaum, Rowse, Peter Thomson, and Ian Wilson omit or reject the Clayton loan; Honigmann and Peter Quennell accept it. Bentley, Bradbrook, Brown, Chute, Halliday, Lee, Quennell, Rowse, Schoenbaum, Thomson and Wilson delete the reference to usury in Groatsworth. Even Chambers, who reproduced the entire open letter for reference in the second volume of his biography commented only on the usual truncated excerpt in volume one. Thomson (17, 35), however, duly noted that Honigmann had “argued that Shake-scene’s real offence is not authorship but money-lending,” and supposed himself that Shakespeare “went in for [usury] on a small scale.” But he missed any connection with the Clayton loan.

In 1949, Leslie Hotson (229-30) tried to drive the final nail into the Clayton loan coffin. He discovered another William Shakespeare, a farmer who resided eight miles south of Clayton’s hometown of Willington and concluded that this Shakespeare was Clayton’s money-lender. However, Hotson did not cite any evidence to show that this Bedfordshire Shakespeare ever loaned any other money, as did Shakespeare of Stratford, or was in London in 1592 and 1600, as was Shakespeare of Stratford. Nor did Hotson postulate why a loan would have been transacted in London rather than in Bedfordshire. However, after establishing the mere existence of a William Shakespeare of Bedfordshire, Mr. Hotson viewed the “question as settled.” Hotson’s discovery hardly settles anything, because it too lacks any corroborating information.

While the Clayton loan sits quite comfortably alongside Shakespeare’s other business records, it has a major downside. If accepted, Shakespeare’s first documented activity in London was money-lending, and that is not a very glamorous entrance for an aspiring poet. Alden Brooks supposed that Chambers rejected the Clayton record because of its negative impact on Shakespeare’s London debut, but equally problematic is the recognition of the reference to usury in Groatsworth. That accusation seriously undermines the traditional interpretation of the “upstart crow” letter and shows that resentment was registered, not against an arrogant writer but against an unscrupulous actor-paymaster and usurer. It may also be difficult to imagine how Shakespeare could have acquired sufficient liquid assets by 1592 to make a £7 loan, a not inconsequential sum in a day when playwrights earned an average £5 to £7 per play. Yet Shakespeare’s steady accumulation of wealth is one of the few sure things biographers know about his life.

How do biographers justify accepting tax records, the *impresa* record, or even the 1596 writ of attachment while rejecting the Clayton loan? Why do they snip out the Groatsworth allusion to usury? It is difficult to avoid the conclusion that most biographers would prefer not to deal with certain troubling records. By failing to introduce and then connect similar and reinforcing records, biographers deflect attention from an otherwise obvious, if unflattering pattern. By minimizing or editing uncomplimentary information, they have sanitized the portrait of Shakespeare for their readers. Although most biographers silently manipulate the information, Anthony Burgess (259)

flatly admitted his philosophy: "Let us try to keep Will likable."

In conclusion, there are good reasons to accept the Clayton loan into Shakespeare's biography and no good reasons to reject it. Unsavory it may be, but it is compatible with other unsavory and undisputed records that cumulatively point to a mean streak in Shakespeare. The Clayton loan may contradict the "gentle" Shakespeare of tradition, but it leads us toward a more coherent portrait of the man from Stratford.

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Notes

¹ D. Allen Carroll (x, 24-7) acknowledged Austin's research and concluded that while "Greene may have had something to do with the writing of Groatsworth, Chettle certainly did."

² Toward the end of Roberto's Tale, we read: "Here (Gentlemen) break I off Roberto's speech; whose life in most parts agreeing with mine, found one self punishment as I have done. Hereafter suppose me the said Roberto."

³ Æsop's crow was a proud strutter who borrowed the feathers of others, while Horace's crow was a plagiarist. There is no consensus on which crow was intended, but many have seen the "upstart crow" as a conflation of the two.

⁴ The friendship between Shakespeare and Combe was the subject of posthumous gossip and legends, as was the story that Shakespeare had composed an epitaph for Combe (see Chambers, Facts and Problems, 2:242-3, 246, 250-1, 253, 268-9). In 1681, John Aubrey reported the following version of the extempore doggerel:

Ten in the Hundred the Devil allowed
But Combes will have twelve, he swears & vowes:
If any one askes who lied in the Tombe:
Hoh! quoth the Devill, 'Tis my John o'Combe.

In 1709, biographer Nicholas Rowe described the friendship between Shakespeare and Combe as "a particular Intimacy." While none of these reports are reliable, there may be a grain of truth in them because none of these early writers knew about Combe's or Shakespeare's will bequests (Honigmann, 13). In addition, these legends tell us that Shakespeare, like Shake-scene, could bombast out a verse.