

Shakespeare's Name

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The significance of the various spellings of Shakespeare's name has long been controversial. Some writers say that the Stratford man's name was 'Shakspere' or something similar, while the playwright's name was 'Shakespeare', and since these names were pronounced differently, they must have been two different men. But other writers point out the many different forms of the name and say that there is no significant difference between the names used for 'Shakespeare' from Stratford and those used for 'Shakespeare' the writer or 'Shakespeare' the actor.

Because of the well-known flexibility in Elizabethan spelling, not to mention poor penmanship and opinionated printers, it seems that only a careful statistical analysis has any chance of determining whether the spelling of the name has any ability to discriminate among these several 'Shakespeares'.

The data available for such an analysis are, of course, the surviving contemporary public records and various other documents that referred to the name.¹ Several choices arise in the use of these data. First, one could include in the sample to be used for the analysis only the references made during the Stratford man's life, or extend it to 1623 in order to include the First Folio and references by those who probably knew Shakespeare when he was still alive. The longer period seems preferable, but one can easily try the 1564-1616 period to see what difference it makes.

Then there's the question of whether to count all occurrences of the name, including all repetitions within a document and in a series of related documents. For example, the name 'Shakespeare' appeared 15 times in a series of *Venus and Adonis* and *Lucrece* quartos, all most likely based on the first title page.

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And it appeared over 50 times under a series of excerpts quoted in *England's Parnassus*, also no doubt reflecting a single opinion of the name. Similarly, the form 'Shakespere' appeared 21 times in the Old Stratford land documents. Counting all of these copies of the same name would meaninglessly emphasize that spelling in the comparison. From a statistical point of view, the determination of significant difference among versions of the name depends on an assumption of independence of the references counted. So one must try to eliminate those that are just copies of earlier uses. These superfluous appearances are generally quite obvious, and it appears that one can easily get fairly close to a good sample of names. There are some groups of spellings that may be copies but about which we know too little to draw a firm conclusion. In these cases, as with the span of time to be covered, one tests the uncertainty and sees if it's worth worrying about. As it turns out, the results are stable to a wide variety of uncertainty tests.

To be more specific: the procedure used in this analysis was to include in the sample only the first occurrence of a particular spelling in a single document or in a series of related documents when circumstances indicate that the later appearances of that spelling were most likely based on the first one.²

There is also a choice of how to group the names for comparison. If the basic problem is to determine the significance of the various names for distinguishing among possibly different people, or perhaps the same person in different roles, the sample should be divided into groupings corresponding to all possibly distinct persons or roles. In the present case this means 'Shakespeare' from Stratford, 'Shakespeare' the author, and 'Shakespeare' the actor, theater company member, and theater investor. (There are too few references to factor this third group into sub-groups.)

Note that this grouping does not assume that William of Stratford was not the writer or the actor, only that the object is to see whether their names are distinguishable, whoever they may be, whatever their profession, and whatever the reason for the distinction. Of course, if it is found that there is no significant difference between, say, the names used for the Stratford man and those used for the actor, they can be combined.

Therefore, the first group will consist of the names referring to the Stratford man by reference to the town of Stratford, his family, his friends, his property, or some other distinguishing association; and those referring to the author or the actor will identify him by a writing or theater context, as the case may be. Fortunately, there are very few references where assignment to a group is not obvious, the main ones being those in which 'Shakespeare' is not really identified in the reference text.³ The resulting sample of names is shown at the end of the paper, together with a summation by type.

A valid statistical analysis of the above names grouped by person or profession requires that each name be identified by some meaningful spelling criteria. A reading of various scholars of Elizabethan English⁴ suggests the

following general rules about spelling and pronunciation in Shakespeare's time:

1. The middle consonant sound in Shakespeare-like names could be conveyed by various letters: ks, cks, gs, x, kes, etc. So there seems to be little basis for distinguishing among them on this basis.

2. The final e was no longer pronounced as an additional sound in Shakespeare's time, and therefore apparently wouldn't help distinguish one name from another. Thus, 'Shakespeare' would sound the same as 'Shakespear', and 'Shakspere' about the same as 'Shaksper'.

3. Elizabethan English had no diphthong for 'ea' as in the second syllable of Shakespeare, and therefore apparently 'Shakespeare' sounded about the same as 'Shakespere'.

4. An 'e' following a single consonant makes the vowel preceding the consonant long, so that 'Shakespeare' had a long 'a' as in 'ate'.

5. Long vowels were shortened before double consonants or consonant-groups. Thus Shakspere, Shaxper, and Shackspere would have a short 'a' as in 'bad'. Also Shackspere would have a short 'a' in spite of the 'e' following the 'ck'.

Thus, only rules 4 and 5 appear to afford a basis for distinguishing among Shakespeare-like names, and this indicates one can divide the sample of names into two basically different types: those with a long 'a' in the first syllable, and those with a short 'a'.

I should point out that there are exceptions to the above pronunciation rules, depending on the particular evolution of certain words or perhaps the persistence of traditional pronunciation. Furthermore, as one might suspect, the experts often disagree amongst themselves. For example, Kokeritz seems certain that 'Shaksper' was pronounced with a short 'a', whereas Cercignani says that we don't really know. Therefore, rather than try to distill some consensus from these writers, or perhaps just claim that one of them is the foremost authority, I will simply assume as a start point that rules 4 and 5 above are able to discriminate among the various 'Shakespeare' names and see if the statistical analysis bears this out.

Here are the results of the 'base-case' comparisons by group as expressed in the number of names with long 'a' as a percentage of the total:

William of Stratford	28% long 'a'
The author	81% " "
The actor, etc.	81% " "

It can be shown that the 28% long 'a' for the Stratford man is significantly different from 50% at the 5% confidence level, indicating a deliberate preference for Shakspere-like names for him, although there are many departures from that form because of errors, local characteristics, individual whims, etc. The 81% is also significant, indicating a deliberate choice of Shakespeare-like names for the author and actor. These significant differences also indicate that

this criterion is a valid discriminator, whatever the reason might be.

One can now test the importance of various assumptions and uncertainties by comparison with the base-case. For example, counting only the 1564-1616 references instead of out to 1623 doesn't give significantly different results:

William of Stratford	27% long 'a'
the author	81% " "
the actor, etc.	79% " "

The uncertainty about the identification of the 'Shakespeares' in the St. Helen's tax group was also tested by assuming the traditional judgment that he was the Stratford man. There was no significant change from the base case because this group of tax references have about the same mix of type names as in the whole sample. Similarly, one can add in the Rutland reference to the actor group without changing the significance of the difference between that group and the names used for the Stratford man.

As mentioned earlier, judgment is involved in deleting 'copied' names. It was assumed in the preceding cases that the author's name in re-editions of each play had been copied from the first quarto. But the references in the first quarto of each play (and the *Sonnets*) were assumed to be independent. One can't be sure of this because of the probably strong influence of certain documents like Francis Meres' *Palladis Tamia* in 1598. So another test assumed that all the author names on play (and *Sonnets*) title-pages were inspired by the earliest published title page using that version of the name. This deleted another 15 of the 'Shakespeare' references to the author, lowering the author percentage of long-a names from 81% to 76%. But since this is still in the 5% tail of the coin-flipping distribution, the difference between the Stratford man and the author remains significant.

Finally, one might say that the use of a hyphen is not really a different spelling in spite of its indication that the user might be intending something different by its use. There are only two cases where these are counted as different, one in Jonson's cast lists and the other in Digges' F1 verse, and as might be expected there was no significant change in results.

Thus, in sum, there is a robust statistically significant difference between the names used for the author, actor, and theater man and those used for the Stratford man, and it appears one would have to resort to extreme assumptions in order to change this basic result. But how can one explain this in terms of the people and events of the time? There seem to be three possibilities:

1. The Stratford man chose to use 'Shakespeare' for his London literary and acting affairs, while keeping Shakspeare-like names for Stratford and personal affairs. But he did use 'Shakespeare' in Stratford in situations where he presumably had a choice and, according to this explanation, would have used 'Shakspeare'. Also, there seems to be no plausible reason for him to maintain two different but similar names.

2. The author references were all strongly influenced by the name that appeared in *Venus and Adonis*, *Lucrece*, and *Palladis Tamia*. But this answer just shifts the question to why these seminal documents, especially the first two, which were certainly author-approved, used the 'Shakespeare' spelling. And this, of course, leads us either back to the double name hypothesis above, or to the third possibility:

3. The Stratford man was in fact not the author and therefore the two type names had different origins and intentions. But if so, one would also have to conclude that the actor's name in some way came from, or was confused with, the writer's name.

There is another characteristic of the name that should be discussed with regard to distinguishing between William of Stratford and the other 'Shakespeares'; namely the incidence of hyphenation. Some writers say that the hyphenated form is a clear indication that the name was considered a pseudonym. Others say that it was used only occasionally, that it doesn't imply a pseudonym, and that it was nothing more than, perhaps, an heroically descriptive name given as a sign of admiration.

There are several interesting things about the occurrence of hyphenation: First, about 18% of the author references in the sample are hyphenated; second, it is never used for the identifiable William of Stratford; and third, its uses suggest they were not trivial: they were used on the title pages of quartos, in introductory dedications, in the First Folio itself, and by reliable and serious writers like Davies, Webster, and Jonson. Thus the hyphen appears to be a significant characteristic for differentiating between William of Stratford and the other 'Shakespeares', and not just an occasional aberration.

As to whether it means the writers using it believed the name 'Shakespeare' was a pseudonym, I can only point out that descriptive hyphenated names like this were quite common in literature at that time, and they were apparently intended to describe some prominent characteristic of the person. Shakespeare used a number in his plays; for example: Deep-vow, Copper-spur, Starve-lackey, and Shoe-tie.⁵ There was also John Lyly's Papp-hatchett and, in the contemporary translation of Cervantes, Crack-rope and Slip-string. But evidence overwhelmingly shows that actual family names did not have a hyphen except when two family names were joined, in which case both start with a capital. Chambers collected 83 versions of the name and apparently none were hyphenated except Shakespeare. P.H. Reaney's book on English surnames listed about 6000 names, none of which were hyphenated. The few odd exceptions to this rule, for example those found by Irving Matus, only tend to confirm it.⁶

REFERENCES TO THE IDENTIFIABLE WILLIAM OF STRATFORD:
(the parentheses show the number considered redundant.)

1564 Shakspere (+3)

Stratford register

1582 Shaxpere	marriage license
1582 Shagspere	marriage bond
1588 Shackespere (+1)	Lambert case
1597, 1602 Shakespeare (+5)	New Place purchase
1598 Shaksper	Sturley letter
1598 Shackespere	malt & corn note
1598 Shackespere	SQuiney letter
1598 Shaxspere	payment for stone
1601 Shaxspere (+1)	Whittington will
1602, 1610 Shakespeare (+20)	Old Stratford land docs.
1602 Shackespere	Rowington Court roll
1602 Shakespeare (+1)	Rowington Court roll
1603 Shaxpeare	lease near New Place
1604 Shakespeare (+1)	Rowington survey
1604 Shexpere (+1)	Rogers suit
1605 Shakespeare (+16)	tithes purchase
1608 Shackespere (+6)	Addenbrooke suit
1608 Shakespeare	Addenbrooke suit
1611 Shackespere (+3)	tithe complaint
1611 Shakspeare	tithe complaint
1611 Shaxper	Robert Johnson inventory
1611 Shackespere	repair of highways
1612 Shakespeare (+17)	Mountjoy suit
1612 Shakspeare	Mountjoy suit
1612 Shakspe (+5)	Shakspere signatures
1613 Shackespere	John Combe's will
1613 Shakespeare (+24)	gatehouse docs.
1614 Shakspere	20p from Stratford
1614 Shakspeare (+1)	Welcombe encl. docs
1614 Shackespeare (+6)	Welcombe encl. docs.
1614 Shakspeare (+6)	Thomas Greene notes
1614 Shakespeare	Thomas Greene notes
1615 Shakespere	gatehouse complaint
1616 Shackespere (+1)	Shakspere's will
1616 Shackespere	Shakspere's will
1616 Shakspere	burial register
c1620 Shakspeare	Stratford monument
1623 Shakespeare	Anne's grave

REFERENCES TO THE AUTHOR:

1593-4 Shakespeare (+15)	Qs of V & A and <i>Lucrece</i>
1593 Shakspere	Stonley purchase of V&A

1594 Shake-speare	Willobie commend. verse
1595 Shakspeare	Covell's marginal notes
1598 Shakespeare	Q1 of <i>L.L.L.</i>
1598 Shakespeare (+8)	<i>Palladis Tamia</i>
1598 Shake-speare (+3)	Q2 of <i>Richard II</i>
1598 Shake-speare (+4)	Q2 of <i>Richard III</i>
1598 Shakespeare	Richard Barnfield
1598 Shakespeare (+?)	Northumberland MS ⁸
1598> Shakespeare (+1)	Harvey's note
1599 Shakespeare (+2)	Weever's <i>Epigrammes</i>
1599 Shakespeare (+1)	O1, <i>Passionate Pilgrim</i>
1599 Shake-speare (+3)	Q2 of <i>1 Henry IV</i>
1599< Shakespea	anon. MS notes
1600 Shakespeare (+52)	<i>England's Parnassus</i>
1600 Shakespere	S.R., <i>Much Ado & 2HIV</i>
1600 Shakespeare	Q of <i>Much Ado</i>
1600 Shakespeare (+1)	Q1 of <i>Mer. of Venice</i>
1600 Shakespeare	Q of <i>2 Henry IV</i> ⁹
1600 Shakespeare (+1)	Q1 of <i>M.N.D.</i>
1600 Shakespeare	S.R. <i>King Stephen</i> , etc.
1600 Shakspeare	Bodenham's <i>Epistle</i>
1600 Shakspeare (+4)	<i>Parnassus</i> play
1600 Shakespeare (+1)	<i>England's Helicon</i>
1601 Shakespeare (+2)	<i>Parnassus</i> play
1601 Shake-speare (+1)	<i>Phoenix and Turtle</i>
1602 Shakespeare	Q1 of <i>Merry Wives</i>
1603 Shake-speare (+2)	Q1 of <i>Hamlet</i>
1603 Shakspeare	Mourneful Dittie
1604 Shakespeare	Cooke's <i>Epigrammes</i>
1604 Shakespeare	Scoloker Epistle
1604-5 Shaxberd (+3)	Revels acc'ts
1605 Shakespeare	Camden's <i>History</i>
1605 Shakespeare	Q of <i>London Prodigal</i>
1607 Shakspeare	Barksted's 'Myrrha'
1607 Shakespeare	S.R. of <i>King Lear</i> ¹⁰
1608 Shakespere	S.R. <i>Yorkshire Tragedy</i>
1608 Shake-speare (+1)	Q1 of <i>King Lear</i>
1608 Shakspeare	Q1 <i>Yorkshire Tragedy</i>
1609 Shakespeare	Q1 <i>Troilus & Cressida</i>
1609 Shakespeare (+2)	Q1 of <i>Pericles</i>
1609 Shakespeare	S.R. of <i>The Sonnets</i>
1609 Shake-speare (+3)	Q of <i>The Sonnets</i>
1609 Shaksper	Alleyn sonnet purchase

1609 Shakspear	Harington play list
1610 Shake-speare	<i>Scourge of Folly</i>
1611 Schaksp	Drummond list of books
1612 Shake-speare	Webster's Epistle
1613 Shakespeare	Digges note
1614 Shakespear	Drummond
1614 Shakespheare	Carew's Epistle
1614 Shakespeare (+1)	<i>England's Helicon</i>
1614 Shakespeare (+1)	Thomas Freeman
1615 Shakespeare (+8)	Globe suit
1615 Shakespeare	Howes in <i>Annales</i>
1615 Shakespeare	Porter's <i>Epigrams</i>
1615 Shakespeare	F.B. verse to Jonson
1616 Shakespere	Bolton's <i>Hypercritica</i>
1618 Shakespeare	Basse's elegy
1619 Shaksper	Drummond quoting Jonson
1619 Sheakspear	Drummond quoting Jonson
1619 Shakespeare	Q3 of <i>1,2 Henry VI</i>
1619 Shakespeare	Q2 of <i>Merry Wives</i>
1619 Shakespeare	Q2 <i>Sir John Oldcastle</i> ¹¹
1619 Shakespeare	Q2 <i>Yorkshire Tragedy</i>
1620 Shakespeare	Taylor's <i>Hemp-seed</i>
1622 Shakespeare	Q of <i>King John</i>
1622 Shakespeare	Frankfurt catalogue
1622 Shakespeare	Q1 of <i>Othello</i>
1623 Shakspeer	S.R. for F1
1623 Shakespeare	Holland verse in F1
1623 Shake-speare (+1)	Digges verse in F1
1623 Shakespeare	Digges verse in F1
1623 Shake-speare (+1)	I.M. verse in F1
1623 Shakespeare (+19)	other F1

REFERENCES TO THE ACTOR, COMPANY MEMBER, OR THEATER-OWNER:

1595 Shakespeare	payment for plays
1596 Shakspere	sureties of peace ¹²
1599 Shakespeare	Globe occupancy
1601 Shackspeare	Globe deed to Brown
1601 Shakspeare	update of Globe deed
1602 Shakespeare (+1)	Manningham diary
1602 Shakespear	note on arms doc ¹³
1603 Shakespeare (+1)	King's Men license
1604 Shakespeare	Red cloth list

1605 Shakespeare	Phillips' will
1608 Shakespeare (+1)	other Globe deeds
1615 Shakespeare (+8)	Ostler v. Heminges
1616 Shakespeare	Jonson's actor list
1616 Shake-speare	Jonson's actor list
1619 Shakespeare (+6)	Witter v. Heminges
1623 Shakespeare	F1 actor list

UNIDENTIFIED 'SHAKESPEARES':

1597 Shackspere	St. Helen's tax list ¹⁴
1598 Shakespeare (+1)	St. Helen's tax lists
1599, 1600 Shakspeare (+1)	Residium tax lists
1613 Shakspeare	Rutland's Impresa ¹⁵

NUMBER OF NAMES BY CATEGORY

Stratford man	long 'a'	short 'a'	Total
1564-1616	10	27	37
1617-1623	<u>1</u>	<u>1</u>	<u>2</u>
total	11	28	39
Author			
1564-1616	46	11	57
1617-1623	<u>12</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>15</u>
total	58	14	72
Actor			
1564-1616	11	3	14
1617-1623	<u>2</u>	<u>—</u>	<u>2</u>
total	13	3	16

NOTES

1. The references used for this paper came from E.K. Chambers' *William Shakespeare: A study of the Facts and Problems*, and D. Kathman's "The Spelling and Pronunciation of Shakespeare's Name" in www.clark.net/pub/tross/ws/will.html. These references are certainly not all that existed at the time, and one can only hope that the sample is a fair one; i.e., that losses over time did not particularly favor any one version of the name. One would think that printed documents or public record MSS would survive better than private MSS, and therefore that the sample would be short on the latter. However, the sub-sample of private MS names is similar in mix of basic types to that in the total sample, so it can be shown that, even if twice as many private MSS had survived, the results would not have been significantly changed.

2. This method would seem at least questionable for those cases in which more than one spelling type was used in the same document or series or by the same writer. For example, if one form of the name was used six times and another form only once, should both be counted exactly once? In these cases an alternative method was tested; i.e., counting in proportion to the number of uses but normalized to 1.0 for that document, series, or writer. Thus in the example, one name would have a weight of .86 and the other .14. It's as if one were trying to weight the writer's conviction about the name. But it doesn't really matter since this method reinforced the conclusions of the analysis based on the simpler counting method rather than changed them. The reason being, as with other tests of this sort, that the change tends to affect the basic types of names randomly and therefore more or less in proportion to their number. Incidentally, the removal of copied names from the sample not only makes possible a more valid comparison of names but also makes certain sub-groups of names more obvious. For example, almost all of the long-a forms of the name in Stratford appear in connection with the big purchases - New Place, the cottage, the tithes, and the Old Stratford property. The odds suggest that there would have been only one or two long-a forms. And it doesn't seem likely that this higher than expected usage was because of legal actions being more careful to use the 'right' name, since there were about as many other legal documents that used the short-a form. Also, of course, the Stratford man consistently signed his name 'Shakspere' which indicates that it had more claim to be the 'right' name than 'Shakespeare'. It seems much more likely that these purchases were arranged by the same agent, someone who for some reason preferred the 'Shakespeare' spelling. This, of course, raises the question of the independence of these references and whether all should be counted.

3. Other criteria of difference were checked but only the presence of 'ear' rather than 'er' in the second syllable was able to discriminate. But since the 'ear' is fairly well correlated with the long-a in the first syllable, this criterion doesn't give any new information. The appropriate statistical assumption is that of a binomial distribution in which the two types of names were chosen with equal probability. One then calculates whether the actual count falls in the 5% tail of the distribution for that sample size. If so, they are not random, but based on a preference for that type name.

4. Especially G. L. Brook, *The Language of Shakespeare*; F. Cercignani, *Shakespeare's Works and Elizabethan Pronunciation*; and H. Kokeritz, *Shakespeare's Pronunciation*.

5. Camp-bell in a running title across page-tops, and Walde-grave used by a printer well-known for his eccentricities.

6. Reaney, P.H., *The Origin of English Surnames*, Routledge & Kegan Paul, London, 1967.

7. This name is not counted because it's probably based on the one in Q2 of RII, both being hyphenated and both printed by Valentine Simmes for Andrew Wise in 1598.

8. Although there is one 'Shakspe' in this MS, 'Shakespeare' was clearly the writer's view of the name.

9. This name is not counted because it is probably based on that in the Q of *Much Ado*, both being printed by Valentine Simmes for Andrew Wise in the same year.

10. E.K. Chambers shows one of these without the first "e" although Q2 does show it, and it was "set-up" from the Q1. And both were printed for Nathaniel Butter. Finally the absence of an "e" seems inconsistent with the hyphenation which in all other cases gives the two parts of the compound as two stand-alone words.

11. This name and that in Q2 Yorkshire Tragedy are omitted since they were probably based on the name in Q4 Pericles, all printed for Thomas Pavier by Jaggard in 1619.

12. This Shakspere is not identified, but the presence of Francis Langley of the Swan theater indicates he was probably the actor/theater 'Shakespeare'.

13. Although on John Shakspere's arms document, the reference is to an actor and is therefore placed here.

14. Although traditionally said to be the Stratford man, these tax-defaulting 'Shakespeares' are not identified. Note that I am assuming that the residuum Sussex name was copied from the residuum London tax list.

15. It seems most likely that this is John Shakespeare, the King's bitmaker who also made decorations for tournaments. See C.C. Stopes, *Burbage and Shakespeare's Stage*, Haskell, 1970.