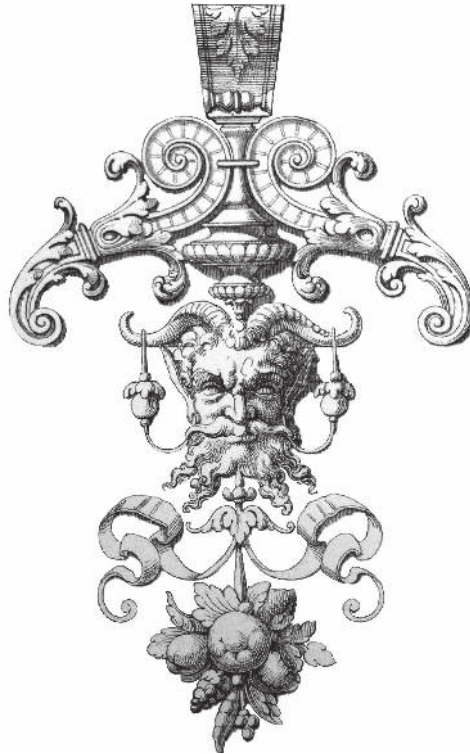


# *The Oxfordian*

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Cover: Portrait of Edward de Vere, 17th Earl of Oxford, English School, 1581. Courtesy of Katherine Chiljan.

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The review by Michael Hyde of Michael Blanding's book, "North by Shakespeare: A Rogue Scholar's Quest for the Truth Behind the Bard's Work" is an edited reprint from the SO Newsletter, volume 57, no. 2, Spring 2021.

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## *From the Editor: Research Breakthroughs*

Significant breakthroughs in research are rare occurrences in any discipline. Usually, the *modus operandi* is for a series of incremental advances that eventually lead to a breakout in conceptual development and seminal discoveries. Put another way, scholarship is often the accumulation of small advantages in particular fields of study, and the Shakespeare Authorship Question is no exception.

For the past hundred years, the Oxfordian hypothesis has been based upon four lines of circumstantial evidence.

- Oxford's contemporaries publicly praised his skill as a poet and a playwright throughout his life, but no play or play list bears his name.
- Oxford's biography is incorporated in the Shakespeare plays in terms of incident, plot and characterization.
- The language of Oxford's early poetry and in his private letters can be found throughout the poems and plays of William Shakespeare.
- Oxford's travels to France and Italy are reflected in a dozen Shakespeare plays in terms of geography, language and culture.

After a cascade of research successes in the first 50 years, fewer discoveries were achieved and restatements of existing scholarship became the norm

for Oxfordian writers. In the past decade, however, four major advances in Oxfordian scholarship have taken place:

1. The discoveries that numerous allusions to Italian topography, language and history in the Shakespeare canon match de Vere's itinerary while traveling in Italy during 1575–76, including his fluency in Italian and his interest in Italian literature.
2. The literary, dramatic, and historical evidence showing that de Vere wrote *The Famous Victories of Henry the Fifth* and four other anonymous dramas early in Elizabeth's reign.
3. The discovery that the First Folio reference to "Sweet Swan of Avon" was deliberately ambiguous since Avon was both the name of a river but also the old name for Hampton Court—where theatrical performances were given for Queen Elizabeth, King James and their courts. It was called "Avon" as a shortening of the Celtic-Roman name "Avondunum," meaning a fortified place (*dunum*) by a river (*avon*), which over time was corrupted by common usage and became known as Hampton.
4. The philological evidence that Edward de Vere was the actual translator of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, Shakespeare's favorite Latin author. This is based on de Vere's combined use of alliteration and hendiadys in his early poetry and his frequent use of double vowels in his private letters, both of which permeate the English translation.

In this issue we publish another major discovery, long suspected but never proven—that all six signatures on legal documents by William Shakspeare of Stratford-on-Avon were actually penned by law clerks.

In 1964 Jane Cox, then head of Renaissance documents at the British National Archives, published an assessment of those signatures. In it, she stated that "Literate men in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries developed personalized signatures much as people do today and it is unthinkable that Shakespeare did not" (Cox 33). In the case of the signatures on Shakspeare's will, Cox notes that "It is obvious at a glance that these signatures, with the exception of the last two [on pages 2 and 3 of the will], are not the signatures of the same man. Almost every letter is formed a different way in each.... Which of the signatures reproduced here is the genuine article is anybody's guess" (Cox 33).

Her analysis, however, was never accepted by professors in academia. For the first time, using modern forensic document standards, we offer an in-depth investigation of paleography and contemporary legal practices in Shakespeare's time that is comprehensive. The major issue, as author Matt Hutchinson emphasizes, has been that almost all Shakespeare scholars have failed to place the signatures in their contemporary environment and examine them in context.

To address these deficiencies once and for all, more than 100 signatures by Shakspeare and his British contemporaries are displayed in Hutchinson's monograph, "The Slippery Slope of Shakespeare's Signatures," for your review and judgment. Obviously, there is another authorship issue related to the integrity of the signatures. "The six signatures," warns Hutchinson, "must be re-evaluated before we can even begin to consider the paleographic argument for the *Sir Thomas More* additions."

With Hutchinson's compelling research, we must finally admit after 400 years that we possess no words in "Shakespeare's" handwriting, unless of course Oxford was Shakespeare.

Another issue of contention in Shakespeare studies has been whether the dedication to *Shakespeare's Sonnets* was designed as a double cryptogram that identifies the true author and dedicatee—Edward de Vere and Henry Wriothesley—or is simply the publisher's baroque rendering of a formal dedication with no involvement from Shakespeare (or anyone else).

The point-counterpoint debate is presented in *The Oxfordian* with two papers by Ramon Jiménez and by John Shahan, published sequentially. On the one hand, Jiménez maintains that the meaning of the dedication has been misinterpreted and that the typography and layout have been over interpreted. Jiménez provides evidence that:

1. the dedication was composed by the publisher, Thomas Thorpe;
2. there is no secret message or code in the dedication, nor any significance in its shape or typography;
3. the dedication is a straightforward, if awkward, expression of good wishes to William Hall, the supplier of the Sonnets' manuscript. In Jiménez's view, a reasonable rewording of it is "On the occasion of this publishing venture, I wish Mr. W. H., the sole provider of the manuscript of these sonnets, all happiness and that eternity promised by our immortal poet."
4. Edward de Vere was not involved with the Dedication in any way.

In counterpoint, Shahan seeks to confirm the initial discovery by Dr. John Rollett in 1997 of two ciphers contained within the dedication text.

Rollett revealed the dedication to *Shakespeare's Sonnets* to be a double cryptogram, the first containing a transposition cipher showing the name Henry Wriothesley (3rd Earl of Southampton), presumably identifying him as "Mr. W. H.," to whom the Sonnets are dedicated. The second is an innocent-letter cipher with a message identifying Edward de Vere, 17th Earl of Oxford, as the author of the *Sonnets*.



Shahan's paper shows that Oxford's authorship is consistent with several other oddities about the *Sonnets* publication. The article accounts for both of the apparent imperfections in Rollett's solutions: (1) the previously unexplained words THE FORTH in the message pointing to de Vere and (2) the separation of the letters "WR" from the rest of Wriothesley's name.

Perhaps most important, the article identifies a previously unappreciated feature of the dedication—the unique lower-case "r" in "Mr."—which proves the dedication was designed as a cryptogram and that the key 6-2-4 encoded into its shape—matching the number of letters in the three parts of the name "Edward de Vere" and producing the hidden message—was no accident. Finally, Shahan's paper corrects errors in Rollett's application of the Friedmans' validation criteria for breaking codes.

We hope the cryptology and math communities will review Shahan's evidence and offer their critical feedback on this discovery in Shakespeare studies.

What is instructive about these two breakthroughs is they were achieved by employing expertise in non-literary disciplines—those of law, history, and paleography regarding Shakspeare's signatures, and of cryptology, statistics, and contemporary typesetting regarding ciphers in *Shakespeare's Sonnets*.

Our cover is a full color reproduction of a rarely seen portrait of the 17<sup>th</sup> Earl of Oxford circa 1580–81 that measures 36-5/8 inches by 28-5/8 inches. We wish to bring it to the attention of a wider audience given new information on the portrait that demonstrates to me that the sitter's identity is Edward de Vere.

In this portrait, Oxford is wearing a hat taken from Queen Elizabeth's wardrobe and given to him by her commandment in July 1581: "one hat of the Dutch fashion of black taffeta with band embroidered with chip ['sheepe'] of pearl and gold" (Wardrobe of Robes day book, National Archives). This fits with Christie's dating of the portrait as circa 1580. The portrait may have commemorated the queen's gift, which occurred shortly after Oxford's release from the Tower of London in June 1581.





The portrait's provenance can be traced to Oxford's granddaughter, Anne Stanley, Countess of Ancram: the estate of her son, the 2<sup>nd</sup> Earl of Ancram, went to his nephew, the first Marquess of Lothian. Lothian's sister married into the Brodie family, and one of her descendants married in the Sinclair family, later the Lords Thurso, from whom the portrait was purchased. Equally important is new information that a portrait of Henry de Vere, 18th Earl of Oxford, was also found in the same collection.

The late costume historian, Janet Arnold, F.S.A., commented in a private letter that the sitter "could be an Englishman dressed in the French fashion, or a Frenchman. He is certainly a courtier, with a sword containing so many jewels, and such an evident air of fashion"; in 1581, Oxford was lampooned by Barnabe Riche (*Riche His Farewell to Military Profession*) for wearing French clothing. Moreover, a new visual comparison of the portrait with that of Oxford's half-sister, Katherine Vere, Lady Windsor provides further evidence that the sitter is Edward de Vere. She is portrayed here in a 1567 painting by the Master of the Countess of Warwick (as seen in Wikimedia Commons).

The Oxford painting's current owner is Katherine Chiljan, author of *Shakespeare Suppressed* (2016), who purchased it in 1996 from Christie's auction house.



Finally, an official document proving the 17th Earl of Oxford served on Queen Elizabeth's Privy Council was discovered this spring at the Folger Shakespeare Library (see page 77). The April 8, 1603 letter from the Privy Council to the Lord Treasurer instructing him to hire horses to bring King James of Scotland to London is signed by Oxford as E. Oxenforde, with a loop flourish under the signature.

This latest find is a reminder that the Oxfordian case can suffer from too much conjecture and too little collection of documents. To that end, simply finding and publishing previously unknown documents related to de Vere would be a real service to scholars. It goes without saying that of equal importance are commentaries that properly place the documentary evidence in historical context.

# *Additional Evidence for Edward de Vere's Authorship of Shakespeare's Troilus and Cressida*

by Michael Hyde

But I hope truth is subject to no prescription, for truth is truth though never so old, and time cannot make that false which once was true.

—Edward de Vere, 7 May 1603 letter to Sir Robert Cecil

In the first scene of *Troilus and Cressida* (TC) the Greek warrior Ulysses tells of “A true knight, they call him Troilus” in the city of Troy. This hint of linking *true* and Troilus via alliteration leads to the pivotal moment of the unmarried sexual encounter (III.ii.89–92) when Troilus proclaims his constant eternal love to Cressida: “Few words to fair faith...Troilus shall be such to Cressid as what envy can say worst shall be a mock for his truth, and what truth can speak truest, not truer than Troilus.”

The last clause of this speech is a natural hexameter, heroically and alliteratively praising “Troilus—his truth—what truth—truest—truer.” The poet soon amplifies his words on the truer and truest truth of Troilus in language that one recognizes as wordplay on the de Vere family motto *Nihil Vero Verius*: “Yet, after all comparisons of truth, as truth’s authentic author to be cited, ‘as true as Troilus’ shall crown up the verse, and sanctify the numbers” (II.170–3).

Troilus himself poetically invents his own tag or motto in this scene, making himself the “author” of his own original authentic comparison to be cited in future times, “as true as Troilus.” The complex wordplay in these two

passages is based on a tautologous conceit, a verbal challenge to audiences and to readers, to remember for all time the truth of *Troilus*—however *Cressida* reacts. The bedroom consummation is delayed while *Troilus* invents his motto. The additional tautology of “authentic author” recalls the main source of *TC*, Chaucer’s *Troilus and Criseyde*, in which the poet cites as authority his invented authorial source, Lollius. *Troilus* makes himself the erotic and poetic standard by which “true swains in love shall in the world to come, Approve their truth by *Troilus*” (ll. 163–4). The *Troilus* motto is said to “crown up” and to “sanctify” the verse. But how?

“Crown up” refers to the crown, or fair smooth side, of a board installed correctly by carpenters, that is, right side up to prevent rot beneath. Hence, the verse is weatherproof, permanent, and durable. “Sanctify” is a word borrowed from religious ceremony, stressing the nobility and truth of *Troilus* even if irreverently in a scene of sexual consummation. And we may wonder how future swains will be approved or tested, perhaps found wanting and unsatisfactory, when compared to the noble example of *Troilus*?

*Troilus* and his clever grammatical comparisons of truth are apparent to those who recognize the intricate interweaving of the de Vere motto in these lines. As we shall note later, “as true as *Troilus*” and the accurate rendering of the de Vere motto in English as “nothing truer than Vere” share the same source—the poet himself, Edward de Vere. The play’s text after the bedroom scene then demonstrates the use of echolalia as a literary device, as the truth of *Troilus* is dramatically and ironically undercut by the falsity of *Cressida*. The best example is IV.iv.56 *passim*, where *Troilus* and *Cressida* debate whether she will “be true” once she is delivered to the Greeks. In 15 lines the single word “true” is echoed three times each in “be thou true” and “be true.” The lover’s debate over *Cressida*’s fidelity so suddenly and immediately following their consummation prepares us for her infidelity. While Samuel Johnson may have tired of the incessant punning and quibbles of Shakespeare’s dialogues, the true-truer-truest truth of *Troilus* repeatedly and successfully hammers home that his constancy is doomed to fail and that he will soon lose false *Cressida*.

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**Michael Hyde** graduated magna cum laude in English from Harvard in 1969 and earned his Master’s in English from Tufts University (1974). His doctorate in English from Tufts (1978) was a study of the poetry of Percy Bysshe Shelley titled “The Poet’s Creative Word.” He has taught English at Tufts, Wellesley College, Harvard Extension School, University of Massachusetts (Boston and Lowell campuses). Michael became intrigued by the Shakespeare authorship question after reading Mark Anderson’s “Shakespeare” By Another Name. Hyde last appeared in *The Oxfordian* 22 with “*Calgreyhounds and the First Folios of Jonson and Shakespeare*”.

## “Vero Nihil Verius—Nothing Truer than...?”

Historian Ramon Jiménez recently argued (Winter 2018, 1) that the de Vere family motto is frequently misquoted and misunderstood as “Nothing Truer than Truth.” As rendered by Jiménez, the correct English translation of *Vero Nihil Verius* is “Nothing Truer than Vere.” This bilingual pun can easily lead to the kinds of “declarative circularities” deplored by Jiménez, which we have explicated in the speeches of Troilus especially at the moment of the bedroom consummation scene of *TC*. Jiménez cites the nonsensical and extravagant Euphuistic hyperbole of Armado to Jacquenetta in the seduction scene of *Love’s Labour’s Lost* (IV.i.60–64)—Armado begins with “truer than truth itself.” Whereas our rendering of “As true as Troilus” is an example of the de Vere motto being used correctly, not tautologically. Intriguingly, Jiménez also notes that Ron Paul and Clive Willingham have searched for the origins of the de Vere motto used repeatedly by Edward de Vere, not finding any usages prior to the 1570s. The implication is that de Vere invented his motto, as does Troilus in *TC*.

Jiménez anticipates our case for *TC* in his later article (Spring 2018, 15–18) titled “An Oxfordian Looks into Henslowe’s Diary.” *TC* or perhaps another version of the Troilus and Cressida story is mentioned four times by Philip

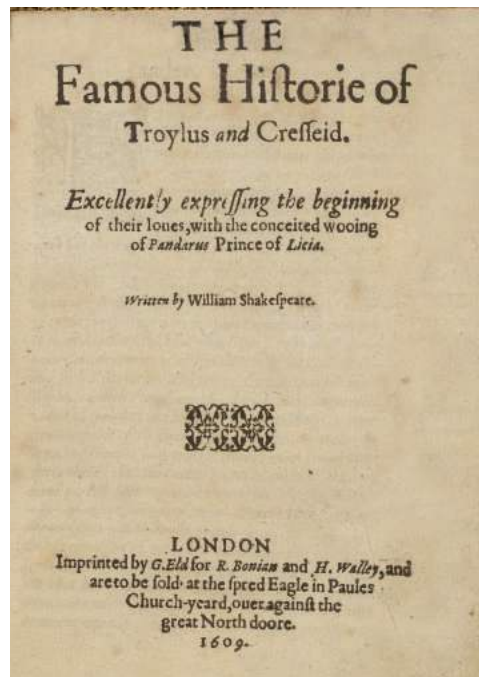


*Troilus and Cressida, Act V, Scene II, engraving by Luigi Schiavonetti. Troilus sees his wife in loving discourse with Diomedes and he wants to rush into the tent to catch them by surprise, but Ulysses and the others keep him back by force.*



Henslowe, once in 1594 and three times in 1599. The latter involves a note “in fulle payment” to Henry Chettle and Thomas Dekker on May 26<sup>th</sup> of 1599, for “their books called the tragedie of Agamemnone” with “troyells & cresseda” crossed out.

Jiménez supports the view that these references are to a version of the canonical *TC*, not to a lost play—perhaps being revised by Chettle and Dekker. As he observes, the British Library pasteboard fragments present a list of characters the same as *TC* (save one); use the same sources of Homer, Caxton and Chaucer; locate the bedding scene in the same spot in the middle scenes of the play; and follow in order scenes involving Achilles-Diomedes and the Greeks rejoicing at the death and murder of Hector. Performances of the play could have occurred prior to the Stationers' Register entry of February 1603—whether privately at Court, or by the Lord Chamberlain's Men in a theater. Jiménez also mentions the “Ever Reader/Never Writer” preface to the second 1609 quarto of *TC*, often cited as a pun on the name of E.Ver(e).



## The Insight of Eva Turner Clark

In 1937 Eva Turner Clark argued for de Vere's authorship of *TC* based on a Revels play of December 1584. This was “Agamemnon and Ulysses” performed at Greenwich for Elizabeth on Dec 27<sup>th</sup> during the Christmas Revels—a day also known as St. John the Evangelist's Day. Most crucially, the play was performed by the Earl of Oxford's Boys under the directorship of Henry Evans, who also worked with Oxford's collaborator and secretary John Lyly—leading many to conclude that de Vere was the author as well as patron of the play. Clark cites J. T. Looney on *TC*'s connection to “Agamemnon and Ulysses”: “Looney expresses the opinion that it is the play later called *Troilus and Cressida*, when published under the name of Shakespeare” (449). Coincidentally, in an *Ironical Letter* of 1585, written by Jack Roberts to Sir Roger Williams, there is contemporary evidence regarding Oxford and Lyly's dramatic methodology. “I pray you take heed and beware of my Lord of Oxenfordes man called Lyllie, for if he see this ltr, he will put it in print, or make ye boyes in Poules play it vppon a stage” (Wilson 81).

We can only wish that we knew something about the lost unprinted text of *Ulysses and Agamemnon*. Biographer Mark Anderson likewise cites Clark's discovery, "This 'lost' play was probably a draft of part of Shakespeare's dark satire *Troilus and Cressida*" (201). He sees Ulysses as de Vere "promoting himself to Queen Elizabeth" (202) as "England's next generalissimo" in the Lowlands against Spain. Curiously, neither Clark nor Anderson link the character of 'Trojan Troilus to de Vere, who had recently (1576–81) avoided his allegedly faithless wife, Anne Cecil. De Vere's life was more that of Troilus than Ulysses. *TC* is neither a Greek nor a Roman play as it is set in ancient Troy, with scenes of battle, sexual impropriety and infidelity in year ten of the Trojan War.

## De Vere's Chaucer and his "wonted" Chaucerism

De Vere ordered a Chaucer from a bookseller named Ceres in early 1570, along with "Italian books... a Geneva Bible gilt... and Plutarch's works in French" (Anderson 41). The Chaucer may have been William Thynne's edition of 1532 or John Stow's 1561 edition. But the purchase suggests he did not have a Chaucer of his own, although he previously had access to the works of Chaucer in the libraries of Sir Thomas Smith and Sir William Cecil before and after the death of his father in 1562. Yet, as we will explain, the de Vere family once possessed the most famous early illuminated manuscript of Chaucer, known as the Ellesmere Chaucer.

Perhaps the biggest surprise for modern readers of *TC* is how utterly the Shakespeare text of the bedroom and consummation scenes departs from Chaucer's poem, which focuses on sexual intimacy, foreplay, and Troilus' stroking of Cressida's body:

Hir armes smale, hir straighte bak and softe,  
 Hir sides longe, fleshly, smoothe, and white,  
 He gan to stroke, and good thrift bad ful ofte  
 Hir snowish throte, hir brestes rounde and lite,  
 Thus in his hevene he gan him to delite;  
 And therwithal a thousand time hire kiste,  
 That what toon for joye unnethe he wiste.  
 (Donaldson ed. p. 694)

As we have seen, *TC* delays the consummation, with Troilus stating and repeating his truth and constancy as "truth's authentic author." The bawdiness and teasing sexual innuendo of Shakespeare's comedies is missing in *TC*; it does not celebrate Cressida's "brestes rounde" as does Chaucer in his original *Troilus and Criseyde*.

Yet in 1593, Thomas Nashe in his preface and dedication to Gentle Master William in *Strange Newes*, addresses de Vere as the “blue boar in the Spittle” whose jests and poems are expressed “according to your wonted Chaucerism” (Greene modern transcript, 3). And Nashe closes his dedication with an obscure request to the blue boar who is de Vere himself: “Let Chaucer be new scoured against the day of battle”—presumably Nashe’s pamphlet war with Gabriel Harvey in the 1590s. The only battle poem in Chaucer is *Troilus and Criseyde*, set in the midst of the Siege of Troy in its tenth year. Are Nashe’s Chaucer and de Vere references a clue that *TC* was composed and already known to Nashe himself?

## The Ellesmere Chaucer and the Rotheley Flyleaf

The Ellesmere Chaucer and its provenance as a possession of the 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> Earls of Oxford were recently investigated by Martin Hyatt (1). His focus on the Rotheley poem, found inserted in the flyleaf of the Ellesmere Chaucer, led us to a significant contribution from Chaucer scholars Ralph Hanna and A. S. G. Edwards. Regarding the Rotheley flyleaf, they state the following:

The poem is quite elaborately heraldic and it interfaces neatly with Chaucerian lyric “Truth’.... Ever since their days as descendants of the Vikings in the Contention, the De Veres seem to have been given to elaborate punning (on the name Vere). This wordplay not only figures in the heraldic display but also, like medieval etymology, generally stands for a relationship with ‘trouthe’.... Most especially the name Vere leads to connections with Latin ‘verus’ true—the family motto was *Vero Nichil* (sic) *Verius*, nothing is truer than truth/Vere (22).

The poem celebrates Spring as the “seasoun of lusty Veer,” echoing Chaucer’s “Aprill with his showres soote.” He admires no one more “Than lusty Veer whom I liken to a bore,” and wishes all honour and grace to “thys blew bore.” He describes the de Vere “bore” as “styfe in tryeuth”—as “contyn-ewyng trouth”—as “feyfull trouth”—and the most “trwyste” lineage. These words are virtually identical to those I have quoted from *Troilus* in *TC*, and Hanna’s version of the de Vere motto in English agrees with Jiménez.

Hanna and Edwards locate the provenance of the Ellesmere Chaucer manuscript in Bury St. Edmunds, ten miles from Castle Hedingham, the ancestral seat of the de Veres. The family circle is similar to that of the Pastons in Norfolk, the Drurys at Hawstead in Suffolk, and the de Veres at Hedingham in Essex. Both Hanna-Edwards and James Ross, biographer of Earl John the 13<sup>th</sup> Earl of Oxford, agree that the likely author of most of the flyleaf poem was Thomas Rotheley, who lived nearby at Witham, Essex (Hanna 19; Ross 208). The Ellesmere was later owned by Robert Drury, barrister, for whom



Drury Lane is named—at least during the years 1528–36—before the manuscript passed to the Egertons.

Drury was one of the executors of Earl John the 13<sup>th</sup>'s estate in 1513, while Thomas Rotheley was a local attorney too. James Ross argues for dating the poem as follows: “However, with a later dating, the most likely candidate to have written the poem is probably Thomas Rotheley of Witham, Essex, a local attorney who served a de Vere annuitant in 1489” (208 n. 21). Hanna says that the estate of Earl John the 13<sup>th</sup> contained “a Chest full of frenshe and englisshe books”—possibly the Ellesmere manuscript itself. Thanks to the meticulous work of Hanna-Edwards and James Ross, we can trace the Ellesmere from the 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> Earls John of Oxford to Drury and thence to the Egerton family, who owned the manuscript until the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century and its sale to Henry Huntington (1917). Today it rests in the Huntington Library in California.

Ross likewise recognizes the “elaborate punning” on the name Vere that Hanna and Edwards have so fully delineated: “Using a boar to stand for the earl (playing on the Latin verres/Vere) and indeed an image the earl himself used” (Ross 208). It is Ross’s note that led me to the Hanna-Edwards article; thus we have independent confirmations from both Chaucer specialists and a medievalist historian of literary punning on the name de Vere as early as Rotheley’s poem.

The evidence for de Vere connections is manifest in the Rotheley poem. In the Appendix with the full poem that Hanna provides, the Vere section is headlined “Incep(i)o materies cum p(ro)prietatibus Veer.” Hanna comments that “Rotheley’s poetry smacks of Bury & the Suffolk Circle” (20). The poem uses the word *tarrage* (scent), known only from Lydgate, who lived at a nearby de Vere property, Hatfield Broadoak. Hanna speculates, “Because the de Veres were involved in local literary efforts, they may well have patronized a poet like Rotheley” (21). I therefore conclude that Rotheley’s poem, written from “a prysone colde,” was written shortly before the Battle of Bosworth—perhaps before Earl John the 13<sup>th</sup> had escaped from his own imprisonment at Calais. It would then later have been copied into the flyleaf of the Ellesmere.

## Kevin Gilvary, William Caxton, 13<sup>th</sup> Earl John—and *TC*

Gilvary’s dating article on *TC* says in his first note, referring to Charles and Michelle Martindale’s research in *Shakespeare and the Uses of Antiquity*: “[they] review the use of various sources and conclude that only Caxton’s is absolutely established” (322). Indeed, my Oxford edition of *TC* notes in line two of the Prologue that the Greek princes being “orgulous” or proud is a word straight from Caxton and is “used frequently by Caxton (though) obsolete by Shakespeare’s day.”

It is Caxton's 1471 printing of *The Recuyell of the Historyes of Troye* that uses the word "orgulous." Gilvary's section on Sources for *TC* states that Caxton's translation from the French of Lefevre's *Recuyell of the Historyes of Troye* "may have been used for the scenes of military action" in *TC* (318). Following the Prologue, Priam's six-gated city of Troy in *TC* (I.i.15) is also from Caxton's *Recuyell* (ii.507).

Finally, Wikipedia states that Caxton's popularity was owed both to royal patronage and to the appeal of his newly printed books among the "English upper classes in the late fifteenth century.... [H]e was supported by (but not dependent on) members of the nobility and gentry," among whom was Earl John the 13<sup>th</sup> Earl of Oxford (Anderson 5). The 13<sup>th</sup> Earl commanded his translation of *The Four Sons of Aymon*, introduced Caxton to Henry VII, and "his name appears in the dedication to Caxton's *Faytes of Arms* in 1489" (Ross 219). The 13<sup>th</sup> Earl replaced Edward IV and Richard III as Caxton's (1422–91) leading patron under King Henry VII.

## Conclusions

First, the use of the de Vere motto through *TC* III.ii ff is a unique signature attributable to Edward de Vere and strong evidence of authorship.

Second, the scholarship of Jiménez renders an accurate translation of the de Vere motto as "Nothing Truer than Vere," which supports our case in *TC* for "Nothing Truer than Troilus" and "As True as Troilus" being the work of de Vere.

Third, the claim of Eva Turner Clark that the Court Revels production of *Agamemnon and Ulysses* by Oxford's Boys in December 1584 was an early version of *TC* is strongly affirmed.

Fourth, the evidence of de Vere's purchase of a Chaucer in 1570, and of the 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> Earls of Oxford being the first known owners of the Ellesmere Chaucer, is striking. Hanna and Edwards and James Ross suggest to us that Edward de Vere's use of the family motto dates back to the de Vere "trouthe" praised in Rotheley's poem—preserved with Chaucer's "Truth" in the flyleaf of the Ellesmere.

Finally, the unique words and phrases of Caxton's "Recuyell" that appear in *TC*, such as "orgulous," uniquely point to the great grandson of 13<sup>th</sup> Earl John, Edward de Vere as the *TC* author.

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# *Is Lord Prospero Visconti of Milan the Model for Lord Prospero of The Tempest?*

by Katherine Chiljan

Scholars have long considered that Prospero in *The Tempest* represented the great author himself, William Shakespeare, a magus that conjures plays on the “island” of the theater. But they also searched for an historical figure upon whom Prospero may have been based, a deposed Italian duke who sought refuge in the liberal arts—especially since Prospero is a name unique to the Shakespeare canon.

Shakespeare’s Prospero, the Duke of Milan, had great learning and valued his library; “rapt” in his “secret studies,” Prospero entrusted his ruling power to his brother, Antonio.

The Government I cast upon my brother,  
And to my State grew stranger, being transported  
And rapt in secret studies... (I.ii)

Antonio eventually ousted Prospero. As Prospero was loved by his people, Antonio had him secretly exiled, and not “destroyed,” as he explains to his daughter, Miranda:

Dear, they durst not,  
So dear the love my people bore me: nor set  
A mark so bloody on the business... (I.ii)

## Is Prospero Visconti of Milan the Model for Lord Prospero of *The Tempest*?

Prospero and his daughter, then a young child, were placed in a ramshackle boat without sails and set adrift. The person who carried out Prospero's exile, however, sympathetically filled the boat not only with supplies, but with books from his library. "By Providence divine" (I.ii), the boat landed safely on a deserted island. Prospero's unencumbered study there resulted in his magical powers.

Twelve years after the exile, a shipwreck occurs on the island and all passengers are miraculously saved thanks to Prospero's magic. Among them are the King of Naples, who was complicit in Prospero's exile, and his son, Prince Ferdinand, who falls in love with Miranda; Ferdinand later introduces her to his father as "daughter to this famous Duke of Milan":

She  
Is daughter to this famous Duke of Milan,  
Of whom so often I have heard renown  
But never saw before; (V.i)

An Italian nobleman, Prospero is Duke of Milan, famous and loved by his people, values study and his library, has a brother and a daughter, is a magician, and was deposed and exiled.

## The Real Prospero

One candidate suggested as Prospero's model is Prospero Adorno, a 15<sup>th</sup> Century doge of Genoa who was deposed and years later reinstated by the Duke of Milan, and had dealings with Ferdinando, King of Naples. Another candidate is Prospero Colonna, a 15<sup>th</sup> Century nobleman and military leader also connected with the King of Naples and his son, Ferdinando. Prospero, Ferdinand, and the King of Naples are all character names in *The Tempest*.

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Another candidate, the subject of this paper, was discovered decades ago by Sir Ernst Gombrich (d. 2001), a prominent art historian. Gombrich came across this line in *A Tract containing the Arts of Curious Painting Carving & Building* (1598):

Vicont *Prospero* a Knight of Millan and a great scholar.

A Milanese nobleman named Prospero who was a great scholar caught Gombrich's attention, as Shakespeare's Prospero, a Milanese duke, was reputed

for the liberal Arts  
Without a parallel; those being all my study... (I.ii)

"Vicont Prospero" was named in the book not because he was learned but because he was the owner of a certain painting, one that depicted birds so realistically that, when placed outside, attracted real birds.

the table [i.e., painting] being set abroad in the sun, other birds came flying about them, taking them for live birds. This table is now to be seen with Vicont *Prospero* a Knight of Milan and a great scholar. (Book 3, 94)



*Figure 1: Bronze medal of Prospero Visconti, circa 1582, from Numismatic Collection, State Museums in Berlin, Prussian Cultural Heritage Foundation.*



## Is Prospero Visconti of Milan the Model for Lord Prospero of *The Tempest*?

The book was an English translation of *Trattato dell'arte della pittura, scoltura, et architettura* (1584) by Milanese painter Gian Paolo Lomazzo (1538–1600) and was “the first treatise on painting to be published in English” (Bakewell). Translator Richard Haydock (1569/70–c. 1642), a “student of physic” at Oxford University, however, mistranslated the line about “Vicont Prospero.” Lomazzo’s original phrase was

il Sig. Prospero Viscôte cavaliere Milanese ornato di belle lettere.  
(Book 3, 188)

“Visconte” was this fellow’s *surname*, and not, as Haydock had translated it, his title. Haydock also had removed the abbreviated “Signore” or lord. Haydock translated “belle lettere” as “great scholar,” but more specifically, “belles lettres” describes literary studies or the humanities in general, according to the *Oxford English Dictionary*. So, a closer translation is:

the Lord Prospero Visconte, Milanese knight, adorned with belles lettres.

Sir Ernst Gombrich was the first to catch Haydock’s mistranslation of “Visconte” and to identify him as Lord Prospero Visconti (1543/44–1592). In 1950, he reported his new candidate as the basis for Shakespeare’s Prospero to the English professor Frank Kermode, who was then preparing an Arden Shakespeare edition of *The Tempest*, published in 1954. Kermode chose not to include it; at the time, Gombrich thought it a correct decision, as he believed the evidence was “inconclusive.”

Twenty-nine years later, however, the orthodox journal *Shakespeare Quarterly* (1979) published an article that considered Haydock’s reference to “Vicont Prospero” as “the best source yet suggested for Prospero’s name,” as it associated “Prospero” with Milan and learning (Young 408–10). Author Alan R. Young, then an associate English professor, evidently arrived at this conclusion independently of Gombrich; neither Prospero Visconti nor Haydock’s mistranslation, however, were mentioned.

## Who was Lord Prospero Visconti?

Starting in 1277, the Visconti family ruled as lords of Milan and, by the late 1300s, as *Dukes of Milan*, the title of Shakespeare’s character. In 1450, however, the title and the power passed to another family, the Sforzas. Prospero Visconti, who lived in Milan, was a collateral descendant of the first lords of Milan and was alive when Lomazzo’s book was published.

Visconti, the Lord of Breme (Morigia 593), was a scholar, orator, historian, poet, musician and even amateur sculptor. His learning was extensive,



knowing mathematics, architecture, astronomy, and ancient and modern languages (including Aramaic, Greek, Latin and the Tuscan dialect). Paolo Morigia noted in his book, *La Nobiltà di Milano* (1595), that Visconti was a bibliophile, owning a

precious and most copious library that contained books on every science and profession, among them books in the Longobardic language<sup>1</sup> written on the bark of trees or fibres. (Gombrich 188)

Visconti's library was likely built upon that of his great-grandfather, Gaspar Ambrogio Visconti (1461–99), a scholar, poet and courtier; this Visconti was a patron of painter/architect Donato Bramante, and edited the poetry of Francesco Petrarca, i.e., Petrarch (Pyle 576–7).

Prospero Visconti possessed an extensive art collection, including drawings, paintings and sculptures, as well as collections of classical antiquities, musical instruments, coins, and medals—two 16<sup>th</sup> Century medals featuring his portrait are in existence.<sup>2</sup> Visconti also held manuscripts by Leonardo da Vinci and those of his disciples, according to his contemporary, Giovanni Ambrogio Mazzetta (Uzielli 233).

Besides his many interests in the arts and scholarship, Visconti was a merchant. He dealt in art, sculpture, textiles, precious gems and jewelry, musical scores, crystal ware, and other fine goods, and supplied these items for the dukes of Bavaria. He also supplied the dukes with armor and “inventions for jousts and tournaments” (Southorn), as well as rare plants, including tobacco (Volpi 147).

Visconti held public offices in Milan and was “universally loved, & highly esteemed” (Morigia 549 and Google Translate). In addition, Visconti was a patron, friend, and protector of painters, musicians, poets and scientists, according to Mauro Pavesi, who wrote a dissertation on Visconti. Pavesi, however, noted that Visconti was little known to scholars outside of Milan (Pavesi 797).

## Striking Parallels

Lord Prospero Visconti and Lord Prospero in *The Tempest* were Italian noblemen of extensive learning who possessed libraries. In addition, Prospero Visconti was a collateral descendant of the lords of Milan whose descendants became the first three dukes of Milan, and the character Prospero *was* the Duke of Milan—the rightful duke of Milan. Prospero Visconti had one sibling, his brother Giovanni Paolo, and the character Prospero had one sibling, his brother, Antonio. Both Prosperos were famous in Milan and beloved by their countrymen.

## Is Prospero Visconti of Milan the Model for Lord Prospero of *The Tempest*?

Forty years after his initial discovery, Sir Ernest Gombrich published evidence even more suggestive that Prospero Visconti inspired Shakespeare's Prospero—a Latin poem addressed to Visconti by Giovanni Matteo Toscano in 1576.<sup>3</sup> In Gombrich's translation, Toscano described the Visconti Dukes of Milan as “no dynasty more renowned for the martial arts” when “Fortuna smiled on” them; then the wheel of fortune turned, and “villainy” carried “their realm into the abyss.”

Now since the wheel of the same fortuna has turned, it carried—Oh villainy!—their realm into the abyss. You, Prospero of the noble blood of the Dukes, serve the Muses, the most noble of activities. So, despite the constant turning and changing of the wheel of impious Fortuna she was not able to deprive you of your dignity. (Gombrich 188)

Evidently, “villainy” or a crime was perpetrated on the noble ancestors of Lord Prospero Visconti which ended their “realm” in Milan; Visconti's personal dignity, however, was maintained and compensated for by serving the Muses. Shakespeare's Lord Prospero, “The wronged Duke of Milan” (V.i), was deposed by the “foul play” of his “perfidious” and “false” brother, Antonio, and took refuge in study during his exile.

Although stopping short of calling Toscano's revelation about Visconti as the “clinching clue,” Gombrich believed it gave him “an edge over his competitors” as Shakespeare's inspiration.

The idea that the noble service of the Muses is equivalent in dignity to the exercise of ducal power seems to me more than a general *topos*. It is, of course, precisely what Shakespeare's Prospero says twice: ‘Me, poor man, my library was dukedom large enough’ and ‘volumes that I prize above my dukedom’. (Gombrich 187)

The specific “villainy” done to the Visconti dynasty and when it had occurred is unknown. When Toscano's poem was printed, over 125 years had passed since the last Visconti duke of Milan, Filippo Maria, had died. Many factions fought to succeed him since he had no male heir; what eventually transpired was a return to a republic. After three years, however, it collapsed, and Francesco Sforza, a successful military commander of mercenary armies (a “condottiero”) and the late duke's son-in-law, took power. In 1450, the city bestowed on Sforza the title, Duke of Milan, as his wife, Bianca Maria Visconti, was the late duke's only living child. It was very unusual—if not unprecedented—for the city to do this. The Holy Roman Emperor did not recognize the title for Sforza, but that came later with his son, Ludovico Sforza, nicknamed “The Moor.” The French king, Louis XII, later threw out the Moor, and claimed the duchy for France as he was the great-grandson of the first duke (Gian Galeazzo Visconti). For decades thereafter, power

<u>Prospero in <i>The Tempest</i></u>	<u>Prospero Visconti (1543/44–1592)</u>
first name Prospero	first name Prospero
Duke of Milan	Visconti family—former dukes of Milan
nobleman	Lord of Breme
Italian	Italian
values library	owned large library
studies liberal arts	studies liberal arts
famous in Milan	famous in Milan
universally loved	universally loved
one brother	one brother
deposed by villainy	Visconti dukedom lost by villainy

*Figure 2: Comparison of Lord Prospero in The Tempest with Lord Prospero Visconti of Milan.*

alternated between the Sforzas and the French, ending in 1535, when Milan was annexed into the Holy Roman Empire. During Prospero Visconti’s life-time, Philip II of Spain held the title Duke of Milan.

## Did Shakespeare Visit Milan?

If Lord Prospero in *The Tempest* was based on Lord Prospero Visconti, then the great author must have visited Milan since Visconti was relatively unknown outside the city. Literary evidence suggests that he did.

Shakespeare’s comedy, *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, opens with Valentine in Verona about to take a journey by water to Milan, yet they are supposedly landlocked cities. Shakespeare orthodoxy often note that this displayed Shakespeare’s ignorance of contemporary Italy. Richard Roe, however, in *The Shakespeare Guide to Italy* (2011), proved Shakespeare correct. Old maps demonstrate that the Adige River, which flows through Verona, was interconnected with the Po and Adda rivers via manmade canals and locks that reached the city of Milan (Roe 46–7). In addition, Catherine Hatinguais, who also researched the topic, concluded “that river traffic in Northern Italy, notably between Verona and Milan, was not only possible but intense, well organized and highly regulated” (Hatinguais 128). River travel was comfortable and safer than by land, as bandits roamed for prey on roads outside city walls (Shakespeare knew this too—when Valentine was banished from Milan, he was recruited as chief for a group of outlaws). By the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century, however, most of these canals had been filled in.

While in Milan, Valentine “Attends the emperor in his royal court” (I.iii), another “mistake” that orthodoxy accuses of Shakespeare, as Milan was ruled by a duke, not an emperor. The Duke of Milan, in fact, is a character in the play (Valentine falls in love with his daughter), yet “emperor” was mentioned

six times. There was a time, however, when an emperor's court was in Milan, as explained by Roe (Roe 68–9). In 1529 most of Italy came under Spanish protection with the Treaty of Cambrai. In 1533 Charles V, Holy Roman Emperor and King of Spain, was invited by the Duke of Milan to visit his city and to swear an oath of fealty to him. Great preparations were made weeks in advance for the emperor's visit. Traveling to “nearby” Milan at this time could be a singular opportunity of advancement for a young Veronese gentleman “to salute the Emperor” and to commend his “service to his will” (I.iii). Although Charles V's visit ended up lasting only a few days, Shakespeare knew this decades-old footnote of Milanese history, and incorporated it into his play.

Shakespeare also knew about “St. Gregory's Well” (IV.ii) in Milan, although it does not appear on maps of the era. Located just outside the city walls was a large open compound for quarantine called the Lazzaretto, which was enclosed by four walls. One wall faced the church of San Gregorio, as shown on a 1629 map (Roe 77). Roe deduced that “well” alluded to the churchyard's ever-expanding pits to bury those who had died in the Lazzaretto across the way during the 1575–76 plague. For this, it came to be known as “il Pozzo di San Gregorio”—“Pozzo” meaning “well.”

These three details of geography, local history, and a landmark known only to residents demonstrate Shakespeare's familiarity with Milan. Roe's book details more Italian knowledge displayed in other Shakespeare plays—yet no evidence exists that the presumed author, William Shakspeare of Stratford-upon-Avon, ever left England. One wonders if Prof. Kermode rejected Gombrecht's discovery about Prospero Visconti for this very reason.

## Did Oxford Visit Milan?

William Shakespeare was the pseudonym of Edward de Vere, 17<sup>th</sup> Earl of Oxford, the true Shakespeare—and Oxford spent about a year traveling throughout Italy. Did he visit Milan, hometown of Lord Prospero Visconti? Oxford wrote to Lord Burghley, “For fear of the Inquisition I dare not pass by Milan,” in a March 17, 1575 letter (Chiljan, *Letters and Poems* 17). Mark Anderson, however, noted in his biography of the Earl that an “English noble would have had no problem passing through the greater duchy; he wanted only to avoid entering the city gates” (Anderson 80). Later that year, on October 6, 1575, one of Oxford's bankers, Pasquino Spinola, reported to Lord Burghley that Oxford had arrived safely in Venice from Milan (Nelson 130). Another letter to Burghley from Francis Peyto, dated March 31, 1576, mentioned that Oxford had passed through Milan on his journey back to England (Nelson 134). These two contemporary reports prove that Oxford indeed visited the city of Milan. But did Oxford and Visconti meet?

As Visconti's learning, library, connoisseurship, and various collections were known in the environs of Milan, Oxford likely heard about him and possibly initiated a meeting. It is on record that Oxford visited the renowned German intellectual and educator, Johannes Sturm (1507–1589), known as Sturmius, in Strasbourg early in his grand tour. Visconti may also have wished to meet Oxford, as he had acquired a high reputation during his tour, especially when he issued an open challenge "to fight and combat with any whatsoever" at tournament sports "in the defense of his Prince and country" (Webbe).<sup>4</sup> In late March 1576, Duke Casimir offered Oxford a viewing of his 4,000-soldier army, an honor Oxford refused because he could not repay it.<sup>5</sup>

Despite Prospero Visconti's esteem during his lifetime, and his rich archives, historians have not paid much attention to him. His letters in the Munich archives were first transcribed and published in a German journal in 1902. Oxford is not named in them, but they do show that Oxford and Visconti's paths crossed. One Visconti letter from Milan is dated September 28, 1575; Oxford was there in late September/early October 1575 (Spinola's letter to



*Figure 3: Portrait of Edward de Vere, 17th Earl of Oxford, English School, 1581. Courtesy of Katherine Chiljan.*



Burghley). Visconti's letters from Milan dated January 31, 1576 and March 31, 1576 (Simonsfeld 355, 360–1) also indicate he was probably in town when Oxford passed through in late March 1576 (Peyto letter). But Oxford did not need to penetrate Milan's city gates to have visited Visconti, who had a residence in Breme, 37 miles southwest of Milan (Pavia province), and a villa in Ravello, on the Amalfi coast (Simonsfeld 434). Interestingly, Visconti built a palace at the site of his ancestral home in central Milan which was completed shortly before his death; although the interior was mostly destroyed during World War II (Giacomini 80), the façade still exists, on Via Lanzone.

The State Archive of Florence holds unpublished letters of Visconti, according to Mauro Pavesi. In a private email, Pavesi said he did not recall seeing Oxford's name during his Visconti research. In an article, Pavesi referred to a manuscript containing Visconti's letters to the Bavarian dukes which included his accounts of "parties, dances and receptions of the Lombard nobility" from 1569 to 1579 (Pavesi 801 and Google Translate); once in the Trivulzio Library in Milan, Manuscript 168 is now untraceable (it was missing in 1902). A concerted effort to find it could reveal new information about Oxford's 1575–76 Italian visit. The Bibliothèque Nationale also holds Visconti's letters, dated 1587–89, according to a 1905 publication.<sup>6</sup> Researchers with expertise in Italian, Latin and German (Visconti's correspondence with the Bavarian dukes) who wish to seek proof of an Oxford-Visconti meeting could discover direct evidence that they did meet in Italy.

## Was Prospero Modeled on Oxford?

If, as some orthodox scholars believe, Shakespeare's Prospero represented the great author, then why did he depict himself as a nobleman, an exile, a magician, and one obsessed with the liberal arts? Mr. Shakspere was definitely not a nobleman, not an exile, not interested in education or magic, and there is no evidence he visited Italy. Shakespeare's Lord Prospero could have been depicted as a simple wizard.

But these characteristics perfectly fit the 17<sup>th</sup> Earl of Oxford, a nobleman steeped in the liberal arts who did visit Italy; furthermore, he was "exiled" from the court of Queen Elizabeth I for two years (from 1581 to 1583) due to his extramarital love affair with one of her attendants, Anne Vavasour. As the additional characteristic of exile did not apply to Prospero Visconti, it appears that Oxford also infused himself into the character of Prospero. For affirmation, the Ogburns (Ogburn 548–50) cited this *Tempest* line:

PROSPERO  
know for certain  
That I am *Prospero*, and that very Duke  
Which was thrust forth of *Milan*... (V.i)

Prospero is “that very duke”—“very” a likely pun upon Oxford’s surname, Vere. Another *Tempest* line has Lord Prospero removing his “mantle” and saying, “Lie there, my art” (I.ii). This parallels an anecdote about William Cecil, Lord Burghley:

At night when he put off his gown, he used to say, *Lie there, Lord Treasurer*, and bidding adieu to all State-affairs, disposed himself to his quiet rest. (Fuller 269)

William Shakspeare, who died in 1616, would not know this as the anecdote was first published in 1642. Oxford, however, knew Burghley intimately, living in his London house as a minor from the age of 12, and later became his son-in-law at the age of 21.

*The Tempest* also shows influence of Oxford’s uncle, Arthur Golding, in his translation of Ovid’s *Metamorphosis*, one of Shakespeare’s favorite classical works. In *The Tempest* (V.i), Prospero addresses Nature:

PROSPERO

Ye Elves of hills, brooks, standing lakes & groves,  
And ye, that on the sands with printless foot  
Do chase the ebbing-*Neptune*, and do fly him  
When he comes back: (my emphasis)

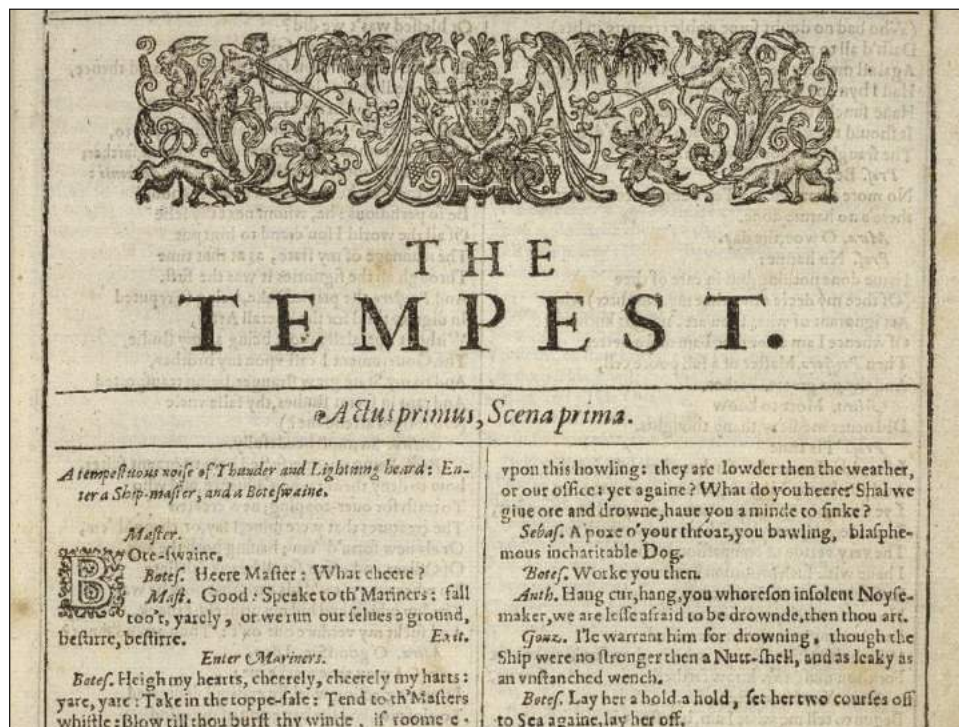


Figure 4: The *Tempest* title page, I.i, from the First Folio, 1623.

## Is Prospero Visconti of Milan the Model for Lord Prospero of *The Tempest*?

In Golding's translation of *Metamorphosis* (Book 7), a nearly exact phrase is used by Medea as she calls upon the elements to provide her with herbs for a magic potion to lengthen her father-in-law's life:

Ye Charms and Witchcrafts, & thou Earth which both with herb & weed  
Of mighty working furnishest the Wizards at their need:  
Ye Airs and winds: ye Elves of Hills, of Brooks, of Woods alone,  
Of standing Lakes, and of the Night approach ye every chone [crack].  
(my emphasis)

Golding worked on the translation when both he and Oxford resided at Lord Burghley's home, likely serving as young Oxford's Latin tutor. Many Oxfordian scholars believe that Oxford either assisted with Golding's translation or was the actual translator/versifier of the work (see Richard Waugaman, *The Oxfordian* 20). Shakespeare knew Medea's story, alluding to her in *The Merchant of Venice* (V.i):

JESSICA  
In such a night  
Medea gather'd the enchanted herbs  
That did renew old Aeson.

Besides their nobility, Lord Oxford and the character Lord Prospero were showmen. Oxford was a recognized playwright cited as "best for Comedy" (Meres 283 verso), sponsored two acting companies (Oxford's Boys and Oxford's Men), and held the lease to the Blackfriars theater. Character Prospero provided "revels" for his daughter and Prince Ferdinand in Act 4 of *The Tempest*. Through his creative spirit Ariel, the goddesses Iris, Ceres and Juno and various nymphs magically appear before them, speaking, singing and dancing—another Shakespearean "play within a play."

A bit of Dr. John Dee can also be found in Prospero, which even orthodox scholars such as Emma Smith, Professor of Shakespeare Studies at Oxford University, acknowledge, citing his interest in mathematics, astronomy, astrology, alchemy, and conversing with spirits through a medium (Smith); Shakespeare's Prospero was a deep scholar and magus who conversed with a spirit. Dee communicated with Oxford, having "his favorable letters" dated 1570, when Oxford was 20.<sup>7</sup> Their acquaintanceship may have inspired Oxford's enemies, Henry Howard and Charles Arundel, to accuse him of "conjuring" spirits (Nelson 58). A spirit mirror made of obsidian, believed to be Dr. Dee's, is on display at the British Library.

Like Shakespeare's Prospero, Dr. Dee valued his library, one of the largest private libraries in England, with over 3,000 printed books and 1,000 manuscripts. Interestingly, Dee was a showman himself: circa 1547, he staged a



comedy by Aristophanes at Trinity College, Cambridge; his special effects of a character riding on a gargantuan flying beetle were so believable that he was accused of sorcery.<sup>8</sup>

In summary, it appears that Shakespeare's character Lord Prospero was initially inspired by Lord Prospero Visconti, whose ancestors, through treachery, lost the dukedom of Milan; his foray into learning of every kind was compensation for this indignity. Both Prosperos maintained libraries, had one brother, were famous and beloved by their countrymen. The traits of learning and nobility in Shakespeare's Prospero, and being a magus, were also shared with Oxford—a learned patron of the arts and magus of the theater. And both the character and his creator experienced exile. A touch of the famous polymath, astrologer and advisor to Queen Elizabeth, Dr. John Dee, is also apparent. In contrast, William Shakspeare has no known acquaintance with Visconti, Oxford or Dee.

### *The Tempest's Composition Date*

When was *The Tempest* written? As with every Shakespeare play, orthodox scholars have no firm dating, but circa 1611 is usually cited, based upon a letter that discussed a 1609 shipwreck in Bermuda. *The Tempest* opens with a shipwreck, and "Bermoothes" is mentioned. Orthodoxy is fond of citing this letter, written by William Strachey in 1610, as Shakespeare's inspiration for the play perhaps because it postdates Oxford's 1604 death. The letter, however, was privately written and unknown until it was published in 1625, as noted by Prof. Roger Stritmatter and Lynne Kositsky—they refuted the theory that it influenced the play in *On the Date, Sources and Design of Shakespeare's The Tempest* (2013).

Literary evidence dates *The Tempest* far earlier than circa 1611. A direct allusion can be found in Sir Philip Sidney's literary treatise, *An Apology for Poetry* (a.k.a. *The Defense of Poesy*), which scholars maintain was written before 1583 (Sidney died in 1586). Sidney describes the play in a passage mocking the inadequacies of the theater for realistic scenery:

Now ye shall have three Ladies, walk to gather flowers, & then we must believe the stage to be a Garden. By & by, we hear news of shipwrack in the same place, and then we are to blame, if we accept it not for a Rock. Upon the back of that...

A shipwreck on Prospero's island opens *The Tempest*. Sidney continues:

Upon the back of that, comes out a hideous Monster, with fire and smoke, and then the miserable beholders [i.e., the audience], are bound to take it for a Cave.... (STC 22534, sig. K1, my emphases)

Who is the “hideous Monster with fire and smoke” who came out of a “Rock” or a “Cave” after a shipwreck? Who else but Caliban, who was called “monster” more than 40 times in *The Tempest*? Caliban is responsible for laying the fire for Prospero’s cell, thus explaining his appearance “with fire and smoke,” precisely as Sidney had described. Caliban’s abode is twice called a rock in the play: Caliban complains he is kept “In this hard rock” (I.ii), and Miranda says Caliban was “Deservedly confined into this rock” (I.ii). Living in a rock describes a cave.

## Marlowe’s *Dr. Faustus* and other *Tempest* Allusions

About five years after Sidney’s comment appeared Christopher Marlowe’s play, *Dr. Faustus* (circa 1588), which contains numerous parallels with *The Tempest*. The title character is a magician, like Prospero; unlike Prospero, who uses magic to reconcile with his enemies, Dr. Faustus uses magic to invoke the devil, and then makes a deal with him. At the end of the play, when devils come to escort Faustus to hell, Faustus renounces his magic and exclaims, “I’ll burn my books!” At the end of *The Tempest*, Prospero similarly exclaims that he will “abjure” his “rough magic,” break his staff, and “drown my book” (Forker 65). The two magi also conjure spirits to enact their wills, such as creating spectacles for others, and command them to be invisible to all but their masters (Lucking 158).

The illustration on the 1620 title page to *Dr. Faustus* shows how a magus was shown on stage: draped in a long robe, he holds a book in one hand, a staff in another, and stands in a magic circle. Similarly, stage directions in *The Tempest* note Prospero’s “magic robes” (V.i), and that six characters “all enter the circle which Prospero had made, and there stand charm’d” (V.i); Prospero’s books were mentioned several times, and his staff once.

The unusual *Tempest* phrase “foot it featly” (I.ii) was used in a song sung by Ariel to conjured “sprites” dancing on the beach; in 1589, “Footing it featly” (sig. A2 verso) described nymphs dancing near a stream in Thomas Lodge’s *Scillaes Metamorphosis* (Furness 170). Another *Tempest* phrase, “The mariners all under hatches stowed” (I.ii) was echoed in the anonymous fiction, *The Cobbler of Canterbury* (53)—“bestowed the Mariners under hatches”—published in 1590 (Cawley 693).

In April 1598 theater producer Philip Henslowe purchased a “robe for to go invisible” for the Lord Admiral’s Men (Greg 123). The New Variorum Edition of *The Tempest* noted this fact for the stage direction, “Ariel invisible playing and singing” (I.ii) (Furness 77); the editor evidently thought they were linked. Also in 1598 Ben Jonson’s comedy *Every Man in His Humor* was first staged, which included characters Prospero and Stephano, just as in *The Tempest* (these names were changed in the 1616 printed version); and in both plays, Stephano steals clothing.

A speech in *The Tragedy of Darius*, by William Alexander (later Earl of Stirling), is about “palaces” and “gorgeous halls” that fade away “in the air,” and all “scarcely leaves behind a token”:

KING DARIUS

...And let this worldly pomp our wits enchant.  
All fades, and scarcely leaves behind a token.  
Those golden Palaces, those gorgeous halls,  
With furniture superfluously fair:  
Those stately Courts, those sky-encount’ring walls  
Evanish [dissipate] all like vapors in the air.  
(IV.ii, my emphases)

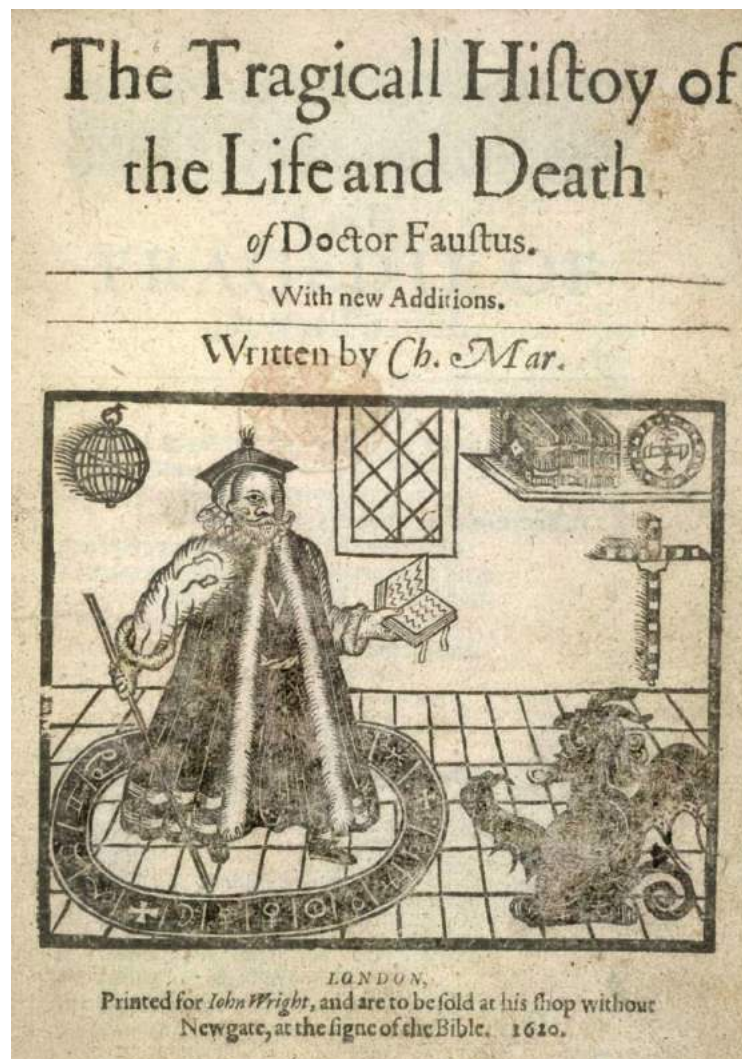


Figure 5: Dr. Faustus title page, by Christopher Marlowe.

## Is Prospero Visconti of Milan the Model for Lord Prospero of *The Tempest*?

Similarly, Prospero's "Revels" for Miranda and Ferdinand, which included "gorgeous palaces," melt "into thin air," leaving "not a rack behind" (Anders 139):

Our Revels now are ended: These our actors,  
(As I foretold you) were all Spirits and  
Are melted into Air, into thin Air,  
And like the baseless fabric of this vision,  
The Cloud-capp'd Towers, the gorgeous Palaces,  
The solemn Temples, the great Globe itself,  
Yea, all which it inherit, shall dissolve,  
And like this insubstantial Pageant faded,  
Leave not a rack behind: (4.1, my emphases)

*Darius* can be dated to no later than 1601, as Ben Jonson alluded to it in his comedy *Poetaster*, which was probably performed in spring of that year (Donaldson). Character Captain Tucca ordered his servants to "speak in King Darius's doleful strain" (III.i) in front of the actor, Histrio. Other Shakespeare phrases found in *Darius* include "the shadow of a dream" (IV.iii) from *Hamlet* (II.ii) (Stritmatter, Kositsky 106), and "sovereign salve" (III.i) from *Venus and Adonis* (line 45).

*Westward Ho*, a play first performed in late 1604, also alludes to the *Tempest*. The subplot is about a lord, only referred to as "Earl." Like Shakespeare's Lord Prospero, Earl summons spirits within a circle, which his servants gossip about:

SERVANT 1:

Does my Lord [i.e., Earl] mean to Conjure that he draws these  
strange Characters [?]

SERVANT 2:

He does: but we shall see neither the Spirit that rises, nor the  
Circle it rises in.

SERVANT 3:

'Twould make our hair stand up on end if we should, come fools  
come, meddle not with his matters, Lords may do anything. (IV.ii)

Stage directions in *The Tempest* mentioned Prospero's magic circle, into which the conjured spirit Ariel leads the shipwrecked characters; Ariel is invisible to them, accounting for Servant 2's comment in *Westward Ho* that he shall not see Earl's invoked spirit. Dramatists Thomas Dekker and John Webster

incorporated several clues that Earl was the 17<sup>th</sup> Earl of Oxford (Chiljan, *The Oxfordian* 21), thereby hinting at an association between him and the character Prospero.

These eight “too early” allusions to *The Tempest*, dating from circa 1583 to 1604, demonstrate the literary world’s familiarity with Shakespeare’s play many years or decades before orthodox scholarship believes it was written; William Shakspeare’s confining vital statistics make such recognition impossible.

*The Tempest* being first composed by 1583 fits the Earl of Oxford’s life as it relates to the character Prospero: at that time, Oxford was exiled from Queen Elizabeth’s court, had only one daughter (his second daughter, Bridget, was born in 1584), and he had known Dr. Dee for over a decade.

## Conclusions

Literary and documentary evidence strongly suggest that the great author, Shakespeare, who was the 17<sup>th</sup> Earl of Oxford, visited Milan. If so, then he would have certainly heard of Lord Prospero Visconti, a nobleman renowned in that city for his vast scholarship, his public service, his artistry in poetry and music, his library, and his varied collections. Shakespeare’s apparent knowledge of the Visconti family’s misfortune in losing the dukedom of Milan through villainy, and Lord Prospero Visconti’s compensation by immersing himself in the arts and sciences, likely inspired *The Tempest* character Lord Prospero, Duke of Milan, who had similar experiences. If Oxford met Visconti, then this knowledge would have been firsthand.

Perhaps Oxford even viewed at Visconti’s house the famous painting of birds that deceived real ones, as noted in Lomazzo’s book.<sup>9</sup> Interestingly, Oxford/Shakespeare wrote lines about real birds pecking at a painting of grapes in *Venus and Adonis*:<sup>10</sup>

Even as poor birds, deceived with painted grapes,  
Do surfeit by the eye and pine the maw... (lines 601–2)

Among the numerous fine goods that Visconti supplied the nobility were perfumed gloves (Verga 134); maybe Oxford acquired from him the pair he presented to a delighted Queen Elizabeth (Ward 129).

Besides Visconti, Oxford portrayed himself in the character Prospero, dropping a “very” name clue and including biographical details, especially his two-year exile from Queen Elizabeth’s court. And he was certainly a magician of

the theater. These two points were not applicable to Lord Prospero Visconti. The magical elements of robes, staff, books, and magic circle used by the character Prospero could have been knowledge that Oxford had acquired from Dr. John Dee, who delved into the supernatural, and with whom he was acquainted as early as 1570. Lord Prospero Visconti as the inspiration for Shakespeare's Lord Prospero adds to other instances of Shakespeare characters modeled upon real people, including Malvolio as Sir Christopher Hatton (*Twelfth Night*), Polonius as Lord Burghley (*Hamlet*), Dr. Caius as Dr. John Caius of Cambridge University (*Merry Wives of Windsor*), and Oxford himself as Prince Hamlet in *Hamlet*.



## Endnotes

1. The Langobards or Lombards were originally a Germanic people who ruled most of Italy from the 6<sup>th</sup> to 8<sup>th</sup> Centuries.
2. The medals are located in Berlin (Münzkabinett [Numismatic Collection], Staatliche Museen zu Berlin—Stiftung Preußischer Kulturbesitz), and in Milan (Gabinetto Numismatico e Medagliere, Castello Sforzesco).
3. See the Latin poem by Jo. Matthaeus Toscanus in *Carmina illustrium poetarum Italorum*, Paris, 1576, Book 2, 272.
4. Below is the full quote from Webbe's book, which was dedicated to Queen Elizabeth I.

One thing did greatly comfort me which I saw long since in Sicilia, in the city of Palermo, a thing worthy of memory, where the right honorable the Earl of Oxenford a famous man for Chivalry, at what time he tra-vailed into foreign countries, being then personally present, made there a challenge against all manner of persons whatsoever, and at all manner of weapons, as Tournaments, Barriers with horse and armor, to fight and combat with any whatsoever, in the defense of his Prince and country: for which he was very highly commended, and yet no man durst be so hardy to encounter with him, so that all Italy over, he is acknowledged ever since for the same, the only Chevalier and Noble man of England. This title they give unto him as worthily deserved.

5. This incident was mentioned in George Chapman's tragedy, *The Revenge of Bussy d'Ambois* (3.4), composed circa 1607 and published in 1613. Johan Casimir (1543–1592) was a German prince (son of Frederick III, Elector Palatine), and the Count Palatine of Simmern. The title duc d'Étampes was given to him by Henri III of France in 1576.
6. *Bibliothèque Nationale, Collections Manuscrites sur l'Histoire des Provinces de France*, ed. Philippe Lauer, vol. 1 (Bourgogne-Lorraine), Paris, 1905, 393. Visconti's letters are not reproduced in this book.



7. “The honorable Earl of Oxford, his favorable letters, anno 1570,” as quoted from Dee’s manuscript, *The Compendious Rehearsal of John Dee*. Oxford was named along with Queen Elizabeth I, King Edward VI, Lord Burghley, Sir Francis Walsingham, the Earl of Leicester, and Sir Christopher Hatton as evidence of Dee’s “credit and estimation in England.” The manuscript was “exhibited” to the queen on November 9, 1592, and first published in 1726 by Thomas Hearne in the appendix of *Johannis contratri & monachi Glastoniensis, Chronica*, vol. 2 (1726). See *Autobiographical Tracts of Dr. John Dee*, ed. James Crossley, 1851.
8. [www.bl.uk/collection-items/john-dee-is-accused-of-sorcery-after-staging-a-greek-play](http://www.bl.uk/collection-items/john-dee-is-accused-of-sorcery-after-staging-a-greek-play).
9. “The Baptism of Christ” by Cesare da Sesto, private collection, Palazzo Gallarati Scotti, Milan.
10. Most editors view these lines as an allusion to Zeuxis, an ancient Greek artist whose lifelike painting of grapes attracted real birds to it, as related in Pliny the Elder’s *Naturalis Historia*.

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Bronze medal of Prospero Visconti, circa 1582, Numismatic Collection, State Museums in Berlin, Prussian Cultural Heritage Foundation, 18225949. <https://nat.museum-digital.de/index.php?t=objekt&oges=553508>. Photo credit: Reinhard Saczewski, Creative Commons, [creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/)

Is Prospero Visconti of Milan the Model for Lord Prospero of *The Tempest*?



# *The Production of the First Folio Reconsidered*

by Gabriel Ready

**T**he folio edition *Mr. William Shakespeare's Comedies, Histories, & Tragedies* (hereafter, First Folio) has long attracted notoriety and aroused suspicions. For many there is still no plausible explanation to its inception. Orthodox scholars are unconvinced by the First Folio's preface stating that the players John Heminges and Henry Condell collected the plays without self-profit, believing instead that it was an elaborate commercial enterprise. Citing a near moratorium on new Shakespeare publications after 1604, J. Thomas Looney thought that the appearance in 1623 of a complete collection of Shakespeare plays has "elements of mysteriousness and secrecy" (359).

Charlton Ogburn Jr. guessed at what elements might be involved. Being the lodestar that he was, Ogburn in effect provided a vocabulary and framework for how post-Stratfordians would think about the publication for years to come. Ogburn fixated on what he called the "curious shortcomings" of the volume, asking "why are the imperfections of so great a book so many and some so gross?" Ogburn expressed doubts about the authority of the underlying copy used to print the First Folio and added:

A second reason for the textual failings of the Folio must be that however long the collection had been planned the actual production was rushed. A much better job could have been done with the materials available. Were the compilers fearful that the longer the work of



assembling and printing took the greater the danger would be of provoking a reaction at the highest level of the realm and of a bar to the publication? A guess as to the cause of haste, relying on our present information, can be only shot at in the dark. (239)

Ogburn's assertions about the tempo and quality of the printing of the First Folio, which he associated with the potential censoring of unpublished plays, were to be recycled again and again.

In the 1990s post-Stratfordian Peter Dickson developed the most convincing hypothesis to date, linking the appearance of the First Folio with the Spanish Match, a marriage proposal of King James' son Prince Charles and Infanta Maria Anna, the daughter of Philip III of Spain. Dickson's insights reverberated in the world of Shakespeare studies with bowdlerized versions soon appearing without acknowledgement in orthodox articles, including in the book *The Making of the First Folio* (2015), written by the UK's leading First Folio expert Emma Smith.

The Dickson hypothesis focuses on England's political environment of the 1620s that saw Henry de Vere, 18th Earl of Oxford (hereafter Oxford), Henry Wriothesley, 3rd Earl of Southampton, and the Herbert brothers William and Philip lead a faction opposed to the marriage negotiations between England and Spain. The Anglo-Spanish alliance was a two-decade-long foreign policy agreement that would have culminated in the Spanish Match had the terms of the marriage been satisfactorily met.

The First Folio was patronized by Oxford's in-laws, William and Philip Herbert, the Earls of Pembroke and Montgomery, the latter being married to Susan Vere and the former serving as Lord Chamberlain from 1615 to 1626. They, like Oxford, were among those leading the Protestant opposition to the impending Spanish Match, and resisting the rising influence at court of George Villiers, Duke of Buckingham, and the Spanish Ambassador to England, Count Gondomar. For his opposition to the Spanish Match, Oxford was imprisoned in the Tower of London from April 1622 to December 1623, which aligns with the dates of production of the First Folio almost exactly, February 1622 or later to November or December 1623.

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Like Ogburn before him, Dickson maintained there was a “sudden decision” and a “sudden rush to assemble and publish the Bard’s 36 dramas in a large folio” (116). Dickson linked a rush to assemble the collection with two potential dangers, the destruction of the plays and the death of the author’s son:

It may be that the rush to publish was simply an attempt to preserve the plays, given that the political climate indicated that more than [18<sup>th</sup> Earl] Oxford’s life could be lost if the Spanish Marriage became a reality. In other words, for the Protestant faction in England the stakes in this crisis could be that they feared—with good reason—that the days of Bloody Mary could be returning, and that many lives might be lost, along with many books and manuscripts. (Boyle 1)

Reporting on the Dickson hypothesis, the *Shakespeare Oxford Newsletter* emphasized that “the First Folio was rushed to completion” and that “the First Folio was full of errors, to a point of embarrassment” (Boyle 5).

Commenting on the Dickson hypothesis, Roger Stritmatter also focused on the speed and quality of production:

The printing of the folio was a sloppy, rushed job; to this day a small industry—which includes the past labors of Emily Clay Folger, Charlton Hinman, Edwin Elliott Willoughby<sup>1</sup> and other luminary scholars—is devoted to establishing a documentary record of folio publication anomalies. So bad is the folio typography that each copy exists in a unique state. There are literally hundreds, if not thousands, of errors in many copies. (112)

And the criticism appeared again two decades later, now familiar, by post-Stratfordian Christopher Haile:

It [First Folio] was horrendously full of typographical errors, with plentiful signs that the texts were still being edited during final production, such that every copy of the First Folio is slightly different. This latter point demonstrates that the book was printed before even the printers thought it was ready.... It seems reasonable to suppose that there was a crucial deadline, but no apparent reason for it... The question long unanswered is why they would wait so many years, and then in the final stages act in such blind haste. (222)

Repeating an assumption does not make the assumption true. Appearing in highly regarded contributions to post-Stratfordian literature, the above arguments are awash with unfounded and even erroneous notions about the printing of the First Folio and the practices of hand-press printing of Early Modern books in general. The catalogue of assumptions, most of

them implied, includes the following: the project was put on an advanced schedule (Ogburn, Dickson, Boyle, Stritmatter, Haile); printing by the pressmen was more hastily executed than the norm (Dickson, Boyle, Stritmatter, Haile); the First Folio has more typographical errors than the norm (Ogburn, Boyle, Stritmatter, Haile); the decision to begin printing was sudden (Dickson, Haile); the printer's copy for the First Folio was poorly edited (Ogburn, Haile); the First Folio was printed from unauthoritative underlying copy (Ogburn); and, that every copy being unique is bibliographic evidence that the printing was botched (Stritmatter, Haile).

This paper sets out to examine the above assumptions, particularly the claim that there were more typographic errors in the First Folio than there ought to be, and that these were caused by excessive haste in the book's production by Isaac Jaggard and his workers. In other words, was the printing of the First Folio poorly executed by the standards of its time? Can the typographic errors be blamed on an overly harried print shop that was trying to meet an urgent deadline? After considering these questions, a course correction to the Dickson hypothesis is presented.

## Printing Timeline of the First Folio

Charlton Hinman's *Printing and Proof-Reading of the First Folio of Shakespeare* (1963) is unambiguous on the timeline of production and the management of Jaggard's resources concerning the two-page formes. In hand-press printing, a forme is the locked-up group of type set inside a chase that prints one side of a sheet of paper and is the basic unit of production, wherein the number of compositors assigned can reveal the work rate and the book's relative priority among other jobs. Regarding optimal capacity, Hinman maintained that the First Folio could have been delivered in less than a year if compositors worked simultaneously on groups of the formes (1:342). It took almost twice as long, some 21 or 22 months to print the First Folio, starting between February and May 1622 and ending in November or December 1623 (1:346).

The decision to use only one printing house is revealing. The First Folio could have been printed sooner had the publishing agents used other printing establishments. Hinman summarizes one of the challenges of printing:

Presswork capacity, because it was so strictly limited, was the real bottleneck of English printing at this time. Except for the King's Printer, none of the Master Printers of the Stationers' Company (some twenty-two in 1623) was allowed more than two presses, a number of them being permitted only one. Hence presses were kept busy, and we may be sure that Jaggard saw to it that his two presses were kept fully occupied during the printing of the Folio. (1:40)

The bottleneck meant some publishers used more than one printer, as was the case for the Beaumont and Fletcher Folio (1647), whose publisher Humphrey Moseley put production on an advanced schedule by having seven different establishments manufacture the volume (Turner “The Printers”). Hinman’s successor as folio chief at the Folger Shakespeare Library, Peter Blayney, in his 2018 George Kiddell Lecture on the History of the Book (“How Many Printers Does it take to Change a Liturgy: The Printing of the Revised *Book of Common Prayer* in 1559”) outlines how 11 different printers shouldered the work for what was truly an urgent project.

Using only one establishment, the printing of the First Folio can only be described as conservative and prolonged. Hinman attributed the overall slow production to two factors: a large number of formes were set wholly by one compositor (168 of the total 441 formes, or more than a third) and work was performed on other projects. Hypothetically, progress at optimum speed benefited from typesetting by two compositors, and it was even possible to have simultaneous setting by three compositors on groups of formes, a rare composition practice for the First Folio (2:520 footnote; Blayney “Introduction” xxxiii).

From the start, there was little sense of urgency and the printing “got off to a decidedly slow start” (Hinman 2:519). After printing the first plays of the Comedies section, *The Tempest*, *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* and *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, production slowed in late spring or early summer 1622 because Jaggard was finishing Thomas Wilson’s *Christian Dictionary*, completed before *Measure for Measure*, between quires E and F. Printing was also interrupted to work on Augustine Vincent’s *Discovery of Errors*, which was finished at the same time as *Richard II* (quire c) was being printed. Not only were compositors working concurrently on different projects, there was one long interval when work on the Shakespeare volume was suspended altogether. A major interruption occurred “roughly from 15 July through 30 September” of 1622 so they could print William Burton’s *The Description of Leicestershire*, a folio of 88 sheets (2:520).

The work rate of one project cannot be examined in isolation from others. The printer’s goal was to achieve balance in composition and presswork across multiple concurrent projects.<sup>2</sup> Jaggard had two and sometimes as many as four books in production at any one time; three folios were in production in 1622 when Burton’s *Leicestershire* in folio was deemed a priority and resources diverted to that end. In addition to the larger books, there was day-to-day job work, the printing of ephemera such as ordinances, playbills, and indulgences. Having a mix of small and large work orders was essential in balancing resources and satisfying the diverse demands of an increasingly literate public. For example, there was the concurrent printing of *Cymbeline*, or quire aaa, and *The ‘Heralds’ Visitation Summons* (2:320–1). Concurrent

printing and staggering the workflow also provided Jaggard with more predictable income (Werner 24, 42).

Optimal productivity on the volume was achieved during relatively modest intervals when Jaggard had two or more compositors working on groups of formes drawn from different plays, especially during the spring of 1623—the Tragedies section when compositor E joined compositors A and B. Though the variation in work rate gives the impression of unpredictability, I suspect the uptick in tempo is linked to the evolution of the Spanish Match negotiations as, precisely at this time, England’s leaders believed that the return of Prince Charles from Madrid with the Spanish Infanta was imminent. Predictably, there was almost a standstill after printing *Othello* (quire tt) later in the summer of 1623 as the prospects of the marriage floundered.

To summarize Hinman’s findings, it was slow at the beginning in late spring 1622 and slow in fall 1623, and there were some slow periods in between, including a major break in production that lasted approximately 8 to 10 weeks. Hinman speculated that some of these interruptions were caused by wrangling over copyright and last-minute tracking down of misplaced copy.

In addition to the protracted timeline, there is textual evidence refuting the argument that the publishing agents acted unexpectedly or suddenly, that there was a deadline requiring them to submit printer’s copy prematurely. In fact, the prolonged timeline likely derived in part from the high quality of the printer’s copy that was prepared for setting type.<sup>3</sup> Printing from a previously published work was the more expedient approach because, compared to working with a manuscript (Gaskell 41), it was much easier to cast-off copy and it improved compositor efficiency.<sup>4</sup>

Jaggard and company had at their disposal 18 previously printed plays, however, they did not set type from all of them. Only 11 quartos were used as printer’s copy.<sup>5</sup> The rejection of seven quartos (*Henry V*, 2 *Henry VI*, 3 *Henry VI*, *Merry Wives of Windsor*, *Hamlet*, 2 *Henry IV*, *Othello*) stands as incontrovertible evidence against the idea of an unexpected sprint to print. If the Oxford/Pembroke/Southampton faction were truly an impatient group or believed that someone’s life hung in the balance, they could have directed Jaggard to do a straightforward reprint of “good” quartos such as Q2 *Hamlet* (1604) or a recently published Q1 *Othello* (1622), and no one would be the wiser. After all, reprints are exactly what printers did to achieve greater efficiency and profit. That is not what happened. The Folio texts of *Hamlet* and *Othello* were printed from manuscript, not from the quartos.

Moreover, when a quarto was selected for printer’s copy, the editors insisted on recovering variant readings by consulting other authoritative sources, such as theatrical manuscripts.<sup>6</sup> In other words, no play in the First Folio is a simple reprint of an earlier printed text. The editors were uncompromising, as

every one of the 11 quartos used for printer's copy is believed to have been cross-referenced and annotated by other authoritative sources. Three examples of printer's copy using quartos demonstrate the lengths the editors were willing to go to achieve what they felt was the highest possible authority (not to be confused with authorial intention)<sup>7</sup>: *1 Henry IV* Q6 (1613) annotated from a literary transcript (Wells and Taylor 329); *Richard III* Q3 (1602) and Q6 (1622) interleaved, consulting a transcript of a holograph (229); *Much Ado About Nothing* Q1 (1600) consulting a theater playbook or prompt book (371). Many minor improvements were made to the quartos that were used as printer's copy, and some were substantive. For example, the Folio text has scenes added from manuscripts to the otherwise good quartos of *Titus Andronicus* (fly scene) and *Richard II* (deposition scene).<sup>8</sup>

Of the manuscripts used as printer's copy for the remaining 25 plays, the subject is too large and complex to cover in detail in this paper, though two general observations are worth noting. First, there are no surviving pre-1623 Shakespeare manuscript exemplars. Second, the nature of theatrical-based manuscripts is infinitely more varied than previously thought. Textual scholars find themselves at odds to determine with certainty the type of printer's copy that derives from the manuscript medium. If the handling of the quartos is indicative of the overall editorial program, and there is no reason to believe otherwise, it would support those claims of a maximal approach—the manuscripts were meticulously prepared by editors and scribes using only the most authoritative sources. Such an editorial program directly contradicts arguments made by Ogburn and Haile that the underlying copy was shoddily prepared.

Perhaps no greater validation of the editing of the First Folio is needed than the fact that the printer of the Second Folio (1632), Thomas Cotes, used Jaggard's volume as printer's copy without cross-referencing it with other sources. When making his corrections of the typographic errors in Jaggard's folio (at the same time adding his own errors), he saw no need to consult the quartos or manuscripts. Cotes knew that the First Folio text was authoritative, based on careful editing and reliable sources.<sup>9</sup>

Thus, on the overall timeline of production there is no justification to the argument that the project was on an advanced schedule. Only the best underlying copy was prepared, even though the publishers could have easily used good quartos for reprint, thereby shortening the schedule at two critical points—at the editorial stage before copy is given to Jaggard and at the compositional stage (i.e., casting off). Only a single printing establishment was used even though London had 20 other print houses perfectly capable of sharing the workload. A third of the formes was set by one compositor when three compositors working on groups of formes would have significantly increased overall productivity. There was delay after delay as other projects, large and small, were taking precedence over the First Folio. Though the



publishing agents had a deadline in mind, their book was not required before it was delivered in December 1623. The First Folio could have been delivered sooner, and given the variety of options available, a lot sooner.

## Errors and Other Imperfections

If there was no urgency, why are there so many errors? Do the typographic irregularities and other imperfections in the First Folio stem from gross incompetence? Was the printing poorly executed compared to Jaggard's other books and compared to the standards of the Stationers' Company in general?

It is tempting to blame the printing house. Isaac and William Jaggard were publicly criticized on numerous occasions for their work. The irony is that the most urgent priority for them during the printing of the First Folio was a book about errors, Vincent's *Discovery of Errors* (Hinman 1:335; Blayney *The First Folio* 5). The Jaggards, son Isaac and father William, were in a public dispute with the York Herald, Ralph Brooke, whose new edition was to be released correcting a book that the Jaggards had printed for him in 1619. Brooke had blamed the Jaggards for the errata in his earlier edition and the Jaggards took umbrage and joined forces with Vincent to quickly print *Discovery*, showing all the other errors that Brooke had made.

Brooke was not alone in his grievances. Cleric and author Edward Topsell also criticized the senior Jaggard for allowing so many errors in his *History of Four-footed Beasts* (1607), and then in 1612 playwright Thomas Heywood expressed his displeasure at the "infinite faults" in his book *Britain's Troy*, also printed by the Jaggard establishment (Willoughby 61–2).

No sooner do we realize that the First Folio is not atypical in the Jaggards' oeuvre, it becomes equally clear that printers from the era were universally criticized for like offenses. The Jaggards were by no means outliers.<sup>10</sup> Indeed, the battle between printers and writers took place throughout the 17th Century, a subject expounded on at length by bibliographer David McKitterick in his magnum opus *Print, Manuscript and the Search for Order* (2003), especially in chapters four, "House of Errors," and five, "Perfect and Imperfect."

Not mentioned in McKitterick's account are two other collections of English plays published in the 17<sup>th</sup> Century. The folio editions of Ben Jonson and of Francis Beaumont and John Fletcher were also the subject of denigration. In the preface to the Beaumont and Fletcher Folio (1647) Moseley issued an apology to its purchasers: "For literal Errours committed by the Printer, 'tis the fashion to aske pardon." The point is that there was a universal anxiety over printing errors, an anxiety that was based on the realities of hand-press printing.

When considering the question of standardization in the Early Modern period, one might think of the press device of the 16<sup>th</sup> Century Venetian printer Aldine, which features a dolphin and an anchor (Figure 1). The dolphin symbolizes speed of thought and the anchor stability. The emblem came with a saying, *Festina Lente*, meaning “hasten slowly” or “make haste slowly.” The haste was partially in reference to the speed of copying relative to scribal culture. The printing press with movable type was much faster in making copies compared to manuscript reproduction, where copies were made by scribes. In the beginning, hand presses were considered a mechanical wonder of efficiency. But the quality of the printed text was heavily dependent on the attention of pressmen, particularly compositors and proofreaders. All English printers were intimately familiar with the sentiment “make haste slowly.”

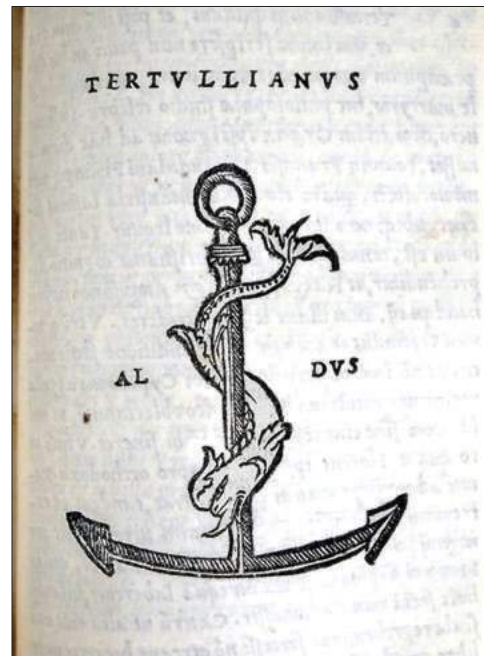


Figure 1. Aldine press device. PA6446 A2 1501 Cage title page; image from The Col-  
lation, Folger Shakespeare Library domain.

In the hand-press era, proofreading occurred at a frenetic tempo. There were two distinct phases of proofing and both were subject to time pressures. Using sub-optimal sheets of paper, there was the revising of an initial pull, called a trial proof or first proof, for the correcting of major errors. First-proofing was executed, typically by a compositor and a corrector, before a print run was underway and might involve consulting of printer's copy. This first phase of proofing precedes the press variant, which means that the most important of the two phases of proofreading in the First Folio was completely invisible to Hinman.

When a clean proof was eventually taken from the main press, the print run commenced. The corrector could not linger on the clean proof because the pressmen might, in the meantime, print a hundred sheets or more; the longer the corrector was at his task, the fewer copies that would contain the corrected state of the forme. Jonson's *Works* (1616), printed by William Stansby, “show an unusually high proportion of unfinished proofing, including eight instances where over one-third of the copies of a page exist in uncorrected

form. Assuming a production run of 750 copies... indicates that on occasion between 200 and 300 sheets were printed between the initial and final stage of correction” (Gant 44). *Works* is an excellent example of the printing getting ahead of the proofing.

To make matters worse, for most hand-pressed books of the era, including the First Folio, the corrector did not consult the printer’s copy for revisions to the fair proof (Gaskell 352–3). This fact explains why stop-press changes were conducted only for glaring visual imperfections (Werner 19). When the corrector was finally ready with his changes marked on the fair proof, the pressmen would stop the run and proceed to unlock the forme so that they could make those changes. Even the task of unlocking the forme and loosening the quoins and wedges to adjust the metal type was risky because the workers were liable to introduce new errors into the text, a common problem in the First Folio. The proofreading process also had to take into account that there was a limited number of type in the cases that could be locked up in formes, left “standing”<sup>11</sup>—another critical point for printers balancing *festina* (haste) and *lente* (slow), a *running* press and *standing* type.

Whether it was the Aldine Press in Venice or Jaggard’s in London, from Brussels to Antwerp, Leipzig to Cologne, Rouen to Rome, proofing was an uneven business that resulted in a plethora of errors. Authors everywhere vented their displeasure. Unashamed, some printers and publishers even went so far as to explicitly ask readers to amend the mistakes they discovered.

Humanists who looked for the utmost fidelity in the printed word, such as the Dutch philosopher Erasmus, were alarmed that not all copies of an edition were the same (McKitterick 111). Printers, including Jaggard, did not discard incorrect sheets “because paper was too expensive to waste for small errors” (Werner 19). Thus, every copy of an Early Modern volume consists of a random distribution of correct and uncorrected sheets, and that is why all copies of an early modern publication are unique, even copies of the same edition (Gaskell 354; McKitterick 9, 121). Smith observes, “we tend to think that the printing press creates hundreds of identical printed books, but that is not actually the case in the hand-press period”<sup>12</sup> (Smith 156–7). The uniqueness of each copy of the First Folio reflects common hand-press print practices rather than the quality of the production, as Stritmatter and Haile erroneously imply.

Three decades after *Printing and Proof-Reading*, Blayney took stock of Hinman’s contribution to bibliography, finding it unsurpassed on the reconstruction of the timeline of a single edition and the workflow of concurrent projects. However, he points out that Hinman’s findings on proofreading are “entirely without foundation” because Hinman mistakenly assumed that the First Folio did not undergo a first-proof phase for the correcting of textual

errors of greater editorial substance (Blayney, Introduction, xxxi).<sup>13</sup> In the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, at the same time when the Folger's collection of First Folios was being made more accessible, there was an uproar about press variants and the typographic irregularities that such a concentrated collection could reveal. Hinman identified around 500 press variants using a machine he invented, the Hinman Collator. While the variants helped him determine exactly when metal types were being used and the order of formes, leading to his most important discoveries (e.g., timeline, concurrent printing), he exaggerated the importance of typographic differences the machine detected and overestimated the role played by stop-press changes, which he called stop-press corrections. Hinman overlooked the critical role of the first-proof phase and did not realize that the problems deriving from working by formes was common to all books of the period.

The reality was that Jaggard conducted his business in earnest when handling the printer's copy that was delivered to his shop. If the First Folio text is not as precise as we would wish, it deserves praise for its accuracy. Despite its error rate and inconsistencies in presentation (i.e., pagination, scene and act divisions, *dramatis personae*), the lapses in printing had minimal impact on the integrity of the text. According to Blayney, there are "at most five" textual variants that would conceivably affect editorial procedure today (xxxii).

For all these reasons, we can appreciate why, in his English edition of Boccaccio's *Decameron* printed in 1620, Jaggard wrote that typographic errors are a "common infirmity" (Willoughby 70). He was well aware of the infelicities of textual transmission and sincerely regretted the errata in his books. The error-riddled books that his establishment produced over many years, and likewise those produced by other members of the guild, suggest that the quality found wanting in the First Folio is quite unrelated to the Dickson hypothesis.

## Shakespeare's Orphans and the Catholic Threat

The imprisonment of the author's son during the printing of the First Folio is of vital interest to Oxfordians. The connection cannot be coincidental. A clarification about the events in the year of 1622 is required, however. Because the exact start date is unknown, it cannot be said with certainty that Oxford was put into prison "after" printing began. Printing began anywhere between February and May 1622, whereas Oxford was put into the Tower at the beginning of April.

Was Oxford's life in jeopardy during the printing of the First Folio? It is difficult to answer this question because there are conflicting contemporary accounts. A letter written by Gondomar, one of the architects of the Spanish

Match, to the King of Spain dated 16 May 1622, draws an ominous picture:

In the letter of April 1, I said to your Majesty how the King removed the Earl of Oxford as commander in chief of the armada in the Strait [the English fleet in the Channel] because I told him to, because he [Oxford] was partial to the Dutch, and also because of the way Oxford was bad mouthing the King and me. He spoke even to the point of saying that it was a miserable situation that had reduced England's stature because the people had to tolerate a King who had given the Pope everything spiritual; and everything temporal to the King of Spain. I told King James to arrest this man and put him in the Tower in a narrow cell so that no one can speak to him. I have a strong desire to cut off his head because he is an extremely malicious person and has followers. And he is the second ranking Earl in England, and he and his followers are committed to the Puritan Faction with great passion and to the faction of the Count of the Palatinate against the service of the Emperor and your Majesty. (*The Shakespeare Oxford Newsletter*, Summer 1998, translation by Dr. Juan Manuel Perez of the Hispanic Division of the Library of Congress)

This is an ambassador's letter, a genre well-known for self-flattery and even bending the facts.

It is true that Gondomar was close to King James, and they shared mutual interests that included books (Gondomar's library was renowned). Importantly, Gondomar played a key role in the re-instatement 15 years later of Walter Raleigh's 1603 execution order. Thus, an evident parallel with Oxford cannot be dismissed. What was unfortunate for the English was that Gondomar tended to overstate his authority in Spain. Though he was a very influential figure in London—something the Protestant faction recoiled at, thereby pushing James even closer to Gondomar and Spain—he was an inconsequential, marginal figure in Spanish affairs who stood far from the inner circle of Madrid's powerbrokers (Redworth 52). Gondomar had ambitions to rise in the Spanish nobility and to win respect in the eyes of his countrymen, and the Spanish Match was his gambit. He had convinced himself that there were more Catholics in England than was the case, and that essentially England was ripe for Rome's manipulation. Gondomar's portrayal of himself to his King as directing the will of the English King is rich material. Probably too rich. The letter should not be taken at face value.

One detail of Gondomar's letter is highly improbable: the narrow cell. It is known that prisoners in the Tower had different experiences depending on their rank, from the lavish to the lethal. Wealthy and politically influential inmates such as the 18<sup>th</sup> Earl of Oxford, the "second ranking Earl in England," might be held in relative comfort, deprived only of their freedom.

High ranking inmates were known to be allowed out for hunting, banqueting, and shopping trips. Some were even given the luxury of servants.

It comes as no surprise then that other contemporaneous letters reveal a different aspect of Oxford's life in the Tower. In one dated 21 March 1623, London gentleman and political moderate John Chamberlain references a rumor suggesting that Oxford will soon be released so that he could command a flotilla:

but now it is given out he [Oxford] may chance be general of the fleet that goes to fetch the Prince and the Infanta. But there will be somewhat ado to furnish out that small fleet of ten or twelve ships, as well in regard of other wants as specially of mariners which absent and hide themselves out of the way (whether it be for the bad payment or other ill usage I know not), so that there have been two proclamations of late to call them home from foreign services, and to find them out that lie. (Chamberlain 489)

It is a fascinating juxtaposition that, during the first phase of printing, Oxford is allegedly in danger of losing his head (Gondomar's account) but when printing is more than halfway complete, he could be promoted to command a flotilla escorting the next King of England and the new bride back from Spain (Chamberlain's account).

I think the Chamberlain letter is as revealing as Gondomar's. Commanding a flotilla would have been a tremendously costly office. Oxford's political enemy, the Duke of Buckingham, would effectively be threatening him with something worse than confinement in the luxury apartments of the Tower. Oxford could not refuse a summons to host Charles and the Infanta, an expensive junket that would have driven him to penury while forcing him to acknowledge the Spanish Match. It was these types of embassies—where “there will be somewhat ado to furnish out that small fleet of ten or twelve ships”—that could put an estate in dire financial straits for years.<sup>14</sup> Buckingham's objective was probably aimed at humiliating a political enemy while abusing the financial assets of an ancient seat.

In a follow-up letter dated 19 April 1623, Chamberlain writes that Oxford is still waiting for Buckingham to “come or send.” In the meantime, Chamberlain observes that Oxford spends his time negotiating his marriage contract with Lady Diana Cecil, the daughter of William Cecil, 2nd Earl of Exeter. Clearly, Oxford is talking to friends during his imprisonment, contrary to the Gondomar account. With little reason to bend the facts, Chamberlain gives no impression of a life in peril (489–92).

There is also a second potential danger that was linked with the erroneous assumption of an advanced printing schedule. Like Ogburn before him,



Dickson imagined that the First Folio may have been hurriedly printed because the Oxford/Pembroke families feared that the 18 unpublished Shakespeare plays might eventually be censored or banned under a new regime. Dickson writes that there was a “great fear of a possible return to Catholicism in a top-down fashion and that the cultural and literary heritage of the Henrician-Elizabethan era was slipping away in the face of a ‘creeping Catholicism’ associated in the public mind with King James’ pro-Spanish foreign policy and plans for a dynastic union with that nation” (116). It is difficult to fathom that there was a fear that Catholics would suppress plays that have evident Catholic sympathies—in fact, this is one of the conditions identified by Looney when creating his profile of the author of Shakespeare’s works. That said, the plays were intentionally written to be unequivocally fluid regarding religion.

While confessional politics frame the cultural context of the First Folio, faith is not a master key to unlocking the mysteries behind this element of the authorship question. The folio volume was not an unyielding, major political statement, let alone an article of faith. Also, it was not a sudden, rash act of impetuosity, or an act of political extremism as was, perhaps, the more pointed publication of the quarto *Othello* in 1622, sponsored by the more radical Earl of Derby (Stritmatter *Small*, 29–30). It was a many-sided production that effectively concealed for future readers its intersecting political interests and symbolic associations, which stands in stark contrast with the polarizing books published during the Spanish Match period. Thanks to a bleached complexion, orthodox experts continue to elide the book’s cultural context. At a time when the country was deeply divided and politically charged, its production was something different, the result of compromise leavened by ecumenical humanism.

What cannot be overlooked is that the moratorium on publishing new Shakespeare plays between 1604 and 1623 stems from those who controlled the plays, the “Grand Possessors.” The preface of the quarto of *Troilus and Cressida* in 1609 and a decree issued by the Lord Chamberlain in 1619 indicate that the Oxford/Pembroke families were responsible for suppressing plays until a more ambitious publication could be realized. If plays such as *The Tempest* or *Macbeth* never saw the light of day, an argument could be made that the guilty party was Protestant in faith rather than Catholic.

Putting religion aside, publishing a complete works of Shakespeare could not have been orchestrated to upset the Crown and its pro-Spanish supporters. The First Folio was advertised at the Frankfurt book fair as early as October 1622. The catalogue mentions “Playes, written by M. *William Shakespeare*, all in one volume, printed by *Isaack Iaggard*, in fol.” Frankfurt was the center of the European book trade, the first *Frankfurter Buchmesse* being held by local booksellers in 1454, soon after Johannes Gutenberg had developed printing in movable type.

The bibliophile King James would not let the opportunity pass. His very own official printer John Bill (the King's Printer) translated the *Mess-Katalog* under the title of *Catalogus uniuersalis pro nundinijs Francofurtensibus* that contained an appendix of English works called "A Catalogue of such Bookes as have been published, and (by authoritie) printed in English, since the last Vernall Mart, which in Aprill 1622. Till this present October 1622" (Figures 2 and 3; see also Greg 3–4 and Hinman 1:334–7). While the dates have commanded critical attention, leading some such as Ogburn to erroneously believe there

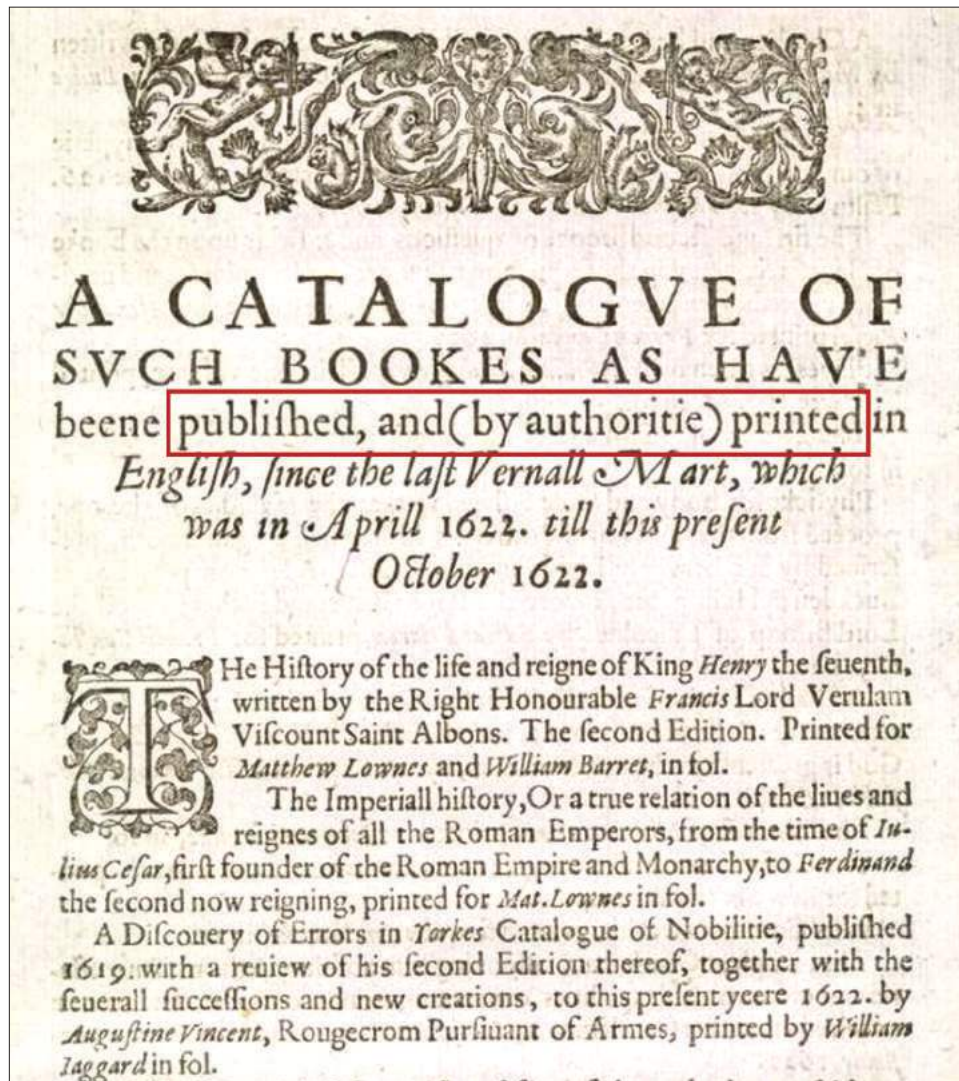


Figure 2: *Ashm. 1057(14), fol.D4 recto* image made available by Bodleian Libraries, Oxford University, under a CC BY-SA 4.0 license. Reproduced online at Shakespeare Documented, a Folger Shakespeare Library domain.

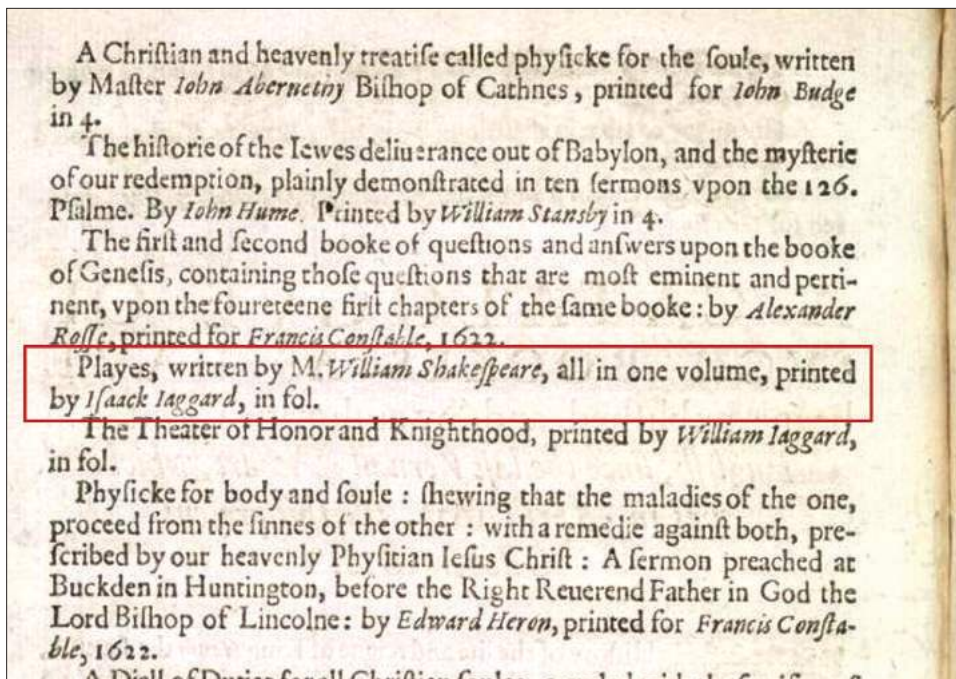


Figure 3: *Ashm. 1057(14), fol. D4 verso image made available by Bodleian Libraries, Oxford University, under a CC BY-SA 4.0 license. Reproduced online at Shakespeare Documented, a Folger Shakespeare Library domain.*

was a pressing deadline, the consensus today is that the advertisement was simply advance publicity. Indeed, several of the books advertised there were published much later than October 1622.

On 8 November 1623, Edward Blount and Isaac Jaggard entered by the authority of “Master Doctor WORRALL and Master Cole” in the Stationers’ Register their copyrights to the First Folio plays that had not been previously registered. Scholars have always found it more than a bit odd that Blount and Jaggard waited until the end of printing before getting a license to print. Obtaining a license after printing was atypical. The advance publicity in Frankfurt demonstrates, however, the granting of a license by the wardens Worrall and Cole was a mere formality. According to the King’s Printer a whole year earlier, the publication was already permitted “by authoritie,” arguably from the highest level of the realm.

## Discussion and Conclusions

The First Folio was an authorized collection of Edward de Vere’s plays based on underlying copies of the highest authority and prepared over many years



with patient care involving numerous interlocutors. The overall design was ambitious, the decision to begin printing calculated, and the final assembling of plays prolonged. The production schedule itself was erratic, with more sluggish periods than rapid ones. The great number of typographic irregularities was commonplace and are what we would expect given the textual challenges facing Jaggard's workers. All these bibliographic realities conflict with the picture Ogburn invoked and that the Dickson hypothesis promoted.

Though a conclusion can be reached on issues related to the practical elements of production, there remains the difficult question of why the author's son was in the Tower for the duration of printing. An account would require speculation and invite rebuke. That the First Folio and the imprisonment of Oxford are linked seems obvious to many but not all.

A cursory overview of the Oxfordian theory is instructive. The plays were written by a prominent courtier and originally performed in an intimate setting at court during the reign of Queen Elizabeth. Then, over a period of time, the plays were refashioned for public consumption. The transmission of the text from private audience to public fair was when the Crown became an integral partner in the Shakespeare project, a cost to the treasury that would eventually total £18,000.<sup>15</sup> This was a sizable investment that King James also supported. Did the Crown expect something in return that would go beyond the adulation of ancient lineages and promoting an English dynastic mythology? The terms of Edward de Vere's £1,000 non-accountable annuity could be twisted into a *de facto* proprietary claim. In a word, the Crown might say it owned the Shakespeare plays.

The Oxford family and their surrogates, the Incomparable Brethren the Herberts, had a hereditary claim, an antecedent of modern copyright laws that encompass moral rights aimed at protecting the integrity of the author's work.<sup>16</sup> The plays came under the authority of the Lord Chamberlain, William Herbert 3<sup>rd</sup> Earl of Pembroke, and were in the family's possession via Edward de Vere's daughter Susan. In a word, the Oxford/Pembroke families controlled the Shakespeare plays.

The above sketch of who owned and who controlled the plays is incomplete. The relationship would have been viewed rather differently, through the lens of royal service and royal prerogative, interwoven in the obscure language of a Privy Seal Warrant Dormant. Simply put, Edward de Vere was not contractually obligated to deliver marketing products. It was not a commercial enterprise. It would be more accurate to describe the plays as a gift presented to Queen Elizabeth and her Court as part of the government's "policy of plays" (according to Thomas Nashe in 1592), whereas the annuity was a reward.

The plays and the annuity are two sides of what became a sophisticated ritualized exchange aimed at maintaining social bonds and everything that entails: honor, degree, liberty, and order. A bibliographic clue in the First Folio sheds light on the problem. If a reader is encouraged to open the volume at the halfway point, they will notice a typographic oddity, or what one might call an error.<sup>17</sup> The book was designed so that, when it was opened at the middle for presentation, a particular passage would be prominently featured. Quire gg is the only gathering in the whole volume that is in a folio in eight format (the rest of the book's quires are in a folio in sixes format). Quire gg's outer forme was worked first, receiving unique treatment, while the remaining formes of the quire were then worked in normal order (Hinman 2:98–100). I do not think this was an accident, as some First Folio scholars contend. Occurring in the literal center of the more than 900 pages, printed in large font type, are words evocative of a gift-debt<sup>18</sup> between the courtier poet and the queen and her Court (Figure 4). It is the Epilogue to *Henry IV Part 2* where a dancer addresses the Queen, and in the middle of the address, says:

But to the Purpose, and so to the Venture. Be it known to you [Queen Elizabeth] (as it is very well) I [Edward de Vere as Falstaff] was lately here in the end of a displeasing Play [*Henry IV Part 2*], to pray your Patience for it, and to promise you a Better [*Henry V* or *Merry Wives of Windsor*]: I did mean to pay you with this [play], which if (like an ill Venture) it come unluckily home, I break [become bankrupt]; and you [attending courtiers], my gentle Creditors lose. Here I promised you I would be, and here I commit my Body [of work] to your Mercies: Bate me some [reduce my indebtedness], and I will pay you some [give you more plays], and (as most Debtors do) promise you infinitely.  
(My notes are in square brackets)

For those old enough to remember, the passage is an invocation of the author, immediately situating Edward de Vere in his natural setting, the court. What developed over time with the Shakespeare project was a highly symbolic system of exchange, where Creditors and Debtors are allegorical representations of the gift-debt relationship. Of course, the type of language employed here is impossible to fit into the mouth of the wealthy striver from Stratford-on-Avon.

The solidarity and social cohesion realized through the original Shakespeare venture during Elizabeth's reign required a bit more coaxing during that of James's. Evidently, the author's son was held hostage much in the same way that Prince Charles was held hostage in Madrid in 1623 during the final negotiations of the Spanish Match. In short, Oxford's long residence in the Tower was a surety bond. In due course he was feted by the Crown upon his release

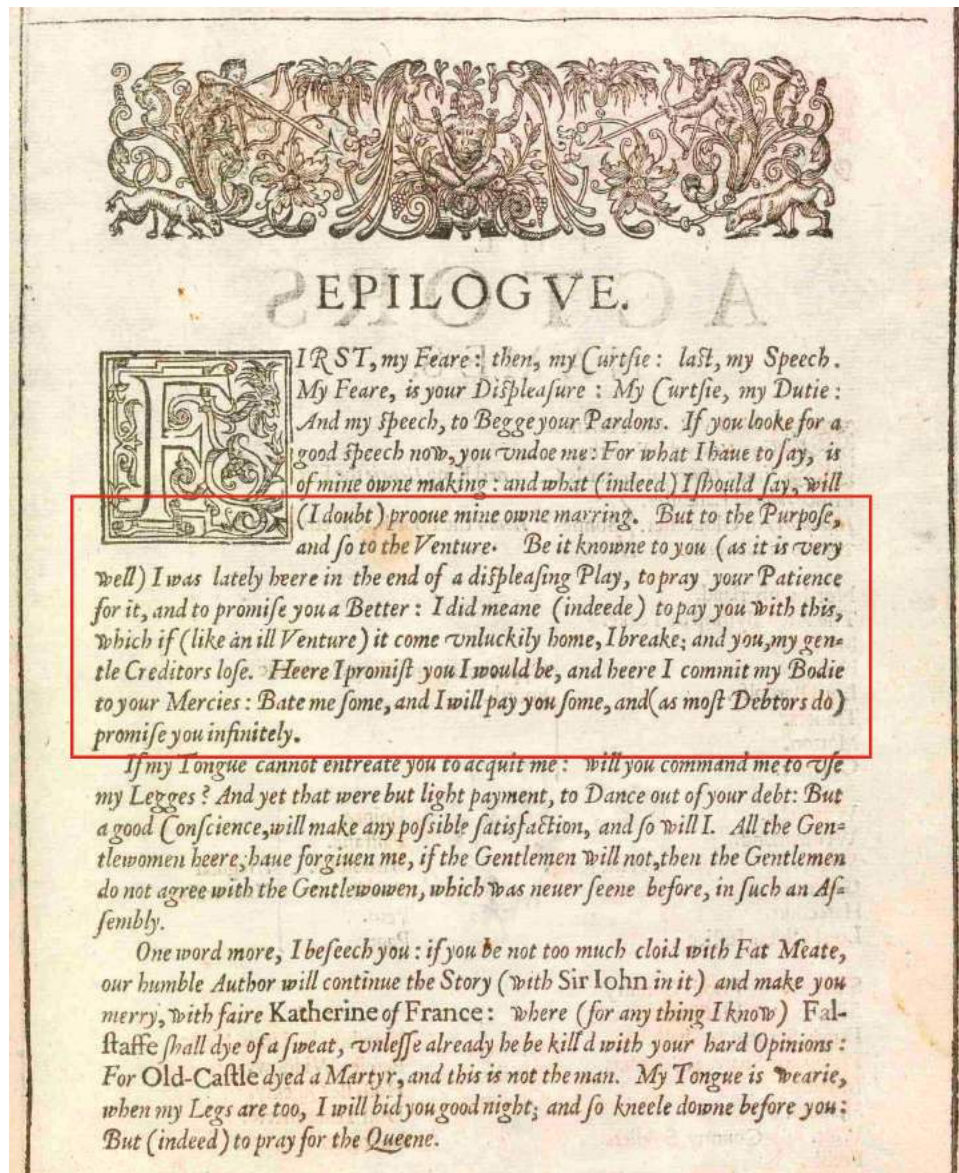


Figure 4: Signature sheet gg8 recto. Digital facsimile of the Bodleian First Folio of Shakespeare's plays, Arch. G c.

when the volume was satisfactorily delivered according to terms that were deemed acceptable by the original gift recipient (or purchaser). The plays were thus a form of reciprocal gift giving that carried on even after the death of the author, for the Crown approved the 18<sup>th</sup> Earl of Oxford's marriage to Lady Diana Cecil shortly thereafter, which allowed him to access significant monies through her marriage dowry.

Because the First Folio was intended for presentation to Prince Charles and the Infanta during their wedding festivities, the Oxford/Pembroke families were keenly aware of the status of marriage negotiations throughout 1622 and 1623. Only weeks before printing began, Prince Charles started Spanish lessons (Redworth 51). As the arrival of the Infanta was repeatedly delayed, the tempo of manufacturing the book proceeded in lockstep. When the marriage was far off, production was slow. And precisely when (winter 1623) it looked like the Infanta could arrive earlier than anticipated, production was seriously increased. When the outlook became gloomy in late summer 1623, production slowed to a crawl. Right up until the last printed sheet in late November of the martial-like Prologue Armed to *Troilus and Cressida*, the Spanish Match was its metronome and compass.

It is possible to interpret the episode as reflecting James' proclivity for royal absolutism. Much like the rumor of Oxford commanding a flotilla, the Crown sought to exploit the realm's resources (e.g., Edward de Vere's plays and William Herbert's office) while bringing overconfident peers to heel (e.g., they would be shown presenting the plays as a gift to a Catholic bride). The brief reconciliation in late December 1623 between Oxford and King James' favorite the Duke of Buckingham marked the end of the First Folio project. The Latin orientation (e.g., involvement of Edward Blount, James Mabbe, and Leonard Digges) must have fulfilled one of the Crown's demands, while the insincerity and misdirection that abound in the preliminaries advanced the polite fiction of Edward de Vere's long-established *nom de plume* and helped galvanize the connection with the merchant from Stratford.

I believe that disparaging the quality of the volume—its planning, editing, designing, composition, proofing, and presswork—is detrimental to the Oxfordian authorship theory. A higher estimation of the First Folio is more supportive of Edward de Vere's claim because the cost of a leisurely production contradicts the traditional story of a profit-driven scheme organized by a syndicate of busy city merchants. The level of care evident in preparing for the publication derives from years of dedication that we associate with familial devotion to orphans, as well as with individuals who can afford curating such a rich inheritance as Shakespeare's works. For the two opposing factions—the Crown and the Grand Possessors, the Oxford/Pembroke families—political differences were merely an impediment to seeing the plays properly through to completion. It is even possible to glimpse in its final shape a grand gesture, an unparalleled display of loyalty and obedience to the Crown.

### Acknowledgment

The author would like to thank Chris Pannell for his comments on an earlier draft of this paper.



## Endnotes

1. To the contrary, Willoughby's critique of Jaggard's printing is positive: "Jaggard, then, probably measured up fairly well to the standards of typographic accuracy of his own day in the eyes of his authors and employers" (62).
2. Committing resources exclusively to one project is an unrealistic expectation: "What mattered was that if the compositors were working on a fairly easy piece of setting (such as many parts of [Andrew] Favyn's *Theater of Honour*) and began to complete formes more quickly than the pressmen could handle them, they could be slowed down by being given a few formes of something with larger pages or smaller type (such as the [First] Folio)—and, of course, vice versa. That, indeed, may well be why Jaggard kept Favyn's book and the [First] Folio proceeding at a similar overall rate rather than finishing one of them as quickly as possible" (Blayney Introduction xxxiii).
3. Printer's copy refers to the textual medium that compositors had lying before them and used to set type using a composing stick. Printer's copy falls into two different mediums, either a previously printed quarto (a known exemplar in Shakespeare studies) or a handwritten manuscript (an unknown exemplar in Shakespeare studies). There is a great variety of manuscript subspecies: an authorial holograph or foul papers; scribal or secretarial copy (both theatrical and literary); a used marked-up prompt-book copy; a touring copy; a licensed or fair "booke" copy; a presentation copy; a theatrical literary copy or post-theatrical copy; a memorial reconstructed copy; etc. Also, importantly, the printer's copy was itself annotated or marked up. Underlying copy is frequently depicted by stemma diagrams (a genealogy tree for texts) which are based on generations of close reading and intelligent editorial sleuthing. One takeaway from this textual archeology is that the editors of the First Folio appear to have taken, at almost every turn, the longer rather than the shorter route towards getting the plays published. This area of research has also upheld Hinman's observation that as a rule "the copy used by the Folio printers was of the highest possible authority" (Introduction xiv).
4. A brief introductory description of the folio in sixes format is given here for those unfamiliar with hand-press print practices. The First Folio was not printed in the sequential order that we find the pages. Rather, Hinman was the first to show precisely how the volume was "set by formes"

and printed from the inside of a quire (six-leaf sections) outward. This means that the book consists of quires each having three sheets of paper folded together. Each sheet is folded once and each quire contains twelve pages of text. Casting off is the process of determining how much text goes on each printed page over twelve pages. The compositor is responsible for reading through the printer's copy text to cast it off and marking it up accordingly. The margin for error would increase based on the difficulty of First Folio texts in a mixture of prose and verse, as well as being annotated. As a result, compositors were expanding and contracting the text according to the allotted space, not according to the copy that stood before them. Blayney describes the challenges of casting off (emphasis provided by Blayney): "It was not always easy to cast off manuscript copy accurately. Once pages 6 and 7 had been printed, the text assigned to pages 1-5 *had* to be fitted into those pages. If the contents of page 5 had been carelessly calculated, the compositor had a choice. He could try to follow the casting-off mark exactly, by squeezing in extra lines or by spacing out the text as appropriate. Alternatively, he could put off the problem by ignoring the mark—he could set in the usual way, make up page 5 when he had set the right number of lines, and then make a new mark of his own in the copy to show where the page had *really* started. If he then did the same with pages 4 and 3 and 2, when the time came to fit what remained into page 1, he might well find himself in difficulties" (*The First Folio*, 12-13).

- 5 For details on printer's copy used for individual plays, I used *William Shakespeare: A Textual Companion* (1997). I also consulted Jonathan Bates' 2007 essay "The Case for the Folio" (in particular, the table on pages 38-9), which offers a more detailed account of the editorial problems than provided in the "General Introduction" to his *RSC Shakespeare: Complete Works* (2008).
- 6 The editors of the First Folio are unknown. The preliminaries imply that the players John Heminges and Henry Condell edited the works, an idea few scholars support. Ben Jonson is widely believed to be a central figure in overseeing the project on behalf of the Oxford/Pembroke families. Today, Jonson would be called a general editor. The author Edward de Vere was known to employ private secretaries who while copying would be editing. What are often referred to as holographs or foul papers could, in fact, be copies made by his secretaries. After his death in 1604 editors might have included scribes and bookkeepers, some anonymous and some not, such as the scribe Ralph Crane or the King Men's bookkeeper

Edward Knight. There are suggestions that Hispanic scholars associated with Oxford University, James Mabbe and Leonard Digges, might have been employed to edit or annotate Jaggard's own printer's copy. At least five compositors worked on the First Folio; each compositor had his own unique spelling and punctuation standards ("accidentals"), thus adding another layer of editorial agency. Proofreading and correcting was conducted by two individuals: a compositor and a corrector. The corrector who checked the compositor's work provided a learned opinion, a job that could have been filled by the humanist publisher Edward Blount or perhaps Jonson, Mabbe, Digges, or someone else. In short, the editorial agents were many and the transmission to print long and complicated.

7. In the early modern period editing was in its infancy and the postmodern concept of authorial intention wholly alien. It must be kept in mind that Edward de Vere constantly revised his plays, so at his premature death large pieces of his writing were in an unfinished state—representing first or second intentions, and few if any his final intention. The first editors would not have been ignorant about the unfinished nature of the work they were in the process of copying and transmitting into print. An urge to perfect was abetted by humanist thinking. A hallmark of the late manuscript culture is that scribes/editors/writers did not slavishly adhere to the exemplar. Copying was done by men educated on humanist precepts, where making copies of exemplars went beyond mere imitation—copying was itself an act of creating, and these scribal norms carried over into the sphere of the printing press in the 16th and 17th Centuries (McKitterick 35). Not unrelated are posthumous revisions effected by dramatists Thomas Middleton and John Fletcher, among others. What Edward de Vere may have thought about the First Folio text of *Richard III* that interleaved quartos printed 20 years apart, or Middleton's revisions of *Macbeth* or *Measure for Measure*, cannot be known. However, we can say that those First Folio texts were never intended by him. At the same time, we can appreciate how the First Folio editors believed they were delivering texts of the highest possible authority, or to quote the preliminaries, "according to true original copies." By today's standards, these pioneering efforts might be judged harshly, likened to corruption or cultural vandalism.
8. In *Shakespeare and the Rise of the Editor* (2007), orthodox scholar Sonia Massai is unable to explain the "leisure" afforded the First Folio editors given the "busy environment of an early modern commercial theatre or printing house" (138).

9. The high quality of editing in the First Folio has contributed to the acclaimed Shakespearean problem of parallel editions: posthumous folio texts versus quarto texts. For the most vigorous orthodox defense of the editorial practices behind the First Folio, see W.W. Greg's *The Shakespeare First Folio* (1955). The following quote is but a small sample of what is essentially a book-length apologia: "the task cannot have been a light one. Indeed, it might not be too much to say that, apart from works seen through the press by their authors, no book of the time had greater care and labor bestowed on its editing than did the First Folio of Shakespeare's plays. That this fell short, sometimes perhaps lamentably short, of the standard we should like to have seen maintained, and that it may even on occasion have been misguided, is true; but that should not blind us to the facts, and no one who has carefully studied these and has himself some experience of the difficult labor of editing will question the onerous nature of the task undertaken or the devotion with which it was carried through" (Greg 78).
10. What constitutes error must take into consideration the hazards of the casting off of copy. For an example of an in-depth examination on the nature of typographic irregularities, see Sir Brian Vickers' *The One King Lear* (2016), which compares the printing of the 1608 quarto text with the printing of the Folio text. Vickers convincingly argues that the Q1 printer Nicolas Okes, who was new to the genre of plays, compressed and abridged the text to make it fit on 10 sheets of paper.
11. "If the type is not immediately needed, the pages of type might remain tied up and set aside, but leaving type standing for any length of time is unusual in the hand-press period. Type was expensive and printers might not keep more than about eight sheets worth of type on hand. Leaving type standing meant that it was unavailable to be used for other sheets, thereby limiting an already limited resource" (Werner 20).
12. Additional citations are provided by two pre-eminent bibliographers of the last 50 years, attesting to the nature of variability between copies of the same edition. "In the earlier hand-press period variation was often substantial. Thus, the twelve known copies of the first quarto for *King Lear* (1608) show eight variant formes in seven of the ten sheets, encompassing nearly 150 substantive alterations, apparently made during the stop-press correction of late press-proofs. The assembly of the variant

sheets into copies was random; no one copy has either corrected or uncorrected formes throughout; and only two pairs of copies are made up in the same way as each other” (Gaskell 354). “It was a fact of production that since proof-reading and correction proceeded even during the press-run, so copies of the final collated sheets would vary: hence the otherwise preposterous supposition that the reader should seek out a better copy of that in his hand made no sense” (McKitterick 121).

13. As early as 1969, D.F. McKenzie pointed out Hinman’s blunder, and a few years later Philip Gaskell delicately noted it as well. Recently, Jonathan Bates, sensing a pervasive appropriation of Hinman’s ideas about press error and proofreading, attempted to set the record straight: “[In t]he early modern printing house it was customary to proof-read each sheet before copies began to be run off the press. Stop-press correction was an added check, not the main defence against error.... [W]e can truthfully say that the degree of press error in the First Folio was relatively low for such a large and complicated book” (47).
14. On the expenses in the peerage, see Lawrence Stone’s *The Crisis of the Aristocracy*, in particular the section on “The Burden of Office” (207–12, abridged edition).
15. See Bonner Miller Cutting’s “A Sufficient Warrant: Examining Oxford’s £1,000 Annuity” in *Necessary Mischief: Exploring the Shakespeare Authorship Question* (2018).
16. Regarding posthumous publication, a comparison of Edward de Vere and another aristocratic poet, Philip Sidney, is noteworthy. W.W. Greg writes that “the works of Sir Philip Sidney were jealously guarded during his life, and that after his death the influence of his family was brought to bear to prevent or suppress unauthorized publications” (45). Leo Kirschbaum provides additional detail of the interference, reporting control exerted by the Sidney family, which intervened in the first edition of Sidney’s sonnets *Astrophel and Stella*, published surreptitiously using a corrupt manuscript copy by Thomas Newman in 1591. The notes in the Stationers’ Register reveal that Lord William Burghley had the edition confiscated. The second edition came out shortly after and was based on a better manuscript. The Sidney example, Kirschbaum argued, illustrates how “a highly placed official or member of the Court interfered in the normal practices of the stationers’ guild” (131-2).

17. What constitutes a printing error is open to interpretation. For example, in their introductory manuals on bibliography Ronald B. McKerrow and Fredson Bowers each separately attribute different types of error to the singular problem of varying arrangements of the preliminary leaves in surviving First Folio copies, to “folding error” and “error in binding” respectively. Still others attribute the so-called error to Jaggard’s management of workflow (e.g., poetic contributions arrived late). Here, as elsewhere, orthodox bibliographers are finding error where there is none. The preliminaries section was intentionally designed to be an optional gathering, see “Model of Disorder” by Gabriel Ready.
18. A gift-debt is a sociological construct developed by French anthropologist Marcel Mauss in his influential essay *The Gift: Forms and Functions of Exchange in Archaic Societies* (1925). Mauss observed that a gift is never truly free in ancient societies: “Exchanges and contracts take place in the form of presents: in theory they are voluntary, in reality they are given and reciprocated obligatorily” (3).

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# *Did the 17th Earl of Oxford Serve on Queen Elizabeth's Privy Council?*

by Gary Goldstein

For several generations scholars have held that Edward de Vere, Earl of Oxford, was a member of the Privy Council under Queen Elizabeth I. However, the only evidence provided was a letter from April 1603, written by de Vere to his brother-in-law, Secretary of State Sir Robert Cecil, on the advent of King James of Scotland into England.

In it, de Vere asks Cecil “what course is devised by you of the Council & the rest of the Lords concerning our duties to the King’s Majesty...?” De Vere here refers to two categories of people without indicating which category he belongs to.

However, in 2009 David Roper published *Proving Shakespeare*, in which he points to a Privy Council Letter of April 8, 1603 that is signed by de Vere – but doesn’t provide a reproduction of the document. In the letter, the Council authorizes the Lord Treasurer to hire horses to bring King James from Berwick to London.

We queried the Folger Shakespeare Library, which holds the document, and the image they provided demonstrates that, indeed, Edward de Vere served as a Privy Council member since he signs the letter as E. Oxenforde, with a loop flourish under his signature. (See illustration.)

Clearly, the Queen had become convinced of de Vere’s political acumen and judgment, a transformation from the reputation he had earned as a young

Did the 17th Earl of Oxford Serve on Queen Elizabeth's Privy Council?

man at her Court. According to Gilbert Talbot, in a 13<sup>th</sup> May 1573 letter written to his father:

My Lord of Oxford is lately grown into great credit, for the Queen's Majesty delighteth more in his personage and his dancing and valiantness than any other. **I think [the Earl of] Sussex doth back him all that he can; if it were not for his fickle head, he would pass any of them shortly.** My Lady Burghley unwisely has declared herself, as it were, jealous, which is come to the Queen's ear, whereat she has been not a little offended with her, but now she is reconciled again.  
(my emphasis)

Obviously, de Vere's fickle head had matured to where it had earned him political duties, even involving international relations. A clear case took place in 1595 when the French King Henry IV wrote to de Vere thanking him for his political efforts before the Queen, as attested to by the French Ambassador.

(Translation by Craig Huston)

Letter from the King to the Lord Great Chamberlain of England,

I am having this note brought to you by Lomenie whom I send before the Queen my good sister with respect to the matters which concern the well being of her affairs and of mine, in order to inform you of the satisfaction I feel for the good offices you have performed on my behalf in her presence, which I beg you to continue and believe that I will always consider it a great pleasure to reciprocate in whatever might bring about your personal satisfaction, as I have charged the said Lomenie to tell you, whom I pray you to believe as myself, who prays God to keep you, Lord Great Chamberlain, in his care.

This 5th of October at Paris. [1595]

Signed Henry, and above is written to the Lord Great Chamberlain of England.

How long de Vere served on Elizabeth's Privy Council is a question yet to be answered, as is whether King James renamed de Vere to the Council.

*Privy Council to Thomas Sackville, April 8, 1603. X.d.30 (42)—Folio 1 recto. Letters of the Privy Council. Folger Shakespeare Library. Used by permission of the Folger Shakespeare Library. Below the letter is an enlargement of the signature of Edward de Vere, 17th Earl of Oxford, "E. Oxenforde".*

[illegible]

*[Handwritten signatures and names:]*

J. P. Esq. Exeter. C. J. Buchart E. Oxenford. Wm. Thompson  
Rt. Lane  
J. Worcester  
H. Munn  
Ric. London  
Lewarre & Co.  
Wm. Sanders  
J. Sims  
Wm. Sanders  
G. Chandler  
J. Noyes

E. Oxenforde.

Did the 17th Earl of Oxford Serve on Queen Elizabeth's Privy Council?



# *The Slippery Slope of Shakspeare's "Signatures"*

by Matt Hutchinson

When the six signatures believed to be those of William Shakspeare (1564–1616) are examined in their social and legal environment, numerous anomalies present themselves relative to those of his contemporaries that suggest there is a strong possibility that law clerks wrote them instead.

After comparing all six of his purported signatures to those of his contemporaries, we will compare his to the other signatures by the legal deponents and witnesses on the Bellott-Mountjoy deposition, the Blackfriars Gatehouse conveyance, the Blackfriars mortgage, and then Shakspeare's last will and testament.

We conclude by looking at how these findings relate to Shakspeare's alleged handwriting in the manuscript of *Sir Thomas More* and find the association impossible to make due to all six signatures being regarded as "questioned." When considering the artist, we will use the public name of William Shakespeare; when considering the man from Stratford on Avon, we will use the private name of William Shakspeare since that is how he is referred to in most legal documents.



## Handwriting in Elizabethan and Jacobean England

Let us start by considering the perspective of the leading Shakespeare expert in the US. Samuel Schoenbaum writes in *William Shakespeare: A Documentary Life*:

The Elizabethans cared about their handwriting. The master calligrapher Peter Bales achieved fame by the improbable feat of transcribing the Bible within the compass of a walnut; Queen Elizabeth wore a specimen of his art mounted in a ring. (Schoenbaum 1975, xviii)

While Shakspere's playwriting contemporaries did not go to these lengths, as Jane Cox, former head of Renaissance documents at the British National Archives, notes, "Literate men in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries developed personalized signatures much as people do today and it is unthinkable that Shakespeare did not" (Cox 33).

The seminal collection of Elizabethan and Jacobean handwriting is W.W. Greg's *English Literary Autographs 1550–1650*. William Shakspere is notable for his absence, despite living, in the words of Hugh Trevor Roper,

in the full daylight of the English Renaissance in the well documented reigns of Queen Elizabeth and King James I and...since his death has been subjected to the greatest battery of organized research that has ever been directed upon a single person. (Trevor-Roper 41)

Yet Greg found autographs—that is, a document in an author's own handwriting—by more than 130 authors of the period and had to cull many others due to size constraints, referring to the volume of existing samples from prose writers as "super abundant" (Greg 1932, Preface).

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**Matt Hutchinson** is a doctoral candidate in the Humanities based in Sydney, Australia. This is his first appearance in The Oxfordian.

The prevailing style of writing for dramatists of this period was italic (figures 1, 2).

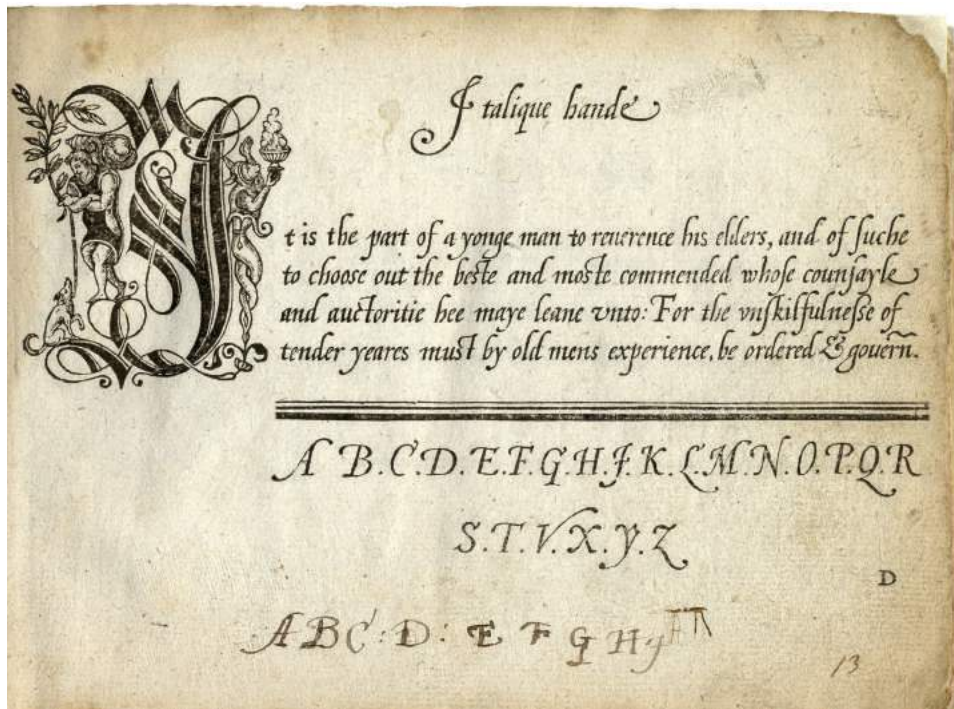


Figure 1: The italic alphabet.

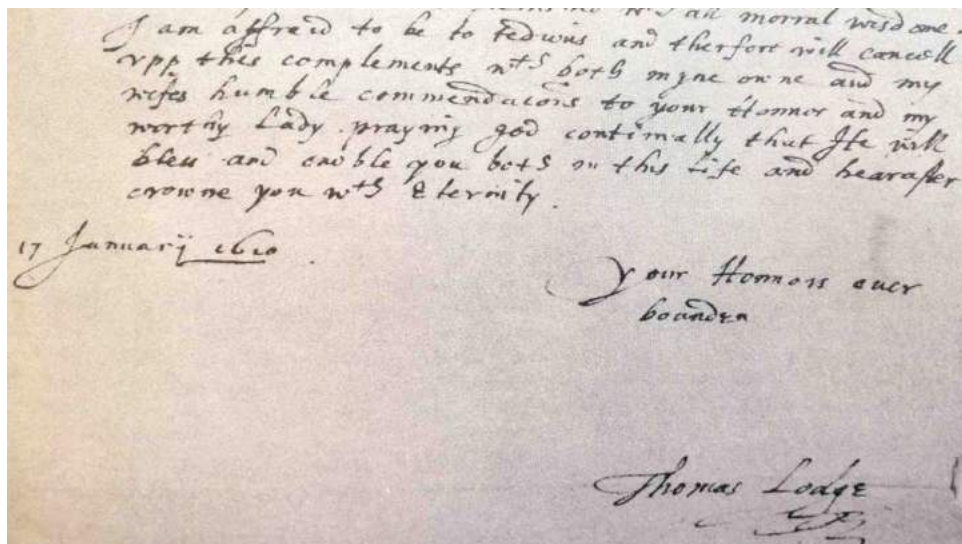


Figure 2: A letter from Thomas Lodge to Thomas Edmondes in the italic hand.

## The Slippery Slope of Shakspeare's "Signatures"

The other predominant style of handwriting was "secretary hand," often used by scribes (figures 3, 5).



Figure 3: Secretary hand.

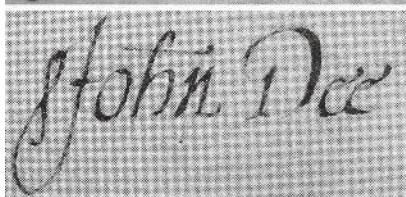
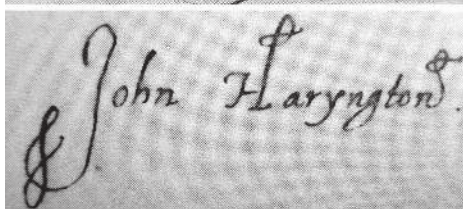
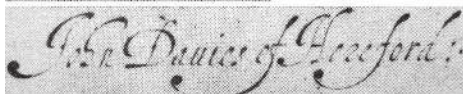
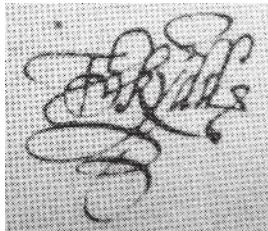


Figure 4A: The signatures of Thomas Kyd, John Davies of Hereford, John Haryngton and John Dee.

Shown here are some examples of signatures among dramatists in *English Literary Autographs*.

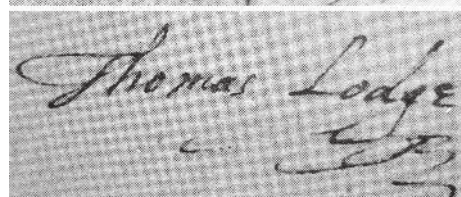
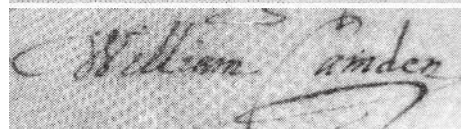
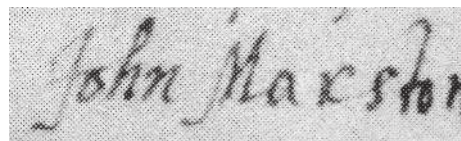


Figure 4B: Signatures of John Marston, William Camden and Thomas Lodge.



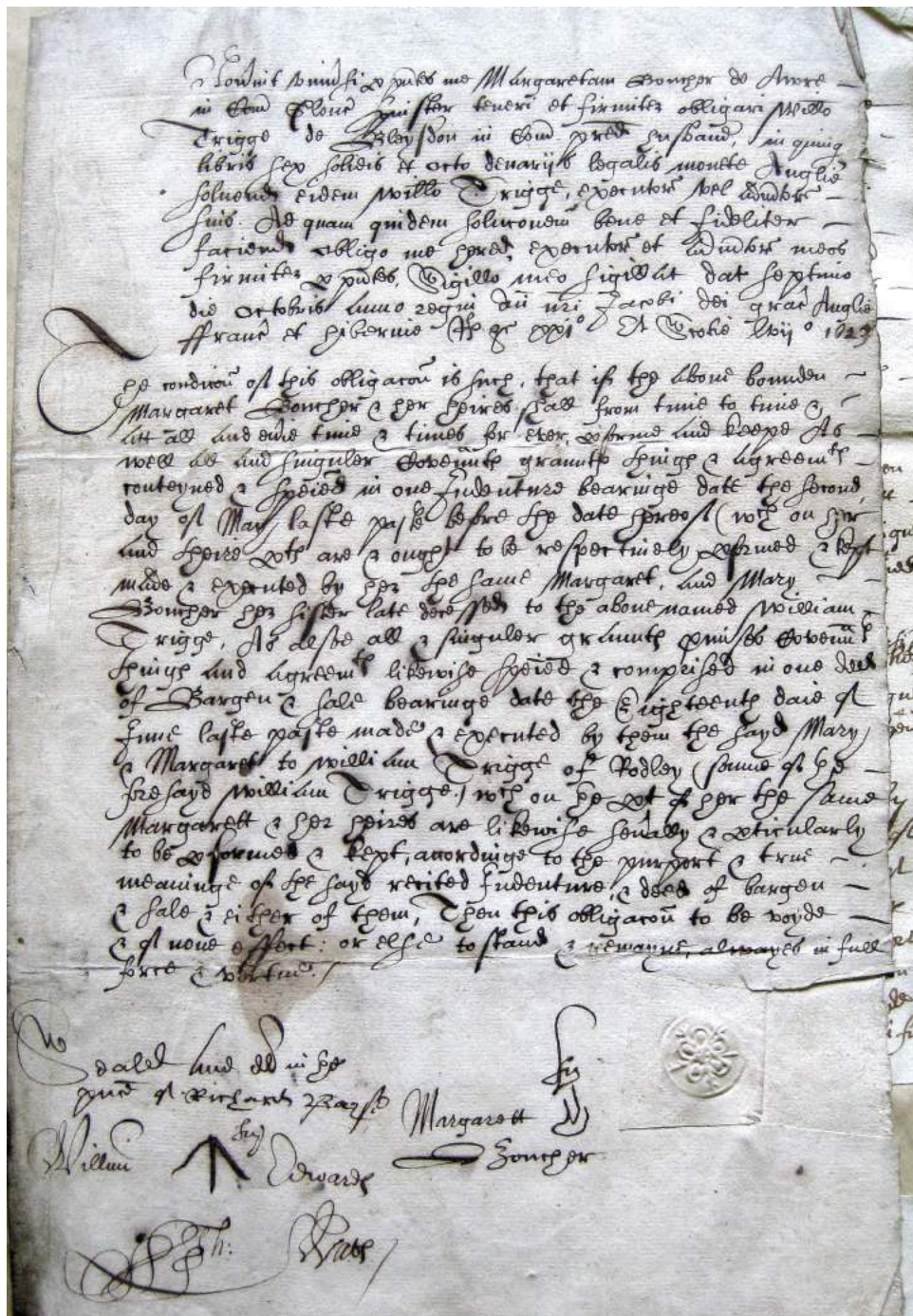


Figure 5: A Covenant bond from 1623 written in secretary hand.

## Examining the Six Signatures of William Shakspeare

The six alleged signatures of William Shakspeare have been found on several legal documents. The first was on a court deposition in 1612. Two more appear on two deeds involving a real estate purchase in 1613. The final three are on each page of Shakspeare's 1616 will (the first one badly eroded) (figures 6, 7):




*Figure 6: The first signature was on a court deposition in 1612. Two more are on two deeds involving a real estate purchase in 1613.*

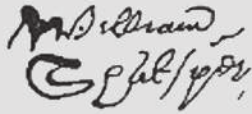


*Figure 7: The final three signatures are on Shakspeare's 1616 will.*

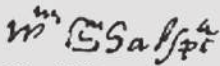
Digitally-enhanced versions are shown below (figure 8):



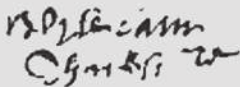
Bellott-Mountjoy deposition,  
12 June 1612, National Archives, Kew



Blackfriars Gatehouse conveyance,  
10 March 1613, Guildhall Library, London



Blackfriars mortgage,  
11 March 1616, British Library, London



First page of will (from 1809 engraving,  
original lost through wear)



Second page of will



Last page of will, 25 March 1616  
National Archives, Kew

It is important to note, as Shakspeare's biographer Diana Price points out, that paleographers,

disagreed among themselves as to the spellings in the signatures. With respect to signature n. 1 [the Bellott-Mountjoy deposition], Thompson spells it Willm Shakp (1923, 59; a line over the letter m indicates abbreviation); Sidney Lee spells it Willm Shak'p (1968, 519); C.W. Wallace (who discovered the signature) spells it Willm Shaks (1910, 500); C.J. Sisson spells it Shak- with no s or p, the hyphen indicating abbreviation (1961, 77n1); Tannenbaum cannot be sure whether it is Wilm or Willu and Shakper or Shaksper (1925, 157) (Price 2001, 337).



## The Slippery Slope of Shakspeare's "Signatures"

Each one of the six alleged signatures is spelled differently. Not one used the full surname "Shakespeare." Possible spellings are given below

• Willm Shakp • William Shakspēr • Wm Shakspē • William Shakspeare • Willm Shakspeare • By me William Shakspear

Ros Barber, English Lecturer at Goldsmith's, University of London, comments on these six signatures:

These signatures are not consistent with Heminges and Condell's testimony of blotless manuscripts. It seems unlikely that the person who could not write his name without a blot would be able to produce such a thing.... The signatures are in what is known as English secretary hand, and this is unusual. Most of his contemporaries signed their name in italic script. Italic had prestige. It is probable that the person who made these signatures could not write in italic script, or they would do so. Shakespeare shows himself aware of the idea of italic hand in Hamlet: "I once did hold it, as our statists do, a baseness to write fair" (Barber 426).

The signature on the first page of the will has deteriorated so much that it is almost useless for comparison, and many, such as Cox, omit it. Cox writes of the signatures:

It is obvious at a glance that these signatures, with the exception of the last two [on pages 2 and 3 of the will], are not the signatures of the same man. Almost every letter is formed a different way in each.... Which of the signatures reproduced here is the genuine article is anybody's guess. (Cox 33)

British archivist and archival theorist Sir Hilary Jenkinson wrote that additional factors need to be considered before attributing signatures to the people whose name they represent:

Criteria for the attribution of a piece of handwriting to a definite person are at present extraordinarily vague. For example, it is apparently not known generally that in the Elizabethan period (and later), a clerk taking down or copying a deposition might himself sign it with the name of the deponent: I believe it could easily be established that quite frequently he would give an air of verisimilitude by writing the signature in a different hand. More, a secretary writing his master's letters might do this.... Walsingham's secretaries, for instance, frequently write as though they were himself (Jenkinson 1922, 3:31–2).

Jenkinson concludes:

Attribution, therefore, must clearly be a matter for considerable caution and for careful scrutiny of evidence other than that offered by the writing itself; especially when we are concerned with the hands of persons who have left us very little on which to base our judgments.... I think it is not unfair to say that in the past even great authorities have sometimes been very casual in this matter. (Jenkinson 1922, 3:32)

This is especially true of the Early Modern period, when, as we shall see, the signature did not have the same legal validity as today. Professor of History Edward Higgs, in *Identifying the English*, writes that while today the signature is the primary method of authenticating documents,

in the medieval and early modern periods, however, the signature shared this function with the seal, and was indeed for much of the time subordinated to the latter. Even when used, the signature was not necessarily the sort of sign manual in use today. (Higgs 59)

Let us look then, in chronological order, at the alleged signatures in their original environment to see if:

- 1) The other signatories of the documents fulfill Cox's claim that literate Elizabethans and Jacobean developed personalized signatures, and
- 2) Whether there are other factors, as Jenkinson warns, that influence whether they may not be actual signatures from Mr. Shakspeare's own hand.

## Comparing Signatures on the Bellott-Mountjoy Documents (1612)

*Bellott v. Mountjoy* was a lawsuit heard at the Court of Requests in Westminster in 1612. Stephen Bellott sued his father-in-law, Christopher Mountjoy, a wigmaker. Mountjoy had taken Bellott as an apprentice in his workshop, in close proximity to Mountjoy's daughter, Mary, whom Bellott later wed. Bellott sued Mountjoy over his promise, allegedly made in 1604, to pay Bellott a dowry.

On May 11, 1612, William Shakspeare was deposed regarding his memory of events relating to the events of 1604, when he lodged at the home of the Mountjoy family. Other witnesses were also deposed on May 11. Two further sets of depositions were taken on June 19 and 23, 1612.

## The Slippery Slope of Shakspeare's "Signatures"

All documents survive from the court case. It is instructive to see all the signatures in the document. As Higgs notes in *Identifying the English*, from around 1500 onwards, being able to consistently reproduce a signature on legal documents became an increasingly important form of identification in a pre-ID-card society (Higgs 58–9). Putting one's name to an informal document with a more haphazard stroke of the pen is very different from doing so on a formal legal document, where being able to identify the signatories was important.

The first four documents are signed by either Bellott's solicitor Ralph Wormlaughton or by Mountjoy's solicitor George Hartoppe.

Figure 9 contains: A) Stephen Bellott's bill of complaint, dated January 28, 1612; B) Stephen Bellott's replication, May 5th and C) Christopher Mountjoy's answer, dated February 3. The rejoinder document is undated, though it must have been submitted after May 5, 1612 because it references Bellott's replication of that date, so it is safe to estimate that it was submitted approximately three months after Hartoppe's first signature on Mountjoy's February 3 answer.



Figure 9: A) Ralph Wormlaughton signature, January 28, 1612; B) Stephen Bellott's replication, May 5, 1612, C) George Hartoppe signature, February 3, 1612, and D) Hartoppe's signature on the rejoinder of Christopher Mountjoy, undated.

Moving to the three sets of depositions, the first deponent on May 11 was Joan Johnson, Mountjoy's former maidservant. She signed twice with her mark (figure 10).



Figure 10: Joan Johnson's two marks.

Daniel Nicholas, a gentleman of the parish of St. Alphage, participated in both the first session of depositions on May 11, signing twice (first two signatures, below) and the second session

on June 19, signing three times. There is no noticeable change in his signatures over the course of a month (figure 11):



Figure 11: Signatures of Daniel Nicholas, a gentleman of the parish of St. Alphage.

William Shakspeare was also deposed at the first session; his deposition bears a signature (figure 12).

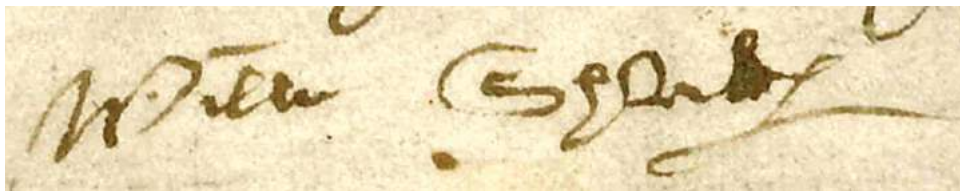


Figure 12: William Shakspeare's alleged signature.

In the second set of depositions, there appear the following signatures: William Eyton, Bellott's apprentice; George Wilkins, victualler, brothel keeper and playwright, and Humphrey Fludd, trumpeter, who signed twice (figure 13).



Figure 13: Signatures of William Eyton, George Wilkin and Humphrey Fludd.

## The Slippery Slope of Shakspere's "Signatures"

Chris Weaver, a mercer (dealer in fabrics), signed twice in the second session and once in the third session (figure 14).

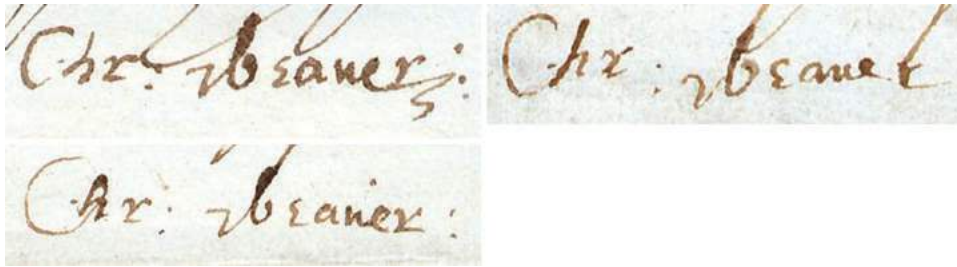


Figure 14: Signatures of Chris Weaver.

Noel Mountjoy, "tiremaker" and younger brother of the defendant, signed twice in the second session and twice in the third session, spelling his name in the original French, Montjoy, rather than the anglicized Mountjoy (figure 15).

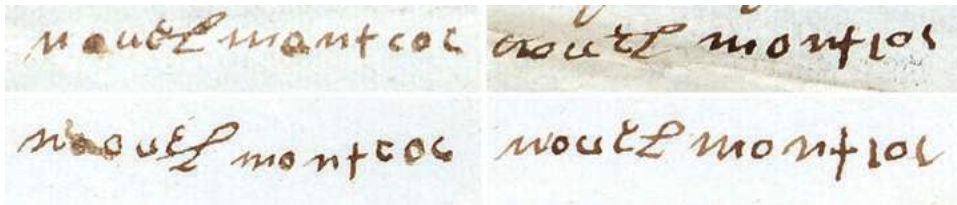


Figure 15: Signatures of Noel Mountjoy.

Thomas Flower, garment maker, signed twice (figure 16).



Figure 16: Signatures of Thomas Flower.

It is interesting to compare the signatures of this diverse group of Elizabethans: a maidservant, tire maker, mercer, gentleman, apprentice, garment maker, two playwrights and two lawyers. The two lawyers' professional signatures reflect their legal training, while the penmanship of the witnesses ranges from excellent (such as Nicholas) to average (Flower).

Shakspere's alleged signature is anomalous in several ways:

- 1) The surnames of all other deponents are signed in full.
- 2) In instances where a deponent signs more than once, the signatures all match and satisfy Cox's statement that "Elizabethans developed personalized signatures," even for those deponents who were not professional writers. This is especially true on legal documents.

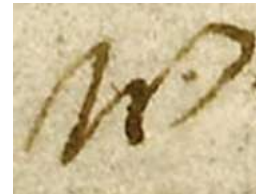


- 3) All the other signatures are not rushed or “dashed in,” whereas Shakspeare’s is “hastily written” (*Shakespeare Documented*) and rather “careless” (British paleographer Edward Maunde Thompson); the others seem to be deliberate and thoughtful. Even the poorer handwriting specimens (such as the signatures of Flower) are nevertheless clear examples of signatures reproduced faithfully from one signing to the next.

Forensic document examiner Roy A. Huber, writing in *Handwriting Identification: Facts and Fundamentals*, states that handwriting written in haste,

frequently contains elements of a person’s writing that are unusual or accidental. They may never appear again in another example. They are unreliable indicators of normal writing habits or of a writer’s normal range of variation. (Huber 52)

- 4) Besides Shakspeare and Wilkins, none of the deponents were writers. Yet Wilkins clearly demonstrates in his single signature what William Shakspeare could not do in six: clear penmanship and a confident hand; what we might call “signing with a flourish.”
- 5) The “W” in William contains an ornamental dot, which was common in the legal writing of the time, but which does not occur in the signatures of any of the other deponents, nor any of the 130 writers in *English Literary Autographs*. As British paleographer Edmund Maunde Thompson observes, this ornamental dot “is a common feature also in other capital letters of the English [Secretary] alphabet, **particularly in the scrivener’s hand**” (my emphasis) (Thompson 1916, 25) (figure 17A).
- 6) Shakespeare’s surname is illegible. Is that really a “k” below? It seems more an educated guess rather than a positive identification. I ask how anyone, seeing the “k” in isolation, could make a positive identification (figure 17B).



Thompson comments on this particular signature:

In this signature to Shakespeare’s deposition we see a strong handwriting altogether devoid of hesitation or restraint, the writer wielding the pen with the unconscious ease that betokens perfect command of the instrument and an ability for swift formation of the letters (Thompson 1916, 9–10).

How much of a “perfect command” could the writer have, such that five paleographers interpreted this signature five different ways with different spellings, and such that the “k” is indecipherable?



- 7) The surname is not only abbreviated; it is abbreviated in the scribal convention. None of Mr. Shakspeare's contemporaries did this in *English Literary Autographs*. First names of writers were often spelled with the first initial and a full stop, or the first few letters of the first name with a colon, for example, A. Rowley and Tho: Nashe. But surnames were not typically abbreviated in this manner on legal documents.

Maunde Thompson recognized the problem:

The Christian name is written indifferently in a shortened form or at full length, following the ordinary practice of the time. It will, however, be noticed that in each of the first three signatures the surname is written in a shortened form. (Thompson 1916, 5)

Furthermore:

It is notable that the medial "s" of the surname is omitted, as though the writer thought the letter negligible.... unless, indeed, in his hurry he accidentally left it out. (Thompson 1916, 8)

Of the 130 writers in *English Literary Autographs*, only one spelled his surname in an abbreviated form. Royalty and members of the clergy were exceptions: Elizabeth and King James only used their first names, for example, never their surnames. But for professional writers, only Edmund Spenser does not spell his surname in full; in this case, however, his contraction differs from a scrivener's abbreviation used by clerks. Spenser developed this signature when working as a secretary in the 1570s and 1580s in Ireland, before italic took hold, in which he would add "Copia Vera" or "A True Copy" and his signature to a large volume of documents. (Marlowe's only extant signature, from 1585 in a Secretary hand, was also made before italic hand became predominant.) Spenser signed his name in full on other documents and there is no reason to believe he would not do so in the Court of Requests. In terms of the consistency of replicating his signature and the overall beauty of his penmanship, Spenser's signatures are the antithesis of Shakspeare's alleged ones (figure 18).

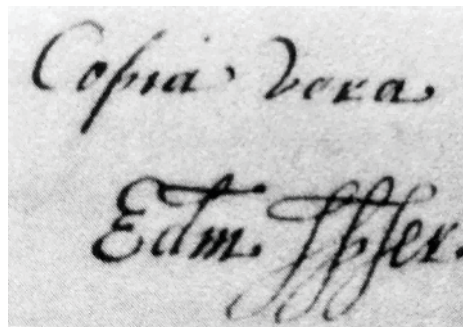


Figure 18: Edmund Spenser's signature.

One further anomaly stands out—what is that large dot beneath the “signature?” There is no comparable mark on any of the other signatures, or in the entire Bellott-Mountjoy documentation (figure 19).



Figure 19:  
William Shakespeare's  
alleged signature.

Edwin Durning-Lawrence, a British lawyer and Member of Parliament, opined that

Answers to Interrogatories are required to be signed by the deponents. In the case of “Johane Johnsonsone,” who could not write her name, the depositions are signed with a very neat cross which was her mark. In the case of “William Shakespeare,” they are signed with a dot which might quite easily be mistaken for an accidental blot. Our readers will see this mark, which is not a blot but a purposely made mark. (Durning-Lawrence 1910, 168)

The Court of Requests required a deponent’s best efforts at a signature, including a full surname, or their usual mark. I have found no examples of abbreviated surnames in the Court of Requests documents I have studied, and I encourage others to peruse the documents at Kew to ascertain if any were. In Stretton’s study of 20 cases at the Court of Requests in his book *Marital Litigation in the Court of Requests 1542–1642*, of the 73 signatures and 6 marks he reviewed, not one signature abbreviated the surname. Durning-Lawrence states “such an abbreviation would be impossible in a legal document in a Court of Law.” (Durning-Lawrence 1910, 170)

Given Sir Hilary Jenkinson’s opinion that clerks, taking down or copying a deposition, might sign the name of the deponent in a different hand to give it an “air of verisimilitude,” the anomalies may be explained. As Durning-Lawrence writes:

It may not be out of place here again to call our readers’ attention to the fact that law documents are required to be signed “in full,” and that if the very rapid and ready writer who wrote “Wilm Shap” were indeed the Gentleman of Stratford it would have been quite easy for such a good penman to have written his name in full; this the law writer has not done because he desired only to indicate by an abbreviation that the dot or spot below was the mark of William Shakespeare of Stratford-upon-Avon. (Durning-Lawrence 1910, 171)

## The Slippery Slope of Shakspeare's "Signatures"

In fact, Durning-Lawrence opined that the “signature” was signed by the clerk who wrote the lower portion of Mr. Shakspeare’s deposition (a different hand writes the first three points) using a contrived hand. Forensic document examiner Roy A. Huber also noted similarities between the handwriting of the clerk who wrote the lower portion of the deposition and the “signature.” Other explanations are feasible and should be explored, as other clerks would have likely come into contact with the document. This should be possible as a voluminous amount of Court of Request documents exist, many of which have not yet been properly sorted and indexed.

## Signatures on the Blackfriars Document (1613)

In March 1613, Shakspeare, along with three other men, agreed to purchase a gatehouse in London known as Blackfriars. Of the documents effectuating the transaction, a bargain and sale agreement dated March 10 (figure 20)



Figure 20: Blackfriars’ bill of sale, dated March 10, 1613.



and a mortgage deed dated March 11 (figure 21) are believed to contain his signatures. Although dated one day apart, it is believed by many that they were both signed on March 11 because it was usual for mortgage deeds to be dated one day after the date of the purchase and sale agreements, even if they were signed one moment later. The reason for this was that the owner would not want to part with his property before he received his consideration. In any case, there would likely have been a short period of time between the two signatures.

Seven people allegedly put their signatures to each of the two documents for the purchase and sale of the Blackfriars. The first three were John Jackson, William Johnson and William Shakspeare, on the front of both documents.



Figure 21: Mortgage deed dated March 11, 1613.

## The Slippery Slope of Shakspeare's "Signatures"

On the reverse side of these documents, the sealing and delivering of the deed was witnessed by William Atkinson, Edward Overy, Robert Andrews and Henry Lawrence (figures 22, 23).



*Figure 22: The reverse side of the March 10 document.*



Figure 23: The reverse side of the March 11 document.

A closer look at the two signatures of William Johnson, a wine merchant (figure 24).

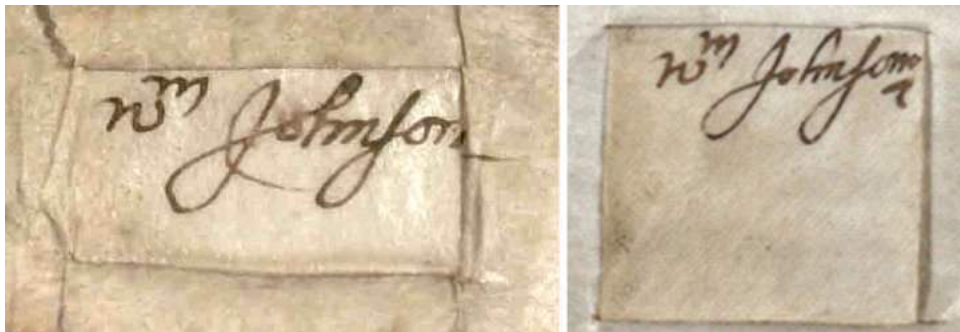


Figure 24: Signatures of William Johnson from March 10 and March 11, 1613.



## The Slippery Slope of Shakspeare's "Signatures"

Five years later in 1618, two years after Mr. Shakspeare's death, William Johnson also signed the bargain and sale agreement for the transfer of the Blackfriars Gatehouse to new trustees (figure 25).



Figure 25: Transfer of the Blackfriars Gatehouse to new trustees in 1618.



Figure 26: a close-up of Johnson's signature on the 1618 agreement.

As can clearly be seen, William Johnson's signature remains essentially the same, whether separated by five years or one day (or less).

John Jackson, gentleman, also signed the two deeds in 1613. Like William Johnson, he signed the 1618 deed.

Again, there is no real variance between the three signatures despite a five-year gap between the first two and the last. This is longer than the four-year span separating the six Shakspeare signatures.



Figure 27: Signatures of John Jackson from the 1613 documents.



Figure 28: Signature of John Jackson from the 1618 document.

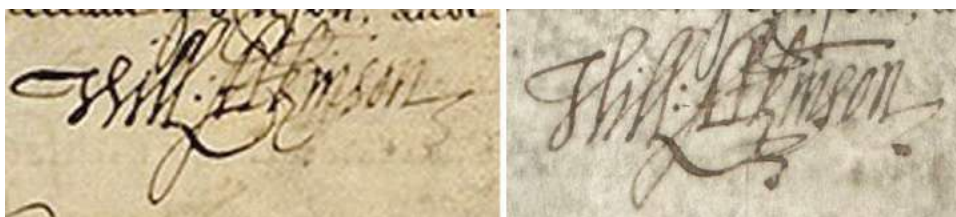
Now we come to Mr. Shakspeare's alleged signatures, dated 10 and 11 March 1613, but probably signed on the same day. The signatures look like those of two different persons: the letters "S-h-a" in the surname, for instance, are formed differently in each.



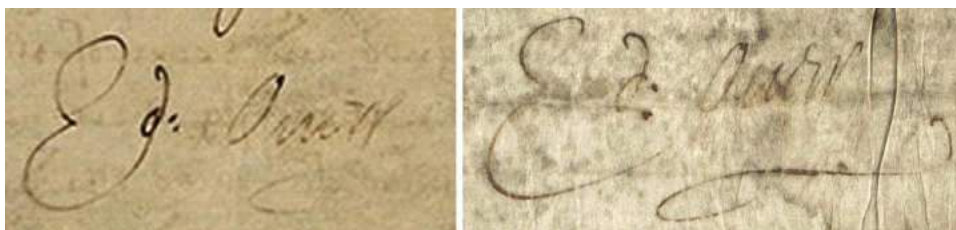
Figure 29: Mr. Shakspeare's alleged signatures, with graphic enhancements.

## The Slippery Slope of Shakspeare's "Signatures"

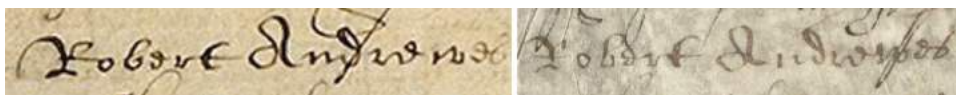
On the reverse side of each of the documents are the signatures of the four witnesses: William Atkinson, Clerk of the Brewers' Company; Edward Overy, gentleman; Robert Andrewes, scrivener; and Henry Lawrence, servant to the scrivener (figures 30–33).



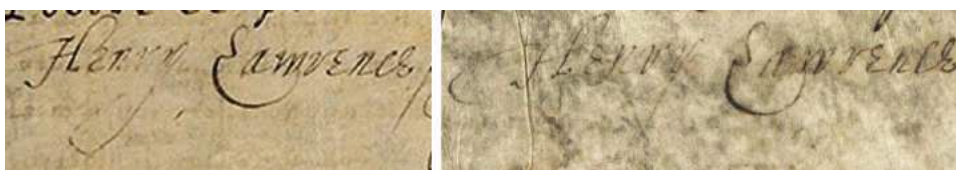
*Figure 30: Signatures of William Atkinson, Clerk of the Brewers' Company.*



*Figure 31: Signatures of Edward Overy, gentleman.*



*Figure 32: Signatures of Robert Andrewes, scrivener.*



*Figure 33: Signatures of Henry Lawrence, servant to the scrivener.*

The four witnesses also signed their names to another document relating to the sale: the bargain and sale signed by Henry Walker, dated March 10, 1613.

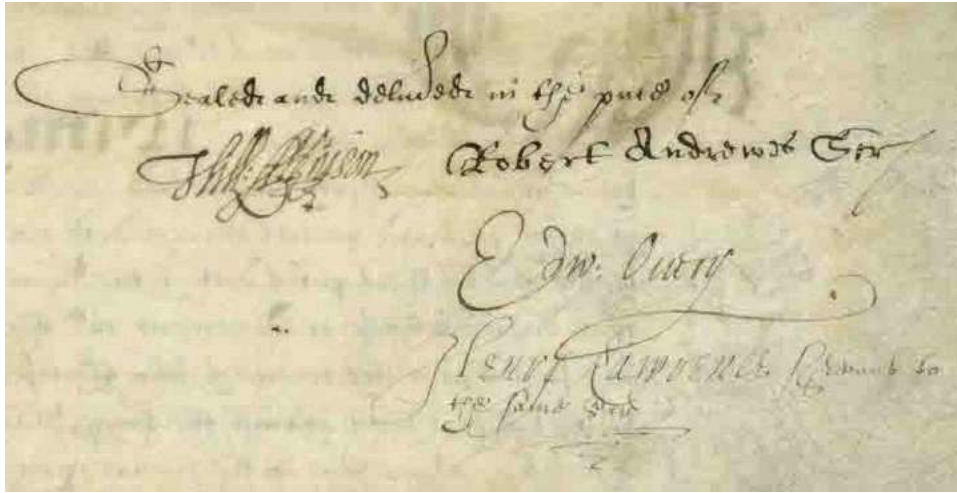


Figure 34: Bargain and Sale signed by Henry Walker, dated March 10, 1613.

Just like William Johnson and John Jackson, who were not professional writers, all signatures match their counterparts in the two deeds. Except Shakspeare's.

As with the Bellott-Mountjoy signature, the Shakspeare signature on the copy of the bargain and sale agreement contained an ornamental dot, as was common in legal writings of the time but absent from the signatures of professional dramatists. Once again, the surname in both instances is abbreviated using the clerical conventions of the time, no other signatures on these documents were abbreviated, and, if they were, they would have been unacceptable on legal documents.

In the body of the March 10, 1613 purchase deed of the Blackfriars property there are seven dotted "W's" in the first six lines. In the body of the mortgage deed of March 11, 1613 in a different clerk's hand, there are seven dotted "W's" in the first five lines.

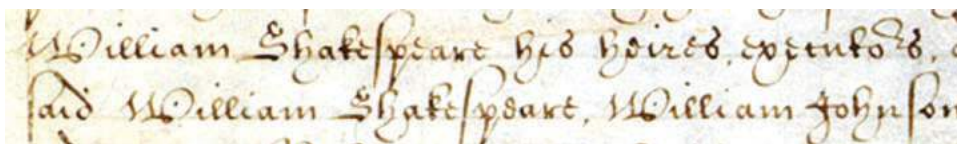


Figure 35: A portion of the March 10 deed which includes three of the dotted "W's".



## The Slippery Slope of Shakspere's "Signatures"

So, from a paleographical point of view, Shakespeare's signatures are once again anomalous.

The problems do not stop there. When we look at the legal requirements of the two 1613 documents, we see that neither actually required signatures at all, whereas the 1618 document did.

Deeds in the Elizabethan Era contained one of two clauses: "sett their seals" or "sett their hands and seals." In Elizabethan society, where a large proportion of the population was illiterate, sealing a document was the most popular way of validating it. Sir Hilary Jenkinson writes:

It is a point rather frequently overlooked that the chief if not the only purpose of seals was originally to authenticate: they were the equivalent of the modern signature at a time when the principals in any business or administrative transaction could seldom read and still more seldom write.... (Jenkinson 1980, 150)

Higgs writes that in the Early Modern period, the signature's use as a method to authenticate documents,

shared this function with the seal and was indeed for much of the time subordinated to the latter. (Higgs 59)

But adding a signature was becoming more common as literacy rates in the Elizabethan Era had increased from medieval times. It became the preferred option because the signature added another layer of authenticity and proof against fraud. A document that was "signed, sealed and delivered" was considered the most secure. However, from a strictly legal point of view, only sealing was required.

The clauses of both 1613 documents clearly read "set their seals," meaning there was no requirement that the document be signed to authenticate it. On the back of the document (verso), the four witnesses were witness "to the sealing and delivery."

Compare these to the 1618 document, signed by Jackson and Johnson, as well as John Heminges, which requires that they "Sett their hand and seals." This document **required** a signature from Jackson, Johnson and Heminges.

The signature of John Heminges is consistent with the one which appears on actor Richard Cowley's will the same year (figure 36):

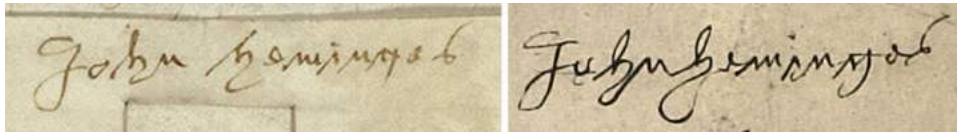


Figure 36: Signatures of John Heminges.

Since the signatures of Jackson and Johnson on the 1618 document unquestionably match the handwriting on the two 1613 documents, there can be no doubt that their 1613 signatures are from their own hands. But the same cannot be said about the two Shakspeare signatures, which differ markedly. I believe the reason is because they were made by two different people. And if they were made by two different people, then neither were probably written by Shakspeare, as he would not have signed one and not the other. Notice that the 1618 signatures are placed on the deed itself, rather than on the tabs.



Figure 37: Signatures on the 1618 document.

Contrast this to the two deeds from 1613 where the names are written on the tags or tabs (figure 38). It should be noted that clerks would often inscribe the names of the sealants on the tags. This was to help identify multiple sealants, particularly if they shared a seal (as Shakspeare and Johnson did, using the clerk Henry Lawrence's seal), which was fairly common.

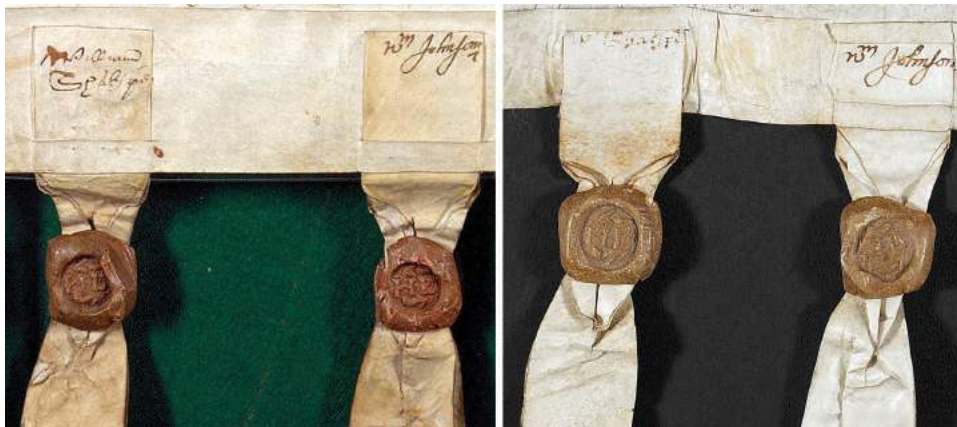


Figure 38. Seals on the two deeds from 1613.



## The Slippery Slope of Shakspeare's "Signatures"

As a handbook on sigillography states:

Frequently, when attaching several seals, the names of the sealers are written on the bow over the seals or on the parchment strips. (Bresslau 596)

Another guide states that "the names of the sealers are sometimes recorded by the scribes of the document" so that "the sigilator could recognize the points which were conceived for the individual seals" (Ewald 176).

This also helped identify the sealers if the seal, or the seal and tag, was to come off, which they sometimes did. A clear case of this is shown below on the bottom far right, where John Jackson's seal has come off (figure 39).



Figure 39: Showing a missing seal.

In R.B. Pugh's catalog of deeds, *Calendar of Antrobus Deeds before 1623*, literary historian Robert Detobel makes the distinction in Pugh's description of deeds between those "signed" by the signatory and those "inscribed" by the clerk. Pugh followed the same protocol used by the British Records Association in its "Reports of a Committee on the Cataloging of Deeds," in which genuine signatures and a clerk's inscriptions of names are differentiated. Consider the description of two deeds from 1612 (highlighted in figure 40):

<b>Marked with the mark of Alice Bundye wife of Robert Bundye.</b>	
<b>Seal :</b> oval ; c. $\frac{1}{8}'' \times \frac{3}{16}''$ ; armorial—a chevron between three lozenges ; red wax ; tag inscribed " Bundie " ; broken.	
<b>Endorsements :</b> (i) Sealed and delivered by Alice Bundye widow late wife and executrix to Robert Bundye in the presence of Ni. Hyde.	
(ii) The counterpart of W <sup>m</sup> (?) Beytham his lease of land in Amesburye (? contemporary).	
(iii) 1 July 1612.	
The Earl of Hertford to Robert Bundie	{ Lease of 7 acres of land part of the demesnes of the late dissolved priory of Amesbury (c. 18th cent., hand C).
<b>147. Covenant by the lessor for peaceable enjoyment. English.</b>	
<b>Seal :</b> missing ; tag inscribed " Rutt ".	
<b>Endorsements :</b> (i) The counterpart of Rutt's lease for certain Billett Land in Amesburye Wiltes (? contemporary).	
(ii) 1612. Lease of 4 a. of land called Barnards Field part of Amesbury demesnes (c. 18th cent., hand C).	

Figure 40. Description of two deeds from 1612 in R.B. Pugh's catalog of deeds.

In Pugh's book, missing seals or tags were not uncommon, again illustrative of why scribes often inscribed the names of the sealers on the tags.

A further point that Detobel raises, first suggested by Malone and endorsed by Tannenbaum, is that the seal tabs with the names of Shakespeare on them seem greasy. Although it is difficult to see in copies as compared to the originals, in the two pictures below, the names of Johnson and Jackson appear more vibrant and the ink appears to have been written with more facility than Shakspeare's names.

In a close-up of Shakspeare and Jonson's tabs, note the "W" in "William" and "S" in the surname appear slightly blotted, indicating the possibility of difficulty writing on the surface. The "W" of "William" and the top of the "S" of the surname are not taking to the paper as easily (figure 41).



*Figure 41: From the March 10, 1613 document.*

## The Slippery Slope of Shakspeare's "Signatures"

Likewise, in the close-up of the second deed, on the other Shakspeare and Jonson tabs, the "Wm Shakspe" has clearly not taken to the parchment as well as the other two names. The Shakspeare name does not come out as clearly as Johnson's (figure 42).



*Figure 42: From the March 11, 1613 document.*

This would suggest that Johnson and Jackson both put their names to the tags when the deal was being executed, which would have aided identification, especially because one seal had been shared. Then at a later time, during the sealing and delivering process after the glue had been applied to attach the tags to the deed, the clerically abbreviated name of William Shakspeare was added to the appropriate tags to aid in identification if the seal or tag were to come off. It would make sense for the scribe for each party to do this, hence the differing handwriting, clerical abbreviation and use of legal nomenclature. This also explains why the writing did not take to the parchment as the other two signatures did.

Attempting to argue that Mr. Shakspeare signed the two 1613 documents presents a nonsensical situation: three men, each of whom were capable of signing their names to a legal document, chose not to do so because their signatures were not technically required. Instead they chose to authenticate these documents using the less secure method of sealing. After the deal

was complete, Mr. Shakspere waited until after the clerk applied the glue to attach the tags to these legal documents, at which time he signed his name on each one, over a tag on each one, by signing two entirely different forms of penmanship, using an illegal abbreviated surname and using scrivener's abbreviations—entirely unlike any of the signatures of every other person who co-signed documents with him.

On the *Shakespeare Documented* website, Professor of English Alan Nelson seems to recognize a problem, explaining that the signatures of other signatories are unproblematic:

Henry Walker's signature, which occurs only once among surviving documents, is unproblematic. The signatures of William Johnson and John Jackson are consistent over three documents, including the 1618 indenture.... John Heminges' signature from 1618 matches his signature in the archives of his parish church of St. Mary Aldermanbury. (Nelson, *Shakespeare Documented* website)

Yet trying to explain Shakespeare's signature, Nelson simply continues:

Here, personal signatures clearly took precedence over their seals as evidence of identity. (Nelson, *Shakespeare Documented* website)

Clearly they did not, for if Shakspere was able to sign, as Johnson and Jackson clearly were and did, the clause would have been "sett their hands and seals" and they would have signed on the document proper. This would have made the deed more secure. There is no reason this should not have occurred, given Johnson and Jackson's consistent signatures from 1613 to the 1618 deed, where the authenticating clause required a signature. Nelson fails to acknowledge that the legal requirement to execute a deed in 1613 was by sealing, not by signing. He fails to raise any of the issues discussed herein.

Likewise, the Wikipedia entry on "William Shakespeare's" handwriting presents misleading information:

Three of these signatures are abbreviated versions of the surname, using breviographic conventions of the time, which was common practice. For example, Edmund Spenser sometimes wrote his name out in full (spelling his first name Edmund or Edmond), but often used the abbreviated forms "Ed: spser" or "Edm: spser." The signatures on the Blackfriars document may have been abbreviated because they had to be squeezed into the small space provided by the seal-tag, which they were legally authenticating. (Wikipedia, "Shakespeare's Handwriting," accessed 08/15/2020)

"Breviographic conventions" are scribal abbreviations used by law clerks and scribes. These conventions were certainly used, but not by parties to a legal agreement when signing their names to authenticate the transaction. As we have seen, Spenser's signatures were developed in a secretarial capacity and he could and did write his name in full when required, with a perfect constancy, unlike Mr. Shakspeare's signatures. And the "signatures" most certainly were not authenticating the document—if they were, the authenticating clause would have read "signed and sealed" rather than just "sealed."

## Summary of Evidence Presented

Of the 16 people who allegedly put their signatures to the same legal documents as Mr. Shakespeare, only Mr. Shakespeare's signatures were not written with a measured hand or a full surname. Of the 14 people who allegedly signed their names to these legal documents more than once, only Mr. Shakespeare's signatures are inconsistent. His signatures are the only ones to use scribal abbreviations and legal writing techniques. Yet unlike many of his fellow signatories, he was supposedly a writer by profession.

Edmund Maunde Thompson writes:

It is remarkable that this [the Bellott-Mountjoy signature], should again, like the other two [the Blackfriars signatures], come to us in a shortened form, but in a different form from the others. (Thompson 9)

Remarkable indeed and without precedent—no other dramatist in the Elizabethan or Jacobean eras set their signatures in this way on legal documents. I would suggest there is no other literate person in this time who did this.

## Other Wills of the Elizabethan and Jacobean Eras

Before examining Shakespeare's will, it is instructive to look first at the other wills of the period made by his contemporaries.

Shakespeare scholar E.A.J. Honigmann and Susan Brock's *Playhouse Wills: 1558–1642* contains transcriptions of 135 wills of Shakespeare's playhouse contemporaries. Honigmann and Brock write that testators

would **occasionally** sign each sheet of a will as well as the last page but there was no requirement to do so; indeed, the absence of the seal or signature of the testator or witnesses in no way invalidated a written document provided there were two or three witnesses and its authenticity was unquestioned. (Honigmann & Brock 12–3)



Indeed, of the 135 wills of Shakespeare's contemporaries in *Playhouse Wills*, only 8 (or 5%) signed their names on more than one page, and of those only 6 (4%) signed on every sheet.

Wills were often drawn up using a formulaic template such as those in Swinburne's 1611 *A Briefe Treatise of Testaments and Last Willes* and West's 1610 *The First Part of Simboleography*. As Cutting demonstrates (Cutting 176), the wills of Jacob Meade and Shakspeare both seem to follow one of the templates set out in West's work:

Jacob Meade	William Shakspeare
....sick in body but of good and perfect memory (praysed bee god therefore) doe make and ordayne this my Last wyll and testament in manner and forme ffollowing that is to say) first I Coment my soulle unto the hands hoping through of Almighty god my maker Assuredly the only merits of Jesus Chryst my saviour to bee made partaker of Lyf everlasting And I Comend my Body to the earth whearof it was made.	in perfect health & memory god be praysed doe make & ordayne this my last will & testament in manner and forme following That is to saye ffirst I commend my soule into the handes of my god my creator hoping & assuredly beleeving through thonellie merittes of Jesus Christe my savior to be made partaker of life everlasting And my bodye to the Earth whereof yt ys made.

## Comparison of Wills

Shakespeare's will states that he is in "perfect health," whereas the majority of testators both in *Playhouse Wills* and in general wrote that they were in poor health, and the legal templates of the time reflected this, stating "in poor health" as the standard option. Let us first look at those others in *Playhouse Wills* who, like Shakspeare, claimed they were in good health and signed their names more than once.

Arthur Wilson was a dramatist who had "three plays performed by King's company at court and Blackfriars" (Honigmann and Brock 208), he wrote his own will "in health," noting rather eloquently "knowing by Divine Truth that man is as the flower of the ffeild, as a Vapor, as dust, as a shadow that passeth away; and by humane Experience as a brittle glasse, soone broken."

## The Slippery Slope of Shakspeare's "Signatures"

Below are two signatures of Arthur Wilson (figure 43) and Wilson's name as he writes it at the beginning of his holographic will (figure 44):

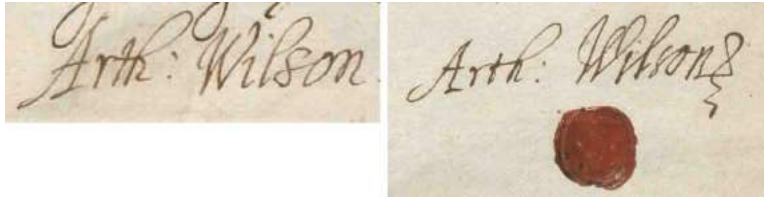


Figure 43: Signatures of Arthur Wilson.

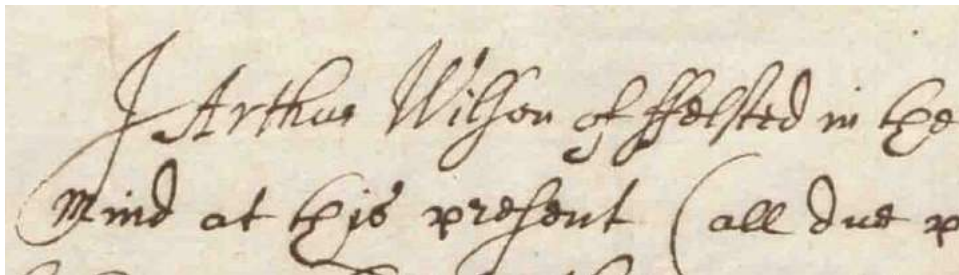


Figure 44: Arthur Wilson's name in his holographic will.

Edward Pudsey (1573–1613), “in health,” was a “theatre goer.” Notebooks include extracts from quarto editions of several Shakespeare plays and from *Othello*, not published until 1622 (Honigmann and Brock 94). He signed his will three times (figure 45).

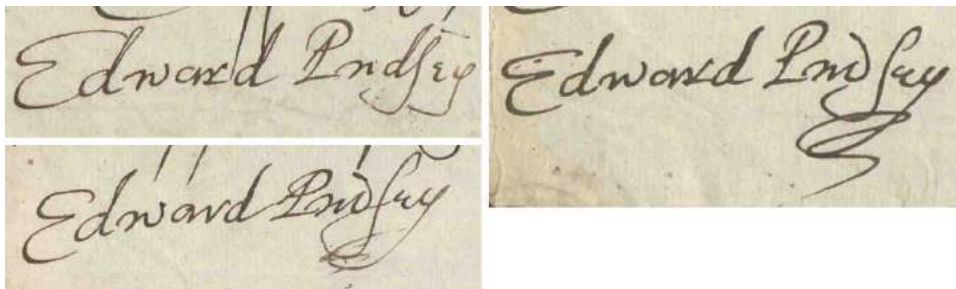


Figure 45: Signatures of Edward Pudsey.

John Astley, Master of the Revels from 1622 to 1640, signed his holographic will twenty times, five of which are shown below (figure 46).



Figure 46: Signatures of John Astley.

When considering those wills that state that the testators are in poor health, caution must be used, as Cressy notes:

Wills are, unfortunately, beset by a serious problem which renders them, as Margaret Spufford says, “fundamentally unsatisfactory.” Most wills were made close to death when the testator was battling his final illness. Many will-makers were senile or incapacitated, and those amongst them who had once known how to write might now find it impossible to sign their names or even hold a pen. (Cressy 106–7)

While the qualities of those “sick in health” are considerably less than those in good health, the formation of letters is still more consistent than Shakspeare’s, and unlike Shakspeare’s none use the legal markings of the time.

Ellis Worth, actor, “Weak of Body,” signed twice (figure 47).



Figure 47: Signatures of Ellis Worth, actor, “Weak of Body”.

## The Slippery Slope of Shakspeare's "Signatures"

Actor John Shancke, "being sicke and weake in body," signed his will seven times (figure 48).

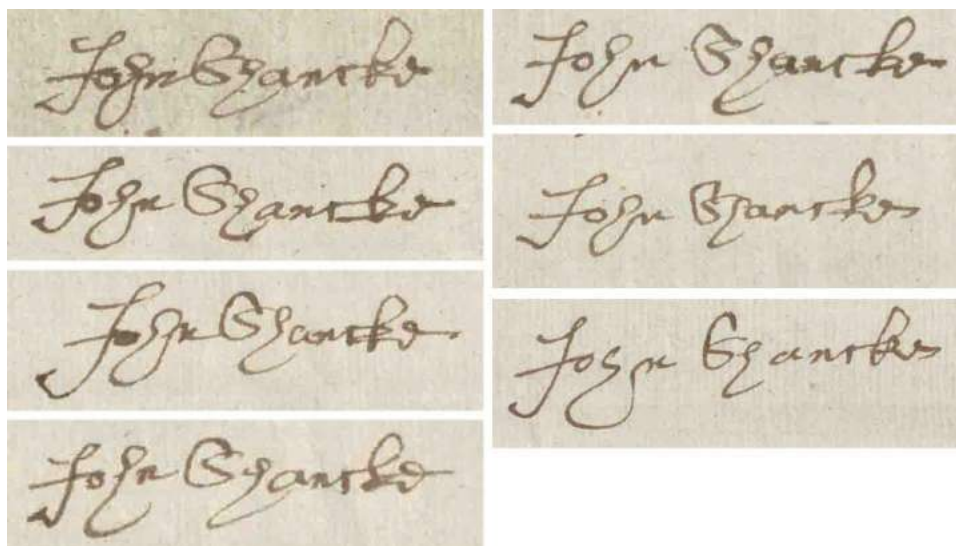


Figure 48: Signatures of John Shancke.

Actor Henry Cundall, "being sick in body," signed nine times. Although his penmanship is very poor, his attempts to form each letter are consistent (figure 49).



Figure 49: Signatures of Henry Cundall.



Actor-dramatist Robert Armyrn, “weake in bodie,” signed twice. The “A” in the first signature and the “t” and “m” in the second are faded, but can be seen in higher resolution copies (figure 50).



Figure 50: Signatures of Robert Armyrn.

John Garland, “sicke in Bodie,” signed twice. The “r” in his first surname may indicate a slip of a pen or a frail hand—one can only speculate. But he still forms his letters with far less variation than the Shakspeare signatures.



Figure 51: Signatures of John Garland.

## Examining Contemporary Wills Signed by Proxy

Sometimes clerks would sign the wills for the testators. Usually the clerk would sign the “signature” of the testator in a different hand than he used in the body of the will: sometimes slightly different, sometimes more obscure.

Below is an interesting example in which the clerk appears to have changed a letter in the “signature” from that in the body of the will. The will of John Nicholas has four signatures affixed to it. It reads “putt my hand and seal.” The first three ‘signatures’ (figure 52).



Figure 52: Signatures of John Nicholas.



## The Slippery Slope of Shakspeare's "Signatures"

From the same will, notice in the example below, to the left of the signature, the clerk has written "John Nicholas" in the attestation clause. The "J" "o" and "N" "t" indicate a common hand, yet the "ch" is written in a different form (figure 53).

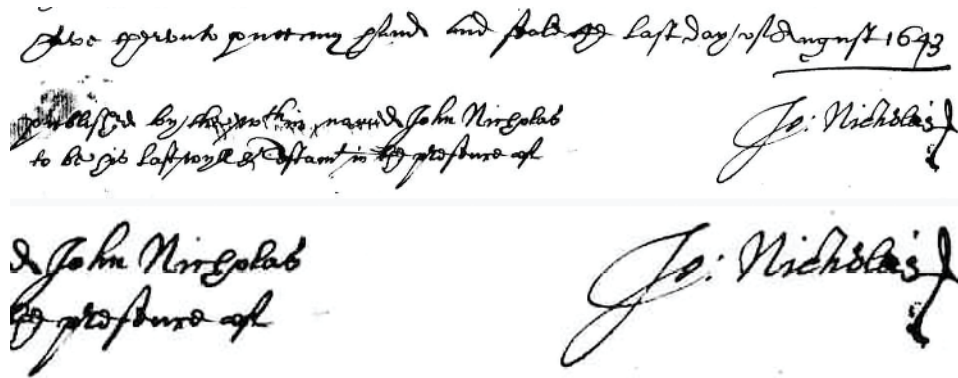


Figure 53: Comparison of writing styles for "John Nicholas" in the will.

However, if we look at some of the ways the clerk writes the name throughout the body of the will, he alternates between the two (figure 54).

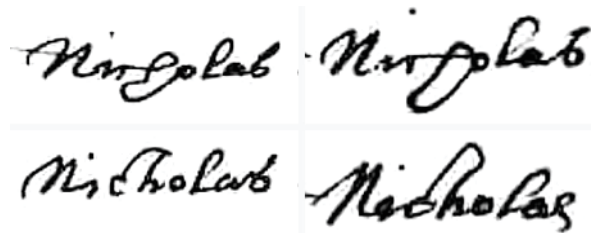


Figure 54: Further comparison of writing styles for "John Nicholas".

In the will of Richard Wind (figure 55), "sick in bodie," the "signature" is again similar, but with some differences, to the "Richard Wind" on the left about halfway down. Notice the "c-h" in "Richard" is the same as in the signature, while the surname is almost identical in each. There are some differences too: the "R" in the version on the left does not have the curve on

the top left that the signature does, although the “P” in “Published” (directly above) does. Likewise, the “d” in “Richard” in the two are different, although the “d” in “Published” by the clerk is similar to the “d” in “Richard” in the pseudo signature, betraying a common hand.

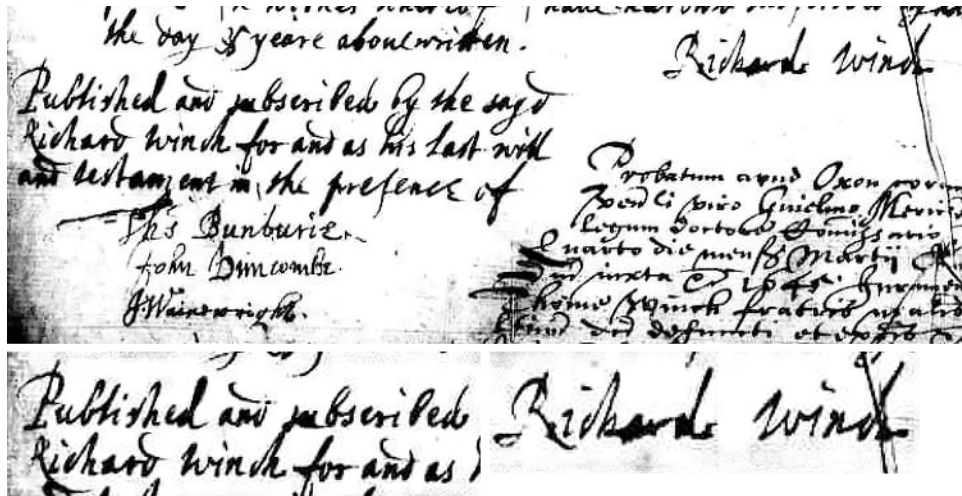


Figure 55: Comparison of writing styles in the will of Richard Wind.

Below, the opening of the will “I Richard Wind” and the name of the testator’s brother, “Thomas Wind,” in the same hand (figure 56).

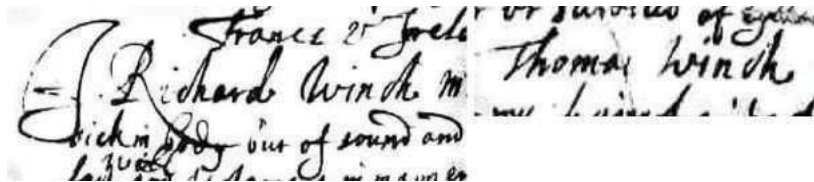


Figure 56: Further comparison of writing styles in the will of Richard Wind.

There are more complex examples of possible signatures by proxy where clerks may have used “disguised writing” to make the signatures look more authentic—these are beyond my paleographical skills; a forensic document examiner with access to the originals would be required to try to ascertain their authenticity.

## The Slippery Slope of Shakspeare's "Signatures"

It was more common for clerks to sign for witnesses. Cox notes:

Among fifty-five wills proved in the Prerogative Court in the same month as Shakespeare's, there are numerous examples of "forgeries" of witnesses' signatures; the attorney's clerk simply wrote the names on the document, sometimes using a contrived hand to make them look like signatures, sometimes not. (Cox 34)

Below, the signature of the testator and two witnesses appear to be in the same hand (figure 57).

Figure 57 shows a handwritten document. At the top, a line of text reads "made and all the rest to my wife". Below this, the text "Witness to this" is written. Underneath, there are three signatures: "John Bevine" (with a large, ornate flourish), "John: Eton:", and "John Hark" (written in a more cursive, flowing style). The signatures are written in dark ink on a light background.

Figure 57: Comparison of the writing styles of the testator and witnesses.

In another will below, we find a more subtle example in which the three bottom signatures contain the same "H," suggesting a common hand (figure 58).

Figure 58 shows a handwritten document. At the top, the text "Signed sealed and published" is written. Below this, the text "in the presence of" is written. Underneath, there are three signatures: "Robert Gardner", "John Hill", and "Humphrey Boulton". The signatures are written in dark ink on a light background. The signature "John Hill" is written in a cursive style, while "Robert Gardner" and "Humphrey Boulton" are written in a more formal, upright style.

Figure 58: Further comparison of the writing styles.

It seems then, that signing for testators or witnesses—or both—occurred at the time. But what about the company Mr. Shakspeare was associated with, the King's Men? Let us look at the wills of some of his fellow actors.

## The Wills of Fellow Actors: Richard Burbage (1619)

In 1619 Richard Burbage made his nuncupative will below (figure 59).

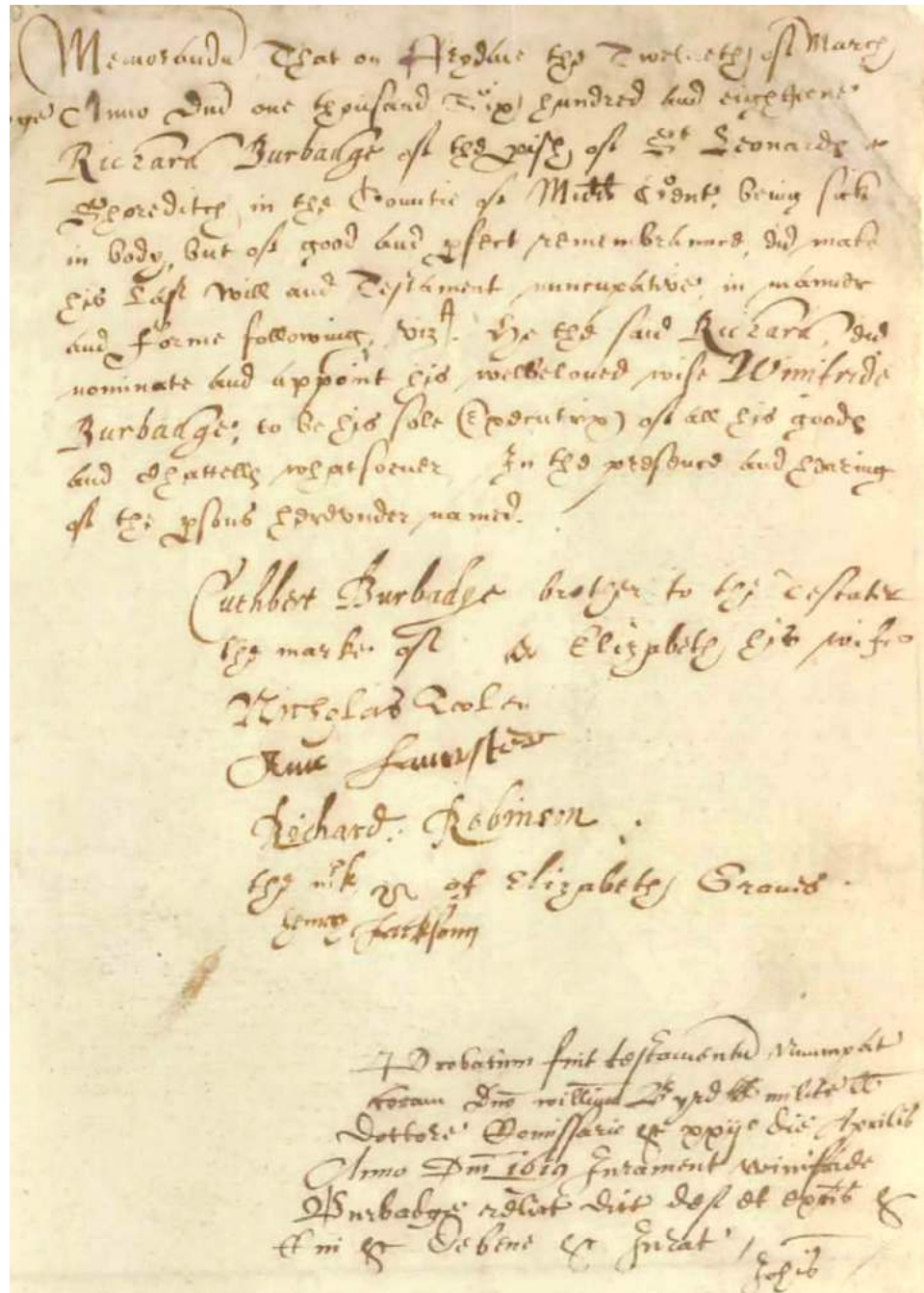


Figure 59: Sample page from Richard Burbage's will.



## The Slippery Slope of Shakspeare's "Signatures"

In *Playhouse Wills, 1558–1642*, Honigmann and Brock write:

Stopes (*Burbage and Shakespeare's Stage* 124) speculates that Cuthbert Burbage acted as a scribe, probably due to the fact that the text and Burbage's "signature" are in the same hand. However, comparison with MSS identified as written by Ralph Crane suggests that Crane wrote the text of the will and at least some of the signatures. (Honigmann and Brock 114)

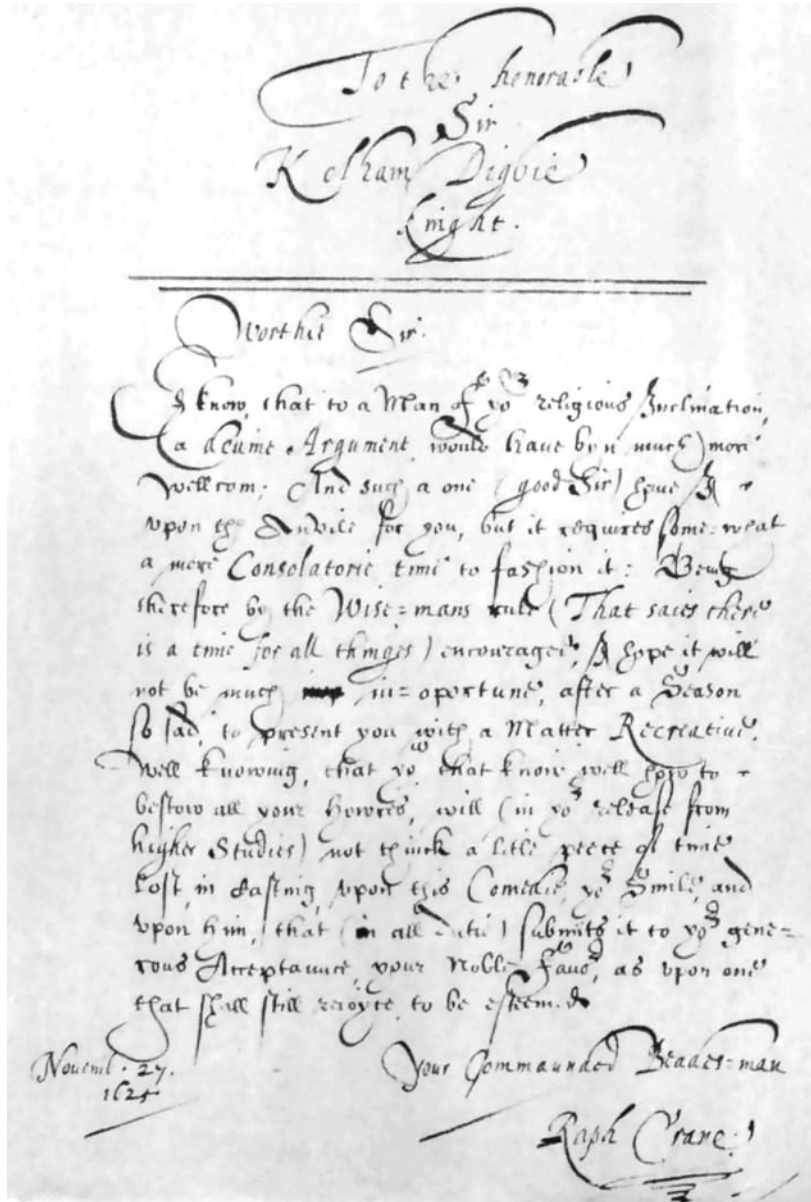


Figure 60: The dedication to Demetrius and Enanthe, December 27, 1625 by Ralph Crane.



They cite Wilson's 1927 article, "Ralph Crane, Scrivener to the King's Players," which includes facsimiles of Crane's work, some of which are shown below. Crane was able to add flourishes and embellishments to his hand easily. He first worked for Sir Anthony Ashley, Clerk of the Privy Council, then in the Signet Office and the Privy Seal, and was soon "copying for lawyers, clergymen and those associated with the theatre" (*The Circulation of Manuscripts* 190). This included work as a freelancer for the King's Men.

A close-up from the dedication shows Ralph Crane's signature (figure 61). Figure 62 is an additional sample of his writing.

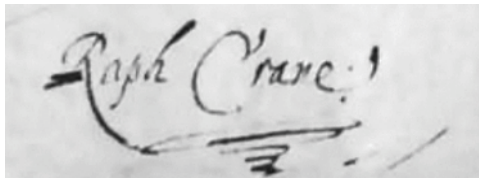
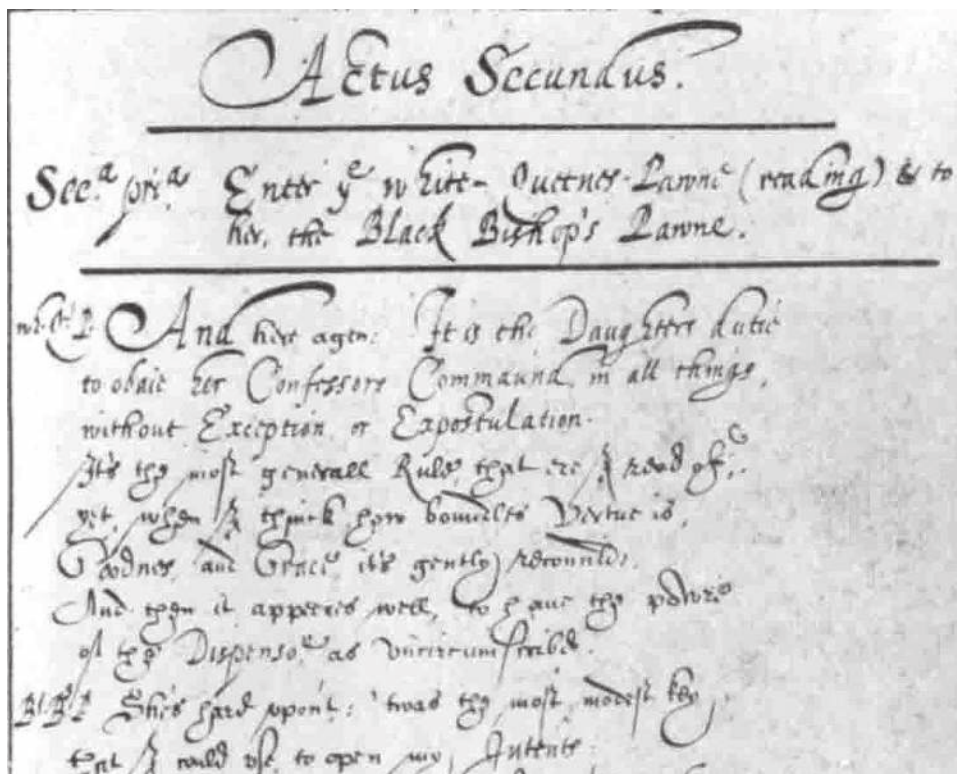


Figure 61: Ralph Crane's signature.



Actus Secundus.

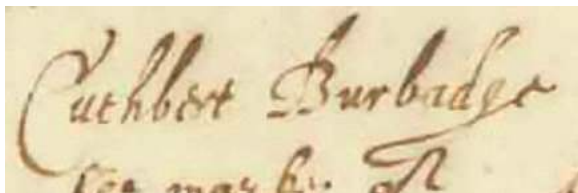
Secundus. Enter J. in white. Outcomes. Lane (reading) & to  
his, the Black Bishop's Lane.

And here again. It is the Daughter's Lute  
to obtain her Confessors Command in all things,  
without Exception or Expostulation.  
It is the most generall Rule, that is, of  
yet, when a young man's Virtue is,  
Admired and Graced, it is gently rewarded.  
And when it appears well, to give the reward  
of the Dispense, as Virtue is, and  
Alas! She's good upon: 'twas the most modest  
and the most of to open my. Autent

Figure 62: This image is from *A Game at Chess*, Lansdowne 690, also written by Ralph Crane.

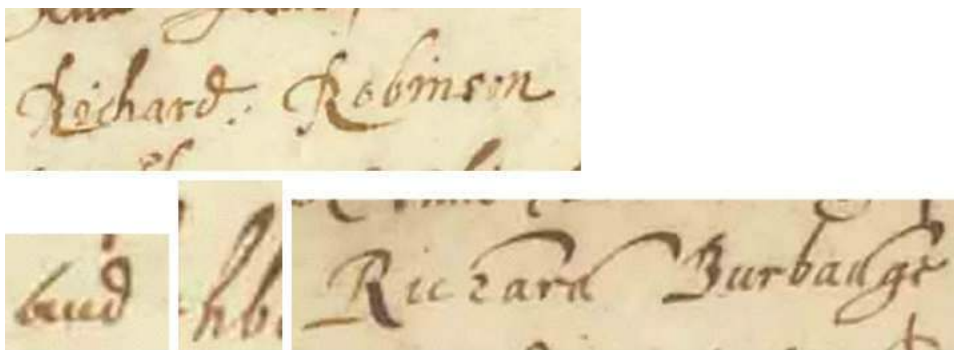
## The Slippery Slope of Shakspeare's "Signatures"

Below is a close-up of Cuthbert Burbage's signature (figure 63).

A close-up photograph of a handwritten signature in cursive script. The name "Cuthbert Burbage" is clearly legible, written in dark ink on aged, slightly yellowed paper. The script is fluid and characteristic of the late 16th or early 17th century.

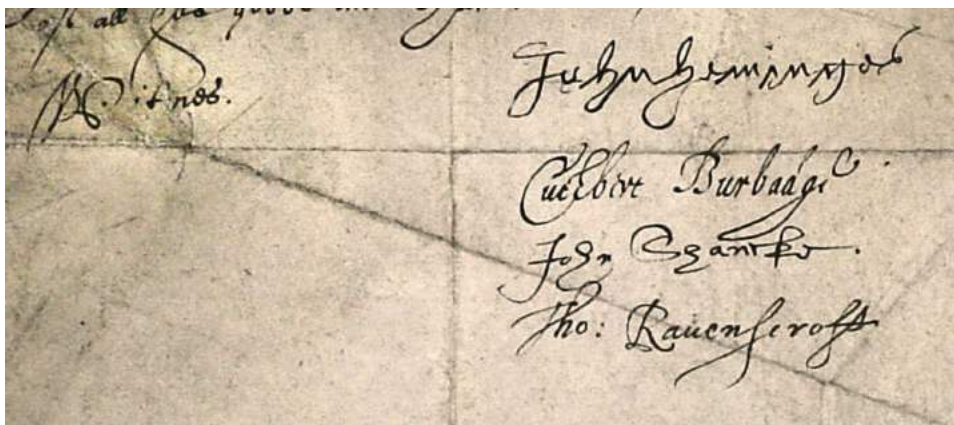
*Figure 63: Signature of Cuthbert Burbage.*

The signature of Richard Robinson, an actor in the King's Men, seems to be in the same hand as that of the body of Burbage's will and Burbage's signature (figure 64).

Three separate close-up photographs of handwritten signatures. The top image shows "Richard Robinson" in cursive. The bottom left image shows a partial signature "and". The bottom right image shows "Richard Burbage" in cursive. All three signatures appear to be in the same hand, written in dark ink on aged paper.

*Figure 64: Signature of Richard Robinson.*

In the previous year (1618) Cuthbert Burbage and John Heminges acted as witnesses to the will of actor Richard Cowley. Notice that in the upper left, the "W" in "Witness" has the ornamental dot, common in the legal writing of the period and several of Shakspeare's signatures, but not in any of those of his contemporaries (figure 65).

A photograph of a document, identified as the will of actor Richard Cowley. The document is aged and yellowed. In the upper left, the word "Witness" is partially visible, with a distinctive ornamental dot above the "W". To the right, there are four signatures in cursive script: "John Heminges", "Cuthbert Burbage", "John Evans", and "Tho: Rauenfroff". The signatures are written in dark ink.

*Figure 65: Signatures on the will of actor Richard Cowley.*

As we saw earlier, Heminges' signature matches his counterpart on the 1618 document in which the authenticating clause required a signature (figure 66).



Figure 66: Signatures of John Heminges.

The fourth signature, that of Thomas Ravenscroft, looks suspiciously similar to the handwriting used to make the signature of Cuthbert Burbage and Crane's extant body of work. It seems that scribes would sometimes add the names of witnesses in the scribe's own hand intermixed with those who could actually sign.

In 1601 Richard and Cuthbert Burbage purchased rooms adjacent to the Blackfriars Theatre. The bargain and sale document contains two signatures.



Figure 67: Signatures of Cuthbert and Richard Burbage.

It contains the authenticating clause “sette their seals” only; no mention is given of signing. The two signatures are of an astonishing quality for two men who never wrote anything else. But as the only two names on the document, it once again strains credulity to assume they are signatures, for if they were, the authenticating clause would have read “sette their hands and seals.” There is a similarity between the two signatures that suggests Crane wrote both the names.

According to Honigmann and Brock, some of the actors within the company were close-knit:

Despite the coming and going, not a few actors remained in the profession for life, or until the closing of the theatres in 1642. Inevitably they married into each other's families.... **Richard Burbage** was the son of James Burbage, an actor and builder of the Theatre who died in 1597; after Richard's death in 1619, his widow Winifred married the actor **Richard Robinson**; **Richard Burbage's** brother, **Cuthbert**, though not an actor, appears in several of our wills. Christopher Beeston's son William followed his father as an actor, and was later known





The testator's name is written out in the attestation clause on the left and his signature to the right. The two handwriting examples appear to be in the same hand (figure 69).

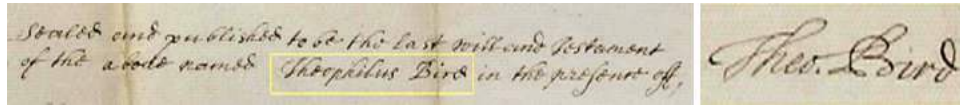


Figure 69: Handwriting examples.

Below, the testator's name as it appears twice in the body of the will; his brother's name is mentioned once (figure 70).



Figure 70: Theophilus Bird & George Bird, as they appear in the will.

George Bird's signature appears among the witness signatures (figure 71).

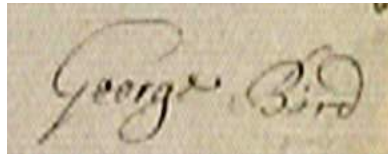


Figure 71: Signature of George Bird.

Also note the letter “H” in the body of the will is written the same way as the “H” in witness Hugh Greene's signature (figure 72).

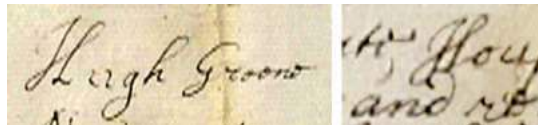


Figure 72: Signature of Hugh Greene.

Bird's will is an example in which the clerk has hardly made any attempt to disguise his handwriting “to give an air of verisimilitude” as Jenkinson put it. Looking through other wills, sometimes more of an effort is made.

It seems then that the leading actor for the King's Men and some of his fellow actors had their signing executed by scribes. We therefore have examples of proxy signatures not just from the period, but we have a tight nexus of actors from the King's Men, with whom Shakspeare was associated.



## The Slippery Slope of Shakspeare's "Signatures"

According to Honigmann and Brock, even wills claiming to be holographic must be treated with caution, and "it is dangerous to assume that a will is holograph even in those exceptional cases when the testator clearly states that he has written the will himself and appears to have signed it" (17).

The will of Edmund Tylney, for example, states in the body that it is "Written with my owne hand," yet the text is "in set secretary hand with displayed matter in italics, not Tylney's hand" (82).

## Shakspeare's Last Will and Testament (1616)

For high resolution photos of the will, see:

<http://www.shakespearedocumented.org/exhibition/document/william-shakespeares-last-will-and-testament-original-copy-including-three>

Shakspeare's will consists of three pages with a signature on every page and "By me" preceding the signature on the third page. The second signature spells the first name "Willim." The surname is never spelled "Shakespeare."

The three pages of Shakspeare's will follow (figures 73, 74, 75).

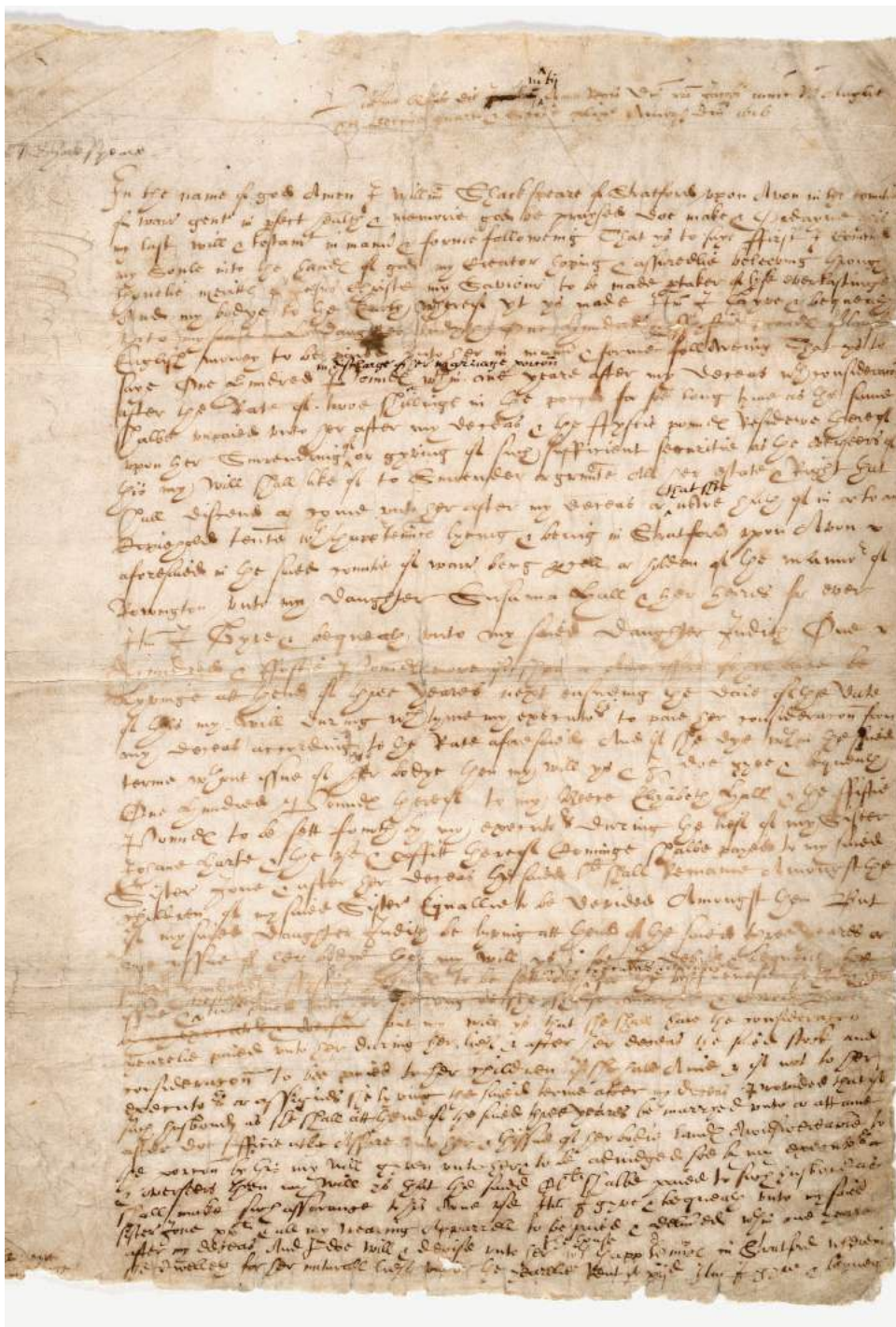


Figure 73: First page of William Shakespere's will.



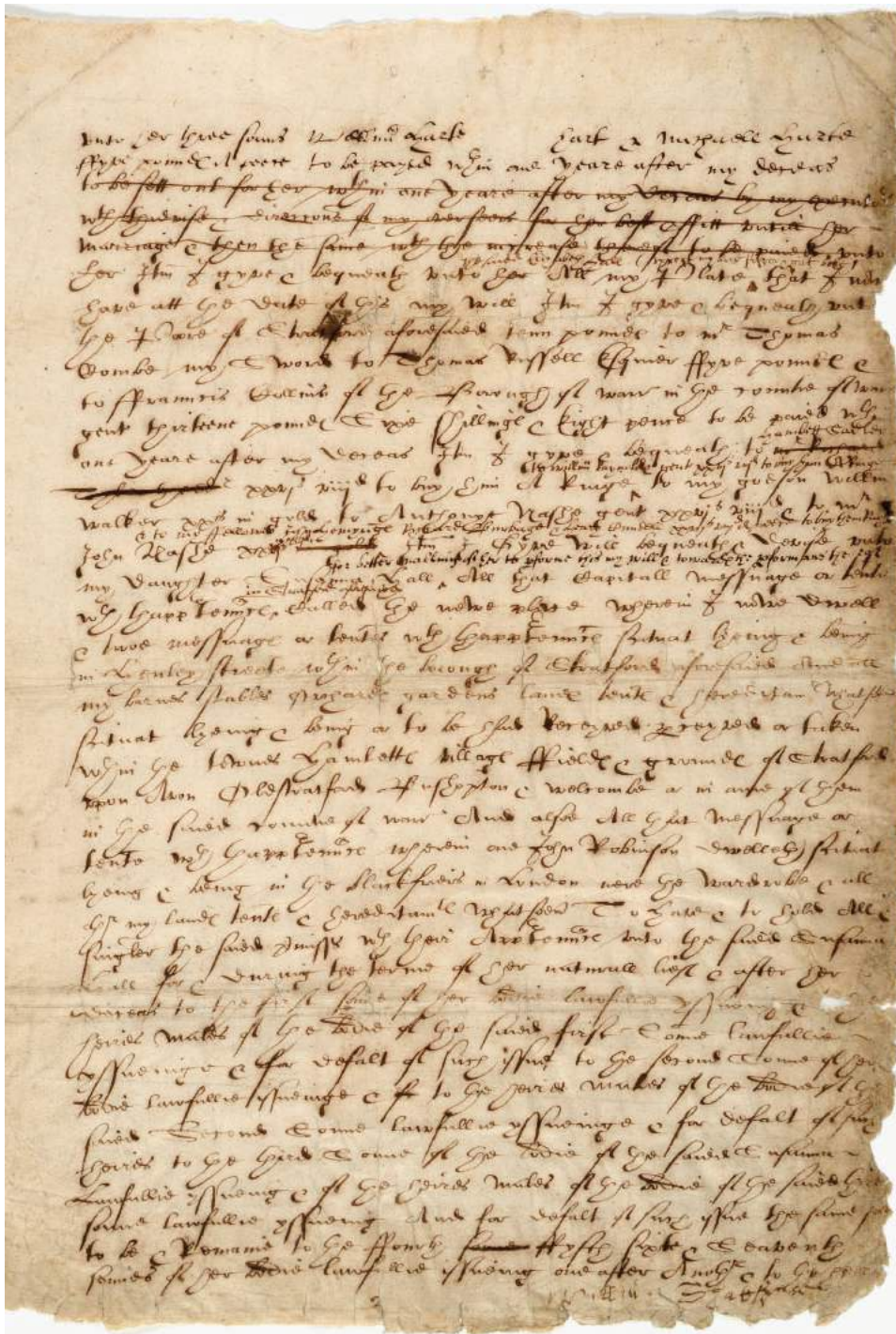


Figure 74: Second page of William Shakspeare's will.

[illegible]

written to you, possibly by  
 your friend  
 Johnna Goss  
 John Thompson  
 cannot tell  
 before we start

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*[Faint handwritten notes, likely bleed-through from the reverse side.]*

Figure 75: Third page of William Shakspeare's will.



## The Slippery Slope of Shakspeare's "Signatures"

For the best part of a century, the general consensus of the circumstances surrounding the drafting of Mr. Shakspeare's will has supported Sir E.K. Chambers' view, given in 1930:

The following hypothesis seems best to fit the facts. In or before January, probably of 1616, Shakespeare gave instructions for a will. It was not then executed, but on 25 March 1616 Shakespeare sent for Collyns. The changes he desired in the opening provisions were so substantial that it was thought best to prepare a new sheet 1. The heading and initial formulas as to health and religious expectation were adapted by the clerk from the old draft.... Then the opening provisions were dictated afresh with one or two corrections... and proved so much longer than those they replaced, as to crowd the writing and necessitate the carrying of two lines on to the old sheet 2, where they were inserted before a cancelled passage. The rest of this sheet and sheet 3 were allowed to stand, with some alterations, and in this form it was signed on each sheet by Shakespeare. (Chambers, 2:175)

However, in 2016 a team at the British National Archives undertook a conservation of the original will, including multi-spectral analysis of the three pages. Multi-spectral imaging can indicate differences in the inks being analyzed: those of a similar composition will only appear under certain wavelengths of light. The will was photographed using 13 wavelengths and using different filters and lighting.

The subsequent paper by Bevan and Foster (2016) made several points (figure 76):

- 1) "The continuing visibility of the page 2 ink suggests that the text on page 2 was written using a different ink than that used for pages 1 and 3" (Bevan and Foster 17). As Cutting observed in 2009, the will was likely to have been initiated earlier than January 1616 (Cutting 183). Bevan and Foster argue the second page of the will was likely from a previous draft, possibly as early as 1613. Unlike many wills which were made close to death as there was a superstition that to write a will was to invite the grim reaper. Mr. Shakspeare, an astute businessman, likely started his will early and was likely "in health" in January 1616 as the opening of the will states.





Figure 76: Multi-spectral analysis of the original will.

In figure 77, “Shakespeare’s will under infrared rays (1050nm spectrum). Most text has faded away from pages 1 and 3. Page 2 has more text remaining. The dark-ink interlineations can be seen on all pages” (The National Archives, Image created by the British Library Board).

- 2) The “By me, William Shakspear” on page 3 was dated to January 1616, while the signatures of witnesses—Shawe, Robinson, Sadler and Whatcott—were dated to March 1616, along with the interlineations.

This second point is most interesting—the witnesses were not present when the signature was made.

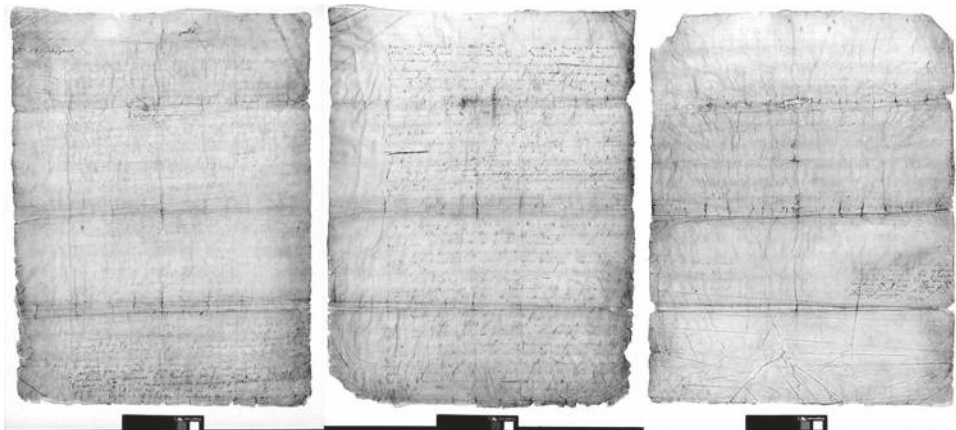


Figure 77: Infrared (1050nm spectrum) analysis of the original will.

## The Slippery Slope of Shakspere's "Signatures"

Of the following 40 other dramatists or acting contemporaries of Mr. Shakspere in *Playhouse Wills* who concluded their wills "In witness thereof," the witnesses were always present, following the custom of the time. One need only skim the words in *italic* below to see the point:

<u>Name &amp; Year of Will</u>	<u>Attestation clause</u>
John Brayne (1578)	"Sealed, subscribed and delivered by the said John Brayne... <i>in the presens of</i> ...[names of witnesses]."
Sebastian Westcott (1582)	"Signed, sealed and delivered... <i>in the presences of</i> [names of witnesses]."
John Bentley (1585)	" <i>Witnesses at</i> the reading sealinge and subscribinge and deliverye hereof [names of witnesses]."
Richard Tarlton (1588)	"Signed, sealed and delivered... <i>in the presence of</i> [names of witnesses]."
Margaret Brayne (1593)	"Signum dicte Margaret B Brayne Sigillat et delibat pro facto <i>in presencia</i> mei...[names of witnesses]."
Thomas Pope (1603)	"Seled <i>in the presence of</i> [names of witnesses]."
Augustine Phillips (1605)	"Sealed and delivered... <i>in the presence of</i> [names of witnesses]."
Hugh Davis (1608)	"I herunto put my hande & seale one the day and yere first above written. <i>In the presentes of</i> these whose names are herunder [names of witnesses]."
Edward Sharpham (1608)	"Signed, sealed published and declared... <i>in the presence of</i> [names of witnesses]."
Henry Johnson (1610)	"Sealed and delivered <i>in the presence of</i> us [names of witnesses]."
Thomas Towne (1612)	"Sealed <i>in the presence of</i> us [names of witnesses]."
Thomas Greene (1612)	"I have sett my hand and seal <i>Before theis witnesses</i> [names of witnesses]."
Robert Armin (1614)	"Published the Daye and yeare above written & the same reade to the Testator by me John Warnar scrivenor, and the same sealed and subscribed by the saide Testator <i>in the presence of</i> (name of witnesses)."
William Hovell (1615)	"Witness <i>hereunto</i> [names of witnesses]."
Philip Henslowe (1616)	"Sealed and subscribed <i>in the presence of</i> [names of witnesses]."

Ralph Reeve (1617)	“Subscribed and delivered <i>in the presentes of</i> [names of witnesses].”
Thomas Giles (1617)	“Witnesses <i>hereunto</i> [names of witnesses].”
Nicholas Tooley (1623)	“Signed, sealed pronounced and declared... <i>in the presence of</i> us [names of witnesses].”
William Bird (1624)	“I have hereunto set my hand and Seale... <i>In the presence of</i> (name of witness).”
John Clarke (1624)	“Subscribed, sealed and delivered and published... <i>in presence of</i> us [names of witnesses].”
Samuel Rowley (1624)	“Sealed and Delivered, and also published and declared... <i>in the presence of</i> [names of witnesses].”
John Underwood (1624)	“The will of John Underwood read published and acknowledged... <i>in the presence of</i> us [names of witnesses].”
Edward Alleyn (1626)	“Sealed and delivered and published... <i>in the presence of</i> us [names of witnesses].”
Henry Condell (1627)	“Signed sealed and pronounced and declared... <i>in the presence of</i> us [names of witnesses].”
Jacques Jones (1628)	“Sealed subscribed pronounced and declared... <i>in the presence of</i> [names of witnesses].”
Robert Lee (1629)	“Sealed subscribed and delivered... <i>in the presence of</i> (name of witness).”
Elizabeth Holland (1631)	“Sealed and her hand sett to: <i>in the presence of</i> [names of witnesses].”
Nathaniel Giles (1633)	“Sygned & delivered <i>in the presens of</i> [names of witnesses].”
John Marston (1634)	“Read published subscribed & sealed in the presence of [names of witnesses].”
William Browne (1634)	“Signed Sealed published and declared delivered... <i>in the presence of</i> [names of witnesses].”
Elizabeth Condell (1635)	“I have published this to bee my last will, and Testament <i>in the presence of</i> ...[names of witnesses].”
John Shank (1635)	“Signed sealed pronounced published and declared... <i>in the presence of</i> [names of witnesses].”
John Honyman (1636)	“Signed subscribed & published <i>in the presence of</i> [names of witnesses].”

## The Slippery Slope of Shakspeare's "Signatures"

Christopher Beeston (1638)	"Read, signed, sealed...and delivered <i>in the presence of</i> [names of witnesses]."
Elizabeth Robinson (1641)	"Sealed and published <i>in the presence off</i> [names of witnesses]."
Michael Bowyer (1645)	"Signed sealed published and declared... <i>in the presence of</i> [names of witnesses]."
Ellis Worth (1659)	"Signed sealed & published... <i>in the presence of</i> [names of witnesses]."
Theophilus Bird (1663)	"Sealed and published... <i>in the presence of</i> [names of witnesses]."
William Beeston (1682)	"Signed sealed and published <i>in the presence of</i> [names of witnesses]."
Charles Hart (1683)	"Signed Sealed Published and Declared... <i>in the presence of</i> [names of witnesses]."

Finally, in 1616 we have the attestation clause of Mr. Shakspeare's will, which, unlike 40 of his contemporaries, did not state that the witnesses were present at the signing:

"Witness to the publishing hereof"

To "publish" a will refers to the testator or lawyer informing the witnesses of the testator's intent to have the instrument operate as a will. The witnesses do not need to know the contents of the will, and more importantly, it does not involve the signing of the will.

That the four listed witnesses—Julyus Shawe, John Robinson, Hamnet Sadler and Robert Whattcott—were not present for the signing of the will is not only established by the attestation clause, it is confirmed by the comparison of the inks used on the will, as noted above.

This was tacitly noted by both Tannenbaum and Chambers, who discerned that the pen and darker ink used for the interlinear additions were the same used for the four witnesses to sign, but different from that used in the main body of the will, which includes the attestation and the three signatures (Chambers 2: 174).

We can see below a contrast in the ink of the signatures of the four witnesses—Julius Shawe, John Robinson, Hamnet Sadler and Robert Whatcott—compared to that used in the attestation clause directly above it, including the signature of Francis Collyns, and the “By me, William Shakspear,” to the right (figure 78).



Figure 78: Contrast in the ink of the signatures on Shakspeare's will.

In drafting a will, the chain of events should proceed as follows: writing the body of the will; making any changes and interlineations; the signing of the will by the testator; signing by the witnesses.

Yet if Mr. Shakspeare did sign the document, and the ink of the interlineations and witnesses is the same while the ink of the body (including the attestation clause and the three signatures) is in different ink, this implies the following. First, that the clerk wrote out the body of the will; second, he then changed pen and ink for the interlineations: third, Shakespeare reverted back to the other pen and ink to sign a document that is not attested to be signed, only published; and fourth, the witnesses used the other pen and ink to sign their names.

This unlikely scenario is now a moot point as it has been refuted by the spectroscopic analysis. Bevan and Foster date the attestation clause and Collyns' signature to January 1616 as well as the “By me, William Shakspear.” They date the signatures of the four witnesses to March 1616.

It is interesting to read Bevan and Foster's 2016 statement that “Page 3 is signed ‘By me William Shakspear’ in a firm and fluent hand” (Bevan and Foster 25), which flies in the face of many 20th Century paleographers who believed them to be the strokes of a weak man, despite the opening of the will stating he was in “perfect health.”



While Bevan and Foster's scientific analysis is to be commended, unfortunately, their knowledge of the law of the period is lacking:

Francis Collyns signed page 3 at the same time (January) as Shakespeare, in what we have called Ink 4, as 'Witness to the publishing hereof'—meaning that Shakespeare had signed the will in Collyns' presence. (Bevan and Foster 25)

In strict terms, the word "publication" meant the point at which the testator approved or signed the will. (Bevan and Foster 13)

Yet that is not what publishing a will means. As already noted, to "publish" a will in law is to acknowledge it before the witnesses as the testator's last will and testament. It does not indicate that the witnesses (or witness, in Collyns' case) witnessed the signing by the testator. Indeed, to "publish" a will does not involve signing at all. Many of the *Playhouse Wills* contained the attestation clause "Signed, sealed and published"—it would be a gross redundancy if "signed" and "published" were one and the same. They were not.

To simply publish a will is extremely anomalous. Most wills are witnessed for either the sealing or signing, or both. In the 135 wills of Shakspeare's contemporaries in *Playhouse Wills 1558–1642*, no other will contains "Witness to the publishing hereof." That the witnesses were present at the publication, but not the signing, of the will are not the only anomalies.

As with the Bellott-Mountjoy and Blackfriars documents, there are various anomalies that separate Shakspeare's will from those of his contemporaries, such as those in *Playhouse Wills*.

It is the only will out of 135 which was originally to be sealed, only to have this language struck out and replaced with "hand" instead. To prepare a will "to be sealed" only was a good indicator—but not proof—that the testator was unable to sign, be it from frailty, illness or illiteracy. It was not unusual for a will to be set up to be sealed and signed, only for the testator to become too ill to do so. But it was highly unusual to set up a will for sealing only, then to change it to be signed. We recall that in 1613, when Shakspeare purchased property in Blackfriars—and the time when Bevan and Foster believe the will was first initiated—both the Blackfriars documents were prepared to be sealed only, despite Jackson and Jonson both clearly putting their names to the deeds.

Schoenbaum recognized the problem (figure 79).

The last sentence of the document reads “In witness whereof I have hereunto put my seale...” Collyns or his scribe has scored through the word “seale” and written ‘hand’ above. Such an alteration suggests that the will, as originally devised, called for Shakespeare’s seal **in place of** his signature. (Schoenbaum 1981, 98; emphasis in original)



Figure 79: The last sentence of the document, with close-ups.

Regarding the three signatures (figure 80), Thompson wrote:

If the three signatures had been attached to three separate documents, they might very excusably have been mistaken at first sight for the signatures of three different persons. (Thompson 1916, 12)



Figure 80: Three alleged signatures of William Shakspeare.

Durning-Lawrence wrote about this issue in detail:

If the writings were signatures what could induce a man when signing his last Will to make each "W" as different from the others as possible, and why is the second Christian name written Willm? Compare also the second and third "Shakspeare" and note that every letter is formed in a different manner. Compare the two "S's", next compare the two "h's", the "h" of the second begins at the bottom, the "h" of the third begins at the top, the same applies to the next letter the "a", so also with respect to the "k's"; how widely different these are. (Durning-Lawrence 1910, 37–38)

Signatures of Francis Collyns once again show a consistent signature, on a 1610 conveyance, and on the will (figure 81).



Figure 81: Signatures of Francis Collyns.

The signature on the first page of the will is so degraded as to be difficult for comparison and an engraving in 1809 is obviously not of a sufficient replication for assessment—so it is therefore not included by many analysts, such as Jane Cox.

Thompson adds that on the third page,

he began to write very fairly well, *in scrivener style*, with the formal words "By me." (Thompson 1923, 61–62) (my emphasis)

Once again, the "W" contains an ornamental dot common to the scrivener and legal professions. The "W's" in "William" and "S's" in the surname are formed in completely different ways. To further confuse matters, some have speculated that the "By me, William" on the third page may be in a different hand to the one that wrote the surname immediately following it.

The use of these ornamental dots did not exist in any of the hundreds of signatures in the original wills I examined, although they were common in the scrivener's writings on many of them.

Here are six examples of the ornamental dots present in the “Witness hereunto” clause (figure 82).



Figure 82: Examples of scrivener script showing the ornamental dot.

This use of the ornamental dot in legal handwriting was not confined to London; the will of Shakspeare’s son-in-law in Stratford-upon-Avon, John Hall, also contains the ornamental dot in the parts written by the clerk but not in the witnesses’ signatures (figure 83).

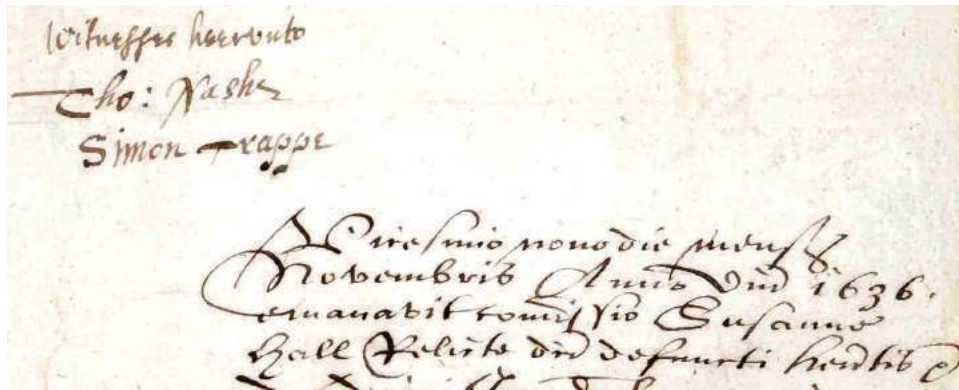


Figure 83: Section of the will of John Hall.

The ornamental dot features in the notarial copy of the will of Walter White, in which the clerk, copying the original, writes the testator’s name (figure 84).

Would the law of England at the time allow for a scrivener to sign the will on Mr. Shakspeare’s behalf?

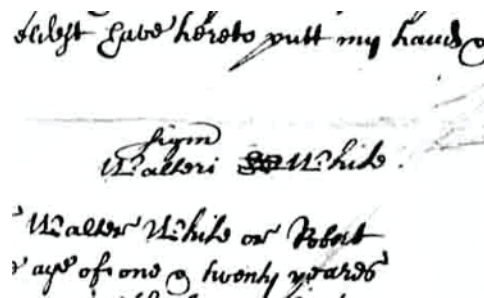


Figure 84: Examples of the ornamental dot.

## The Slippery Slope of Shakspeare's "Signatures"

As counterintuitive as it may seem, English law has never required a testator to sign his will in his own hand. In 1616 the Statute of Wills (1540) was in place, which required wills devising land to be in writing, but no signature was required:

A will might be written, signed and sealed by the testator. It might bear the seal of someone other than the testator. Furthermore, someone else might write the will at the direction of the testator. (Mirow 71)

As Holdsworth writes:

Henry VIII's statutes required the will to be in writing; but they did not require the will to be written by the testator or signed by him. It was held, as early as 1553, that instructions for a will, given verbally by the testator to another person, and written out by that person, even though they were not read out to the testator, were a sufficient compliance with the statutes. (Holdsworth, 7:367)

The 1677 Statute of Frauds, while strengthening the requirements for the creation of valid, legal wills to make them less susceptible to fraud, required wills devising land to be in writing and signed "by the testator **or someone in their presence and at their direction**" (my emphasis) and attested by three or four credible witnesses.

The 1837 Wills Act reduced the number of required witnesses to two, and still required the will "be signed at the Foot or End thereof by the Testator, **or by some other Person in his Presence and by his Direction**" (my emphasis)

The signing requirements of the 1837 Act continue to this day, although signatures by proxy are far rarer since illiteracy rates are so low. In the case of *Barrett v Bem* (2011), an elderly man, Martin, made a will in hospital three hours before he died, with two nurses acting as witnesses and his sister Anne also present. After the will was contested, handwriting experts deemed the signature was in Anne's handwriting, despite being in Martin's name. Justice Vos accepted that the will was signed by Anne at Martin's direction and in his presence in accordance with English law, and ruled that the signature was therefore considered to be Martin's, not Anne's. The Court found that it was therefore permissible that Anne was a beneficiary to the will.

Likewise, in *Dundalk AFC Interim Co Ltd v FAI National League* (2001), Fran Carter directed Pat Byrne to sign a document "Fran Carter" for him in his presence; Byrne then signed his own name as a witness. The Justice



upheld this process, reasoning that it was perfectly legal for someone to write another person's name at that person's direction:

as a matter of law this was a signing not by Mr. Byrne but by Mr. Carter. (Warne 2013)

While it was desirable to indicate agency occurred (such as “per” or “p.p.” before the signature, for “per procuracionem” or “through agency”), there was nothing in the law that required it. While a party to a document cannot be a witness to their own signature, since the signature was legally considered Carter's, Byrne was entitled to sign his own name as a witness.

The law of agency, which allowed others to sign for their clients, dates back to Roman times and became popular in England in the medieval age. Indeed, Shakespeare's works have multiple references to the laws of agency: *Measure For Measure*, *Henry V*, *Twelfth Night*, *Rape of Lucrece*, *Shakespeare's Sonnets* (Sheen 2013, Maxwell 2016). One of the central tenets is

*Qui facit per alium facit per se*—“anything a man may do he may do through an agent.”

Clanchy identifies proxy signatures from at least the 12th Century (Clanchy 306). Higgs states that “If a signature appeared on a medieval document it might not be that of the person who was acting through the document.” (Higgs 62)

Clanchy describes how,

there was as much diversity of opinion about what constituted a valid signature as there was about what made a date appropriate. (Clanchy 304)

Cressy writes that signatures by proxy were common and affect how we try to ascertain literacy rates in previous eras:

the problem of authenticity is equally vexing.... Sometimes the document sports a sprinkling of original signatures and authentic marks but is spoiled by a sequence of names in a common hand, apparently entered by proxy. It was not uncommon for someone to subscribe for his neighbors, or for a literate member of a family to enter names of his sons and brothers. We cannot determine whether these proxy signatures mask illiteracy or represent laziness, timidity or the lack of opportunity to use the pen for oneself. (Cressy 63–4)

## The Slippery Slope of Shakspeare's "Signatures"

Clanchy observes that:

The reasons why England did not develop a uniform scribal system for authenticating documents seem to center on the use of seals.  
(Clanchy 308)

Sealing was very popular since a large percentage of the population was illiterate. While a scribe or notary might identify their signing on behalf of someone, this was only done in a minority of cases (Clanchy 305). As Clanchy writes:

Some scribes seemed ambitious to follow notarial practice, but because there was no uniform training nor regulations their efforts are haphazard. (Clanchy 306)

The classic authority for the English common law definition of a signature is that of Justice Higginbotham:

the object of all Statutes which require a particular document to be signed by a particular person is to authenticate the genuineness of the document. A signature is only a mark, and where the Statute merely requires a document shall be signed, the Statute is satisfied by proof of the making of the mark upon the document **by or by the authority of the signatory**.... In like manner, where the Statute does not require that the signature shall be an autograph, the printed name of the party who is required to sign the document is enough. (*R v Moore; Ex Parte Myers*) (my emphasis)

The "signature" of Walter Raleigh on a wine license below looks convincing in facsimile; closer inspection, however, reveals it is a stamp (and the autograph addition of an "I" also contributed to confusion to the spelling of his name) (figure 85).

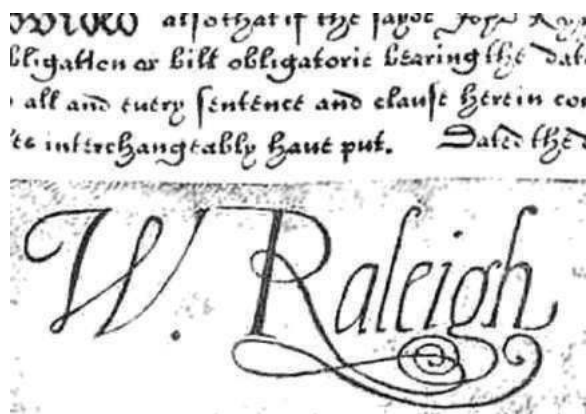


Figure 85: Example of a stamp used for a signature.

We recall that the witnesses to Shakspeare's will attested to the publication of the will, not the signing. As we have seen, there are examples within Mr. Shakspeare's acting company and from other examples in the era of proxy signatures. As Cox notes, prior to the Statute of Frauds of 1677,

the legal sanctity of the signature was not firmly established; the medieval tradition was that of an illiterate landowning class with scribes to do their writing and signing. Wills were proved by the executor's oath, nothing more, unless objections were raised by some interested party, in which case witnesses would be examined. It was not until later in the seventeenth century that handwriting experts began to be used by the court. (Cox 34)

British lawyer Durning-Lawrence, writing in 1900, proffers his legal opinion:

People unacquainted with the rules of British law are generally not aware that anyone can, by request, "sign" any person's name to any legal document, and that if such person touch it and acknowledge it, anyone can sign as witness to his signature. Moreover, the will is not stated to be signed, but only stated to be "published." In putting the name of William Shakespeare three times to the will the law clerk seems to have taken considerable care to show that they were not real signatures. They are all written in law script, and the three "W's" of "William" are made in the three totally different forms in which "W's" were written in the law script of that period. Excepting the "W" the whole of the first so-called signature is almost illegible, but the other two are quite clear, and show that the clerk has purposefully formed each and every letter in the two names "Shakespeare" in a different manner one from the other. It is, therefore, impossible for anyone to suppose that the three names upon the will are "signatures." (Durning Lawrence 1912, 17)

And Hays writes:

a testator's name may represent the signature of another in his stead. The large number of witnesses to Shakespeare's will may indeed reflect a concern of both friends and beneficiaries to validate a will that Shakespeare did not sign. A casual examination of the six signatures reveals that the differences among them are at least as evident as their similarities. (Hays 248)

So, as the laws of England at the time did not prevent another person signing for someone, we must therefore consider whether a scribe of Francis Collins wrote the signatures for Mr. Shakespeare on his behalf. When we take into account Hilary Jenkinson's observations that scribes often signed documents for their clients—which was well within the law of the time—often using a

different hand, how can we conclude with any certainty that the "signatures" on the will are really by Mr. Shakspeare? Cox wrote:

The will signatures have been regarded as sacrosanct, in the main, but in the light of Sir Hilary Jenkinson's observations and practice in the Prerogative Court of Canterbury, the authenticity of even these signatures must be questioned. (Cox 34)

Indeed, it has been noted for more than a century that the handwriting of the will, particularly the interlineations, bears similarities to the three signatures.

In 1909, Magdalene Thumm-Kintzel compared letters from the signatures with those from the body of the will. In the excerpt below, the left hand shows letters from the body of the will, the right hand shows letters from the signatures on the will (figure 86).

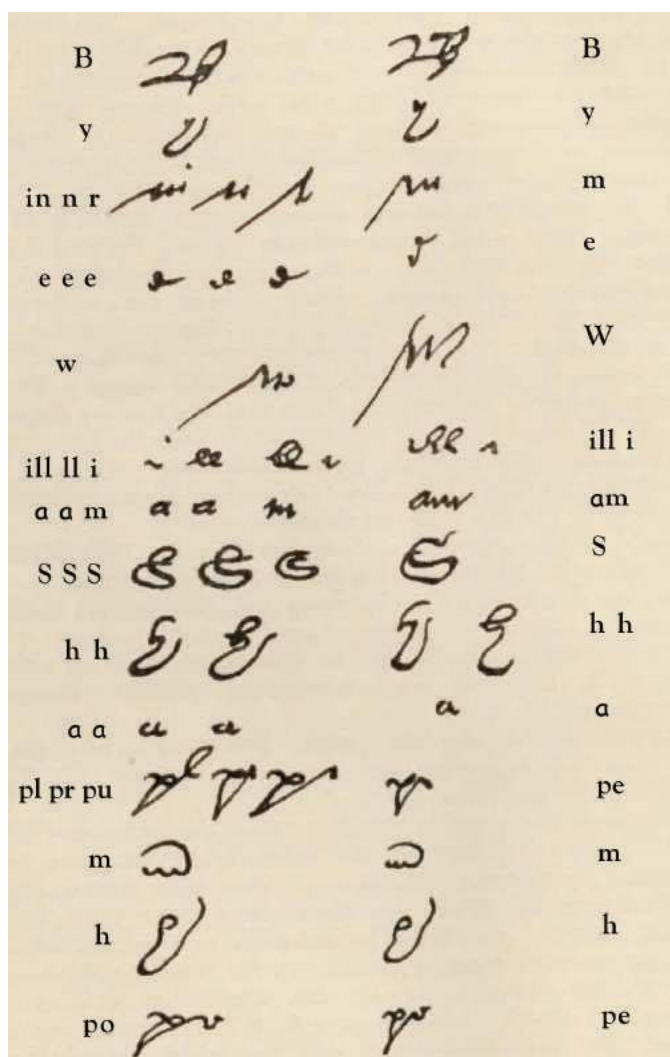


Figure 86



Figure 87: *Shakspeare's alleged signatures—for comparison.*

It is not a perfect match, but of course the three signatures do not match each other either. In 1901, J.P. Yeatman wrote that the interlineal addition on page 3 regarding the “second best bed”:

exactly corresponds with the signature below it. It is more like his signature appended to the Will, but it is not unlike the handwriting of the draft; in fact it is a golden link between them, of the utmost value, in proof that one hand wrote them both. (Yeatman 12)

Writing the interlineations in a smaller space than normal would doubtless have affected the penmanship to some degree, producing a crabbed effect.

A logical distinction must be made when considering Shakspeare's will to be holographic: it could be that either Mr. Shakspeare wrote the will and signed it, or a clerk wrote it and signed it. Hamilton argues for the will being holographic in Mr. Shakspeare's own hand, yet his argument falls apart on further examination.

I have since checked every example of handwriting I could locate in which “By me” was used, and in all cases the document was entirely in the hand of the signer. (Hamilton 6)

However, a quick perusal of *Playhouse Wills*, first published seven years after Hamilton's claim, shows that this is not the case, the wills of Richard Bower (Honigmann and Brock 41) and John Brayne (45) being two examples.

Similarly, given Jenkinson's and Cox's observations about scribes writing in a feigned hand to give them an “air of verisimilitude,” this would also explain the differences, as well as the scrivener's hand and legal characters such as the dotted “W” so prevalent in legal writings of the time.

As Cox notes, “no 17th Century gentleman, literary or otherwise, penned his own last wishes” (Cox 25). Also, if Mr. Shakspeare was writing his own will, why would he spell his own name “Shackspeare” on the first page?



Moreover, if Mr. Shakspeare was in "perfect health," he may well have visited Collyns' legal practice (rather than the convention of the lawyer or scribe attending the bed of the frail testator), in which case another clerk may have signed the will.

## A Further Summary of the Evidence

A signature of a man's name is not proof of his signing. (Hays 1975, 248)

We have seen that, when placed in their legal and social environment, all six Shakspeare "signatures" contain numerous anomalies while none of his co-signatories do. Unlike his playwriting contemporaries who favored italic, he wrote in Secretary hand, a style notorious for its similarity such that it is often difficult to tell apart one person's hand from the next, yet every signature was different. The signatures on Shakspeare's will were not witnessed. His will was the only one to be drawn up to be sealed, only to be changed. To otherwise account for the great variability of the three will signatures, scholars often argue that Mr. Shakspeare's frailty or a possible health condition (such as Bright's Disease) affected his hand, despite any positive evidence. This contradicts the "perfect health" stated in the opening of the will, but more troublingly, does not explain why he adopted the scrivener's style, forming the three "W's" in the legal convention. Yet trying to argue that Mr. Shakspeare trained as a scrivener is a poor argument, for if he did, he was a terrible one. He would have known that legal documents were expected to contain consistent signatures to aid identification; he would have known that the Court of Requests expected full surname signatures; he would have known that to sign and seal a deed was more secure than just sealing. His will would have had witnesses to the signing, not the publication. Yet the works of Shakespeare teem with legal terminologies suggesting someone familiar with the law (see, for example, Jordan & Cunningham, Curran, Davis). It therefore strains credulity to believe he could have made such errors as a scrivener.

No other writer among the 130 of Shakspeare's contemporaries in *English Literary Autographs* adopted the scrivener's hand in this way, and none of Mr. Shakspeare's contemporaries in *Playhouse Wills* displayed the enormous variance in the formation of letters. Yet others had their signing done for them, which was completely legal in that era.

All six signatures should therefore be regarded as "questioned," to use the parlance of the Forensic Document Examiner.

## Discussion

With the notable exception of Michael L. Hays, there have been only a small number of articles by the Shakespeare establishment that consider the authenticity of the six alleged signatures, some of which are discussed below.

Writing in no less a publication than *Shakespeare Quarterly*, De Grazia and Stallybrass quote Cox, yet add in parentheses the following incorrect information:

It is obvious at a glance that these signatures (excepting the two that appear on deeds connected with the purchase of the Blackfriars house) are not the signatures of the same man. (De Grazia and Stallybrass 278)

Cox was not referring to the Blackfriars deeds at all, but the signatures on pages 2 and 3 of the will, having discounted the one on the first page due to its deterioration.

The signatures on the Blackfriars deeds, we recall, are formed in completely different ways, such that it is inconceivable that De Grazia and Stallybrass would assume these are the ones referred to. Of these two signatures on the Blackfriars deeds, attorney Durning-Lawrence wrote:

Look at these two supposititious signatures. To myself it is difficult to imagine that anyone with eyes to see could suppose them to be signatures by the same hand. (Durning-Lawrence 1910, 38)

To be fair, De Grazia and Stallybrass conceded that the “the signature of Shakespeare may thus itself be a collaborative field, not the private property of a single individual” (278). Yet such a mistake, as noted above, suggests that scholars have only superficial knowledge of the circumstances in which the signatures were made, which should not be surprising as there has never been a study placing the signatures in their social environments and considering them in their legal context.

Alan H. Nelson has, on the other hand, attempted to refute Cox’s article in at least two articles published in 2004 and 2006, as well as writing many of the Folger Shakespeare Library’s entries on its *Shakespeare Documented* website.

In attempting to provide evidence that the will signatures were written by Mr. Shakspeare, Nelson misstates Cox’s argument.

Cox’s claim that legal representatives made a practice of “forging” signatures of testators on true original wills and other legal documents could be easily proven if true. (Nelson 2004, 165)

Cox made no such claim with regards to wills. After noting Jenkinson's observation that clerks often wrote down the signatures of deponents, often in a different hand to give an "air of verisimilitude," Cox's words were as follows:

If this was the practice in the equity courts, why should it not also have been the practice of attorney's clerks when drawing up conveying documents? (Cox 34)

Here Cox is talking about deeds, not wills, and as we have seen, it has been noted in several books on sigllography that clerks did indeed write the names of clients on deeds.

In the next paragraph, Cox raises the possibility that the will "signatures" may have been written by a clerk. Cox correctly uses the term "forged" in quotation marks, as there would have been nothing fraudulent or illegal about doing so. Cox refers to examples of witness signatures being written by clerks—as Nelson concedes (Nelson 2006, 64). But she never states that signing a testator's signature was routine or "common" (Nelson 2004, 164) as Nelson asserted. Cox stated that it would be possible, and not illegal.

Has Nelson simply misread Cox, or is he attempting to introduce a straw man argument that he can refute, namely, the absurd notion that most lawyers signed wills on behalf of their clients? By claiming that Cox made a "fatal flaw" by mistaking the signatures on notarial copies of wills for original ones, Nelson insinuates that Cox, a former Custodian of Wills at the Public Record Office (now the National Archives), would be unable to decipher the Latin inscriptions at the end of wills, stating whether they were notarial copies—despite that being a part of her job for decades. Nelson, however, has exposed himself to his own "fatal flaw." He concedes that there was no signature requirement in 1616 (Nelson 2004, 165) but notes that many wills used the manuals of the period as templates, which involved a signature. This was often (though far from always) the case, yet he fails to mention that the templates in those manuals stated that if the will concludes "sett my hand" the attestation clause would read "Witness to the signing in the presence of (names of witnesses)." As we have seen, 40 other wills in *Playhouse Wills* did just this; Shakspeare's did not, a striking anomaly. Nor did the other wills have a signature in the style common to the writing of lawyer's clerks. Nelson does not acknowledge these issues, let alone provide explanations for them.

Nelson claims to have looked at five bundles of original wills from the National Archives and found no examples of testator's signatures being

written for them. Since Nelson does not give any samples, it is impossible to judge his methodology of determining the authenticity of a signature. More work clearly needs to be done in this area. The collection of original wills (PROB10) held by the National Archives consists of almost 7,500 bundles of original wills, meaning Nelson has barely scratched the surface, having looked at only 0.06%. Yet as we have seen, there are examples of clerks writing signatures for their clients. It may not have been a common practice, but it happened enough that we could easily find examples of it on wills and deeds.

Further, Nelson claims that of the wills he studied it was “common for the testator to sign every sheet of a will” (Nelson 2006, 64), yet as we have seen, in *Playhouse Wills*, only 4% of 135 of Shakspeare’s contemporaries did so, indicating Nelson’s small sample is not representative of those in Shakspeare’s milieu.

Nelson also contradicts himself, in one paper arguing:

Cox’s failure to distinguish notarized or scribal copies from true original wills wholly invalidates her conclusion that “there are numerous examples of ‘forgeries’ of witnesses signatures among Wills in the Public Record office.” There are not. (Nelson 2006, 64)

Yet in another paper he writes:

the names of witnesses sometimes occur as a list of names written by the scrivener rather than as a series of personal signatures. (Nelson 2004, 165)

Nelson continues:

Original wills were validated in one of three ways: by the signature of a testator capable of writing and therefore of signing his own name; by the mark of an individual who could not, or chose not to, write his own name; or by the signatures or marks of witnesses in the case of an oral testament. (resulting in a nuncupative will) (Nelson 2006, 64)

This statement is demonstrably false, both in 1616 and today. As previously noted, in 1616 the Statute of Wills (1540) only required wills devising lands to be in writing; there was no signature requirement whatsoever (Swinburne 189). Common law did not require signatures (Borland 53). While signing had become more common, some wills were merely sealed. A will dictated to another was valid under the Statute, as evidenced in *Brown v. Sackville* (1553) (Mirow 72).

## The Slippery Slope of Shakspeare's "Signatures"

In 1616 wills were proved by the testator's oath, not signatures. The will of John Heminges states he has "put my hand and seale" yet it is neither sealed nor signed nor were witnesses named; Heminges seems to have died while the drafting of the will was in progress. Yet as Honigmann and Brock state, "prob. clause marks its acceptance by the courts" (Honigmann and Brock 168). Also notice the similarity between the scrivener's "w" in "will" in the first line below and the "w" in "By me, William" in Shakspeare's will, including the ornamental dot (figure 88).

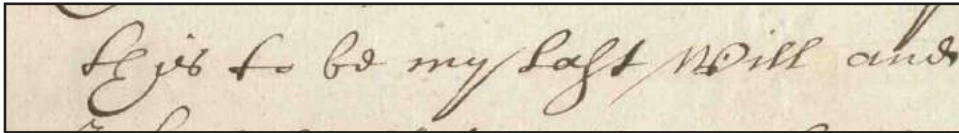


Figure 88

On his essay on wills on the *Shakespeare Documented* website, Nelson again misstates Cox's argument. He writes:

With few exceptions, all original wills which carry a testator's signature or mark were signed by the testator himself or herself. It is not the case that signatures or marks on original wills were frequently written by lawyers or scribes rather than by testators. A possible exception is the will of Augustine Phillips.

Nelson's wording is interesting. Perhaps wills were not "frequently" signed by scribes, but clearly some were, including those of members of the King's Men, of which Shakspeare was a sharer. It is also worth noting that the will of Augustine Phillips, whose signature is in dispute, concludes "put my hand and seal," yet the attestation clause reads only "Sealed and delivered in the presence of;" again, like Shakspeare's will, indicating that the "signature" was not witnessed.

Other aspects of Nelson's methodologies should be addressed. In a 2013 debate, Nelson chastised Tannenbaum for believing that a facsimile of a document is as good as seeing the original (Nelson 2014). Nelson seems somewhat hypocritical. On his personal website, Nelson compiles a list of actors who signed their names, based on *Playhouse Wills* by Honigmann and Brock. However, Nelson seems to have taken the summaries of the wills and descriptions of signatures by the authors on faith, as he does not mention any of the disputed signatures. These would have been apparent to him if he had analyzed actual copies of the original wills, let alone the originals. He seems to have either completely ignored or missed the suggestion that Richard Burbage's will and Cuthbert Burbage's "signature" were in the hand of Ralph Crane, and as we have seen, several of the "signatures" of some of the King's Men can doubtfully be called such.



Similarly, when discussing Robert Burton's handwriting, Nelson quotes Nicholas Kiessling's article "The Library of Robert Burton" in the *Oxford Bibliographical Society*:

Robert Burton "was not at all consistent in signing his name and used over a dozen different forms." Additionally, as Kiessling notes, "Either the Christian or surname [as written by Burton himself] may include various sorts of punctuation: a period, a colon, a slash mark, or dots...." Clearly, inventiveness in signing one's name, including the use of variant abbreviations, could be characteristic of a skilled and widely read man of letters. (Nelson 2006, 65)

Yet once again Nelson appears to be taking the author's word as fact without looking at the actual handwriting himself. He also fails to contextualize the signatures, such as comparing Burton's handwriting on personal as opposed to legal documents.

Below are two examples of Burton's handwriting on books he owned. He uses the Latin spelling for his first name, as Ben Jonson sometimes did. There is no variation in the handwriting, while the "various sorts of punctuation" are actually ciphers representing Burton's family coat of arms (figure 89).

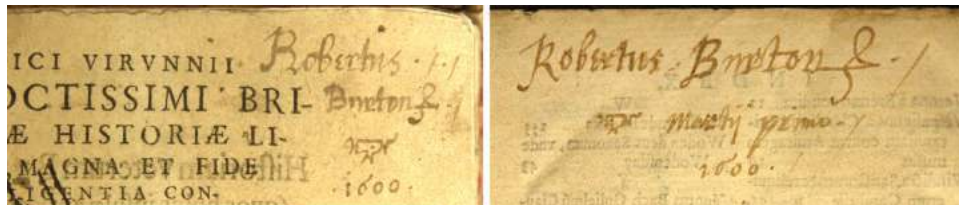


Figure 89: Robert Burton's signatures in two books he owned.

Of the legal documents Burton put his hand to, his holographic will, made "in perfect healt he of body and minde," begins with the top image in figure 90. His two signatures on the Will (bottom images) are void of any ciphers and again show a perfect consistency (figure 90).

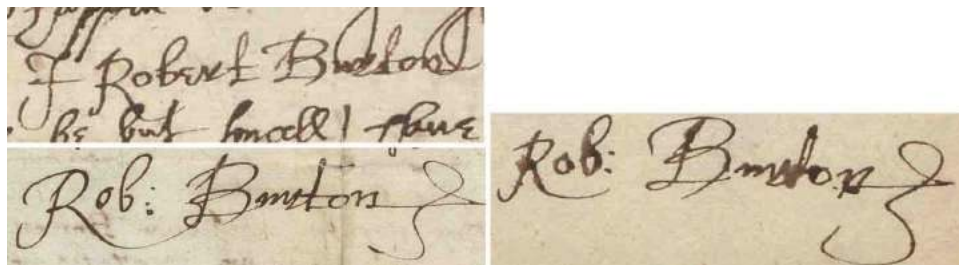


Figure 90: Three handwriting samples from the holographic will of Robert Burton.

There are also a deed and letter signed by Burton held in private collections that I was unable to view, however the transcriptions both read, "Rob: Burton," like the signatures on his Will, with no mention of any ciphers or "various sorts of punctuation."

On legal documents Burton provides textbook examples of a perfectly reproduced signature with a full surname. Not only does the evidence Nelson cite not support his argument, it provides strong evidence against it.

Nelson concludes his 2006 article as follows:

it is quite unreasonable and against all sound legal sense to argue that the very testators' bottom-of-page signatures whose purpose was to validate the Will were written in by a hired hand in a way that would invalidate it. (Nelson 2006, 64)

On the contrary, it would have been prudent and perfectly legal for Shakspeare's lawyer or clerk to sign the will for him, at his direction and in his presence, especially if he had trouble signing. Wills signed by another at the direction of the testator were allowable under law, and "signature by another in compliance with a Statute is sufficient, even if such a will recites 'I have hereunto set my hand and seal'" (Schoenblum s19.45).

Shakspeare's will is the only one in "Playhouse Wills" to be first drafted as to be only sealed and not signed, a usual marker for not being able to sign; it is the only will in the collection to have the authenticating clause struck out and "seal" replaced by "hand"; it is the only will in *Playhouse Wills* to have the authenticating clause reads "Sett my hand" yet the attestation clause read "witness to the publication of" rather than "witness to the signing of"; it is the only will in *Playhouse Wills* to have the signatures written in letters found in legal script; it is the only will in *Playhouse Wills* that was signed on each sheet by a testator who claimed to be in good health, yet to have such variance in handwriting, likely indicating a clerk who was not used to writing the name. It is, therefore, I submit, a prime candidate to have been signed by someone else.

Let us now see how the conclusions drawn hitherto affect the only piece of writing claimed to be in Mr. Shakspeare's own hand.

## Did Shakespeare Write Hand D in *Sir Thomas More*?

In the last century, gaining traction with Pollard's *Shakespeare's Hand in the play of Sir Thomas More* in 1923, there has been a concerted attempt by Shakespeare scholars to link the six surviving signatures with three pages of script revision on the manuscript of the play *Sir Thomas More* on a paleographical basis. The third page is the clearest of the surviving pages and is shown here (figure 91).

1400 f.

153



While paleography is very useful for interpreting ancient texts, it cannot be used to pinpoint dates or handwriting with high precision, such that we would describe it as scientific. Paleographical interpretations are not used, for example, in courts of law.

Forensic Document Examination, on the other hand, is accepted by courts and requires certain scientific standards to be met. This begs the question, what is the Forensic Document Examiner's position regarding Hand D?

In 1960, Forensic Document Examiner Roy A. Huber, whose book *Handwriting Identification: Facts and Fundamentals* is considered a seminal textbook on the subject, was asked to ascertain whether the six Shakspeare signatures could be positively matched to the handwriting of Hand D. In 1960, Huber delivered a presentation to the Stratford Festival, in which he concluded that an identification of Hand D as Shakspeare's was **not** possible.

Forensic Document Examination (FDE) requires the following:

Acceptable writing conditions. Normal writing conditions are required to gain a proper gauge of a person's handwriting. Yet all six of the alleged signatures were made in imperfect writing conditions: the Bellott-Mountjoy signature was rushed; the two Blackfriars signatures were compromised by writing on a greasy surface in a confined area; the three will signatures were possibly by a man in a weakened state. On the basis of the very first criterion alone, all six signatures are disqualified.

Time of writing. The time that writing samples are made must be close to when the questioned signatures were made, as a person's handwriting can change over time. Jowett (2011) tries to argue for a 1603 date for the Hand D writing, rather than the usually agreed upon date of the early 1590s, yet both dates are too far removed from the dates of the signatures (1612–16) to be accepted. Greg exhibits a blatant double standard by disallowing a letter written by Thomas Dekker in 1616 to compare with the handwriting of Hand E, while allowing the three will signatures of Shakspeare's, made the same year, to compare with Hand D. (Price 341)

Signatures cannot be compared with regular handwriting. Since the Hand D revisions contain no signatures and the six signatures only contain "By me," this would leave us with, at best, a sample size of two words. Yet Thompson (1923) and those following him have simply disregarded this.

Capitals and lower-case letters cannot be compared. Once again, Thompson (1923) and those following make the exception.

Sample size. In terms of sample size, six signatures and two words “By me” are generally considered too small a sample to make any sort of detailed comparison.

Under all these conditions then, the six “Shakespeare signatures,” even if we are to accept all six as authentic, fail **every** one of the requirements of Forensic Document Examination.

Even worse, the fundamental principle of Forensic Document Examination is that before any of the above criteria can be addressed, it is essential that:

The handwriting sample must be clearly identified and accepted as being in the person’s hand. There must be no doubt as to the authenticity of the samples and they must not be “questioned.”

As we have seen, there are multiple reasons to believe that all six signatures are in dispute. If trying to make an identification with samples that clearly fail the most fundamental requirements of Forensic Document Examination is absurd, trying to do so when **all** the samples are questionable is doubly so.

What has been the reaction by Shakespeare scholars to Huber’s findings? It has simply been to ignore it. Each attempt in the last 50 years to argue on paleographical grounds for Hand D as Shakspeare’s, such as those by Jowett (2011) and Dawson (1990), have completely neglected to mention Huber’s work, despite FDE being the most sophisticated and accurate scholarly measurement of handwriting that we have.

In his 2011 Arden edition of *Sir Thomas More*, Jowett states

Hand D shows significant similarities to that of Shakespeare. Particularly striking was a distinctive “spurred” form of the letter “a” shared between Hand D and the Shakespeare signatures. (Jowett 437)

Incredibly, not only is this the only sentence in the book that describes the signatures, it is clearly wrong. Why does Jowett use the plural signatures to infer that they all shared the “spurred a” when only one of them does? As Downs notes

It might be observed that a spurred “a” is shared by one (“Deposition”) signature only—not the signatures—and that in Hand D the feature is also anomalous. (Downs 2013)



Figure 92 shows a comparison of the bulbous spurred "a" in the Bellott-Mountjoy Shakspeare "signature", the beginning of the word "that" from page three Hand D additions (line 34) and the "a" from page 3 Hand D additions (line 24), with a graphic example of a spurred "a".



*Figure 92: Examples of the spurred "a."*

Recall that in the Bellott-Mountjoy signature, the "bulbous a" occurs in conjunction with a "k" that is an indecipherable mess. Huber stated that hastily written handwriting cannot be deemed to show a writer's usual formation of letters. How can we be confident that the spurred "a" is not a rushed mistake, uncharacteristic of the writer's usual style? How can we possibly base any result on a single example? There is nothing resembling the indecipherable "k" anywhere in the writings. Additionally, as Jenkins noted, scribes in depositions would often sign for deponents in a different hand, again confounding results.

Both Jowett and Bate (the latter in a 2017 debate) raise Dawson's 1990 article, which described a comparison of 250 writers against features found in the alleged signatures and those in Hand D, and concluded that none of the 250 writers shared those features. Yet while Huber laid out his argument with charts and magnifications of the handwriting samples in a clear and detailed manner, Dawson gave us no facts or evidence—there is no mention of who these writers were, and no samples of their writings were given:

Dawson does not give the identity, kinds, or dates of these documents. (Hays 186)

Dawson's is an argument based on faith. How can it be called scholarly, let alone scientific, when the author does not share his results with us? That Jowett can describe Dawson's paper as "particularly detailed" (Jowett 440) is baffling.

Another omission by many recent scholars is the evidence that Hand D is the writing of a scribe. Evidence of both “eyeskip” (the process in which errors occur when a copyist goes back and forth between the original and the copy and sometimes copies from the wrong place) and the correction of Hand D by Hand C suggest that Hand D is a copyist, not a writer composing the material.

Consider the section below (figure 93).

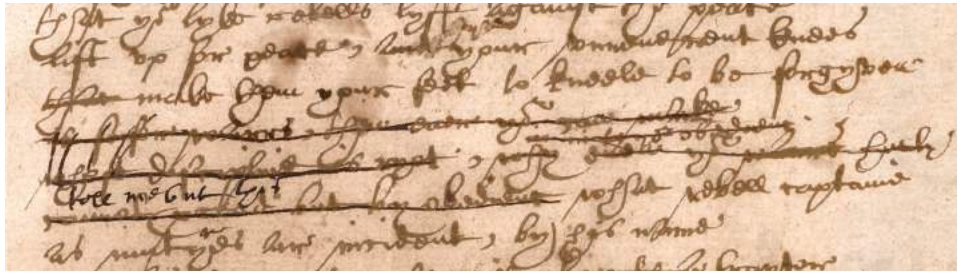


Figure 93: A section from page three Hand D showing corrections by Hand C.

A transcription follows; brackets [ ] indicate crossed out writing; the writing in bold is by ‘Hand C’:

lift vp for peace, and your vnreuerent knees  
 [that] make them your feet to kneele to be forgiven  
 [is safer warrs, than euer you can make]  
 [whose discipline id ryot ; why euen yor [warrs] hurly] [in in to yor  
 obedien.]  
 [cannot proceed but by obedien] **Tell me but this** what rebell captaine  
 as mutynes ar incident, by his name

One wonders how Jowett can describe Hand D “as showing a writer in the immediate process of composition” (Jowett 440) when some of the “composition” not only does not make sense, it repeats simple words such as “in.” Is that really to be expected of the greatest dramatist in the English language? To make matters worse, this is not the only apparent example of eyeskip; there is one on each of the three pages of additions.

Jowett sidesteps directly addressing the Hand D as scribe hypothesis and instead, as Downs writes,

tackles a straw man—Ioppolo’s suggestion that Shakespeare was copying his own draft. That’s not impossible of course, but the evidence she puts forward is of no consequence and Jowett rightly confutes it. But he avoids the topic otherwise as Greg, Pollard, and others have done for a century.... If Hand D is a copy we should find out. Most

scholars aren't aware of the issue but trust (in passing) authorities taking a "playwright at work" as self-evident. On further review, it isn't, and until the matter is taken up the study of Sir Thomas More falters. (Downs 2013)

To review the history of scholarship on the penmanship of Hand D is to describe a collation of omissions, straw man arguments and arguments based on faith. Results from the most up to date scientific handwriting analysis of the Forensic Document Examiner, which clearly stated an identification was not possible, are ignored, while untestable data such as Dawson's are embraced. Selecting untestable arguments that support one's thesis and rejecting those that do not is not scholarship. Moreover, not one of the studies questions the authenticity of the six alleged signatures. They are accepted as fact.

Thompson believed that the first two pages of the script revisions were written quickly, using writing techniques that indicate Shakespeare had received "a more thorough training as a scribe than had been thought probable." These pages contain abbreviations and contractions of words which were "in common use among lawyers and trained secretaries of the day." These pages show more of the characteristics of "the scrivener" (Thompson 1916, 55–6).

Considering that the six signatures may well have been penned by four scribes, it should not surprise us that there may be some scribal similarities with the additions to *Sir Thomas More*, since they would involve a quadrupling of scribal writing habits to choose from. Further, as Plomer noted regarding the Secretary hand, "such is its uniformity, moreover, that one man's hand is difficult to distinguish from another's" (Plomer 201). However, as Huber and others, including Hays and Price, have clearly shown, they contain multiple differences which are routinely ignored.

Given the paucity of the paleographic argument, why has there been such a drive to attribute the Hand D handwriting to Shakspeare? As Price notes, the desire to attribute Hand D to Shakspeare's pen was driven by the dearth of writing samples compared to other writers of the time (such as those displayed in *English Literary Autographs*), raising questions about Shakspeare's authorship of the Shakespeare canon:

In the early 1920s, Alfred W. Pollard recruited a group of scholars to contribute essays identifying Hand D as Shakespeare's.... Pollard was attempting to fill the documentary void and put an end to the authorship question. In the early part of the twentieth century, the controversy was gaining momentum. Anti-Stratfordian challenges were coming from J. Thomas Looney and Sir George Greenwood in England, and Mark Twain was popularizing the case in the United States.

In his preface, Pollard explained that if it is proved that Shakespeare wrote the Hand D portion of *Sir Thomas More*, then the theories proposing Oxford, Derby, or Bacon as the author come “crashing to the ground.” There’s his agenda, but the subtext is just as significant. If Pollard thought that Hand D could settle the authorship question once and for all, then he was acknowledging that Shakespeare left behind no evidence during his lifetime that proves he was a writer by profession. Otherwise, Pollard would not have needed Hand D to settle the debate. (Price 330)

This pressure to provide a single literary document, resulting in the suspension of paleographical practices and the omission of studies that do not support this goal, seems to be dividing the Shakespeare scholarly community. Consider the disparity between how the Folger Shakespeare Library and the British Library describe Hand D on their respective websites.

On the *Shakespeare Documented* website, courtesy of the Folger Shakespeare Library, we have the following synopsis of Hand D:

On the basis of poetic style, many scholars believe that a three-page revision to the play is in Shakespeare’s handwriting. However, we don’t really know what Shakespeare’s handwriting looks like. **Six signatures of Shakespeare, found on four legal documents, are the only handwriting that we know for certain are his** [my emphasis]. This is too small a sample size to make any sort of reliable comparison.

The Folger’s description certainly seems a reasonable description, yet even this assumes the signatures as certain. Given what we have seen, there are good reasons to believe this is far from the case. Perhaps they will reconsider the other requirements of the Forensic Document Examiner besides just an inadequate sample size, in particular the authenticity of those signatures.

Contrast the Folger’s statement, however, with this from the website of the British Library:

The *Book of Sir Thomas More*: Shakespeare’s only surviving literary manuscript. This is part of the only surviving play script to contain Shakespeare’s handwriting. Three pages of the manuscript, ff. 8r, 8v and 9r, have been identified as Shakespeare’s, based on handwriting, spelling, vocabulary and the images and ideas expressed.

How can one possibly conclude with any degree of certainty, as the British Library does, that the case is settled, when the legitimacy of the signatures is still in question?

There is clearly a marked disagreement between the two organizations. Bear in mind, the British Library Exhibition that featured Hand D as being written in Shakspeare's own hand was curated by Jonathan Bate, whose biography shows no expertise in paleography. On the other hand, Alan Nelson, an experienced paleographer who consults for the Folger, when asked in a 2013 debate if he thought Hand D was in Shakspeare's own hand, replied "I don't know." How could any paleographer claim otherwise?

## Conclusions

From Thompson's paleographic case in the 1920s to Alan Nelson's recent description on the Folger's *Shakespeare Documented* website, almost all Shakespeare scholars have failed to place the signatures in their contemporary environment and examine them in context. They have taken their authenticity "as a matter of faith." When examined in context, all six Shakspeare signatures show multiple anomalies relative to those around them such that all six must be considered "questioned."

It is time to allow the original documents containing the signatures to be examined by Forensic Document Examiners and to bring outdated paleographic research in line with 21st Century practices. The recent multi-spectral analysis conducted by TNA is to be encouraged, and we should push for other relevant documents to be placed under similar scrutiny. For example, a scientific analysis on the Blackfriars deeds could shed more light into why the tags bearing the Shakespeare signatures appear greasier and not to have taken the ink as readily as the tags for Jackson and Johnson. The "blot" below the Bellott-Mountjoy signature has never been subjected to an examination by a Forensic Document Examiner, nor the writing of the clerks of the depositions above it. Sir Hilary Jenkinson's claim that clerks signed for deponents should be investigated further.

The six signatures must be re-evaluated before we can even begin to consider the paleographic argument for the *Sir Thomas More* additions. The signatures must be reassessed *ab initio*—from first principles. It is time for the Forensic Document Examiners to fully assess the documents and bring the scholarship into line with the modern standard. Among the possible outcomes, we must recognize the sobering possibility exists that we do not possess a single word in Mr. Shakspeare's own hand.

## Acknowledgments

I would like to dedicate this monograph to the late Robert Detobel, whose scholarship inspired me to undertake the current study.



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## The Slippery Slope of Shakspere's "Signatures"

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# TO.THE.ONLIE.BEGETTER. *Making Sense of the Dedication*

by Ramon Jiménez

The purpose and meaning of the 12 lines of text on the Dedication page of the 1609 Quarto of the *Sonnets* of William Shakespeare have been the subject of intense scholarly interest for more than two centuries.<sup>1</sup> Although Thomas Thorpe's authorship of the Dedication has been agreed upon by nearly all scholars, the identity of the individuals referred to in the text, and the meaning of certain words and phrases, have provoked repeated speculation and controversy. And, beginning in the late 1990s, several Oxfordian scholars have disputed the authorship of Thorpe, and asserted that the 144 letters in the text contain a hidden message revealing the names of the *Sonnets*' author and the young man to whom he addressed the great majority of them. The Dedication was printed in the following form (figure 1):

In my view, the meaning of this text has been misinterpreted, and the typography and layout

TO.THE.ONLIE.BEGETTER.OF.  
THESE.INSVING.SONNETS.  
M<sup>r</sup>.W.H. ALL.HAPPINESSE.  
AND.THAT.ETERNITIE.  
PROMISED.  
BY.  
OVR.EVERLIVING.POET.  
WISHETH.  
THE.WELL-WISHING.  
ADVENTVRER.IN.  
SETTING.  
FORTH.

have been over-interpreted. In this essay I will provide the evidence and make the following arguments:

- The Dedication was composed by the publisher, Thomas Thorpe.
- There is no secret message or code in the Dedication, nor any significance in its shape or typography.
- The Dedication is a straightforward, if awkward, expression of good wishes to William Hall, a fellow stationer, and the supplier of the *Sonnets*' manuscript. A reasonable rewording of it is "On the occasion of this publishing venture, I wish Mr. W. H., the sole provider of the manuscript of these sonnets, all happiness and that eternity promised by our immortal poet."<sup>2</sup>
- Edward de Vere was not involved with the Dedication in any way.

These conclusions are not new. They were advanced more than 100 years ago and have since been repeated by both Stratfordian and revisionist scholars.

## The Author of the Dedication

On the available evidence, the author of the dedication must be Thomas Thorpe. The occasion of the dedication, its extravagant style, its typographical features, Thorpe's relationship to the addressee, and even his use of his initials to sign it, all comport with his previous practices.

Thorpe's other dedications were similar in style to the one he wrote for the *Sonnets*. His first, of Marlowe's translation of the first book of Lucan's *Pharsalia* (1600), was also to a fellow stationer, his "kind and true friend" Edward Blount. His opening line: "Blount: I purpose to be blunt with you" is an example of the "dedicatory name play" he often indulged in (Mandel 839). Because this translation was registered to another stationer, its legality was questioned by W. W. Greg in 1944 (172–3).

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Of Thorpe's eight surviving prefaces and dedications, only one, published in 1616, was without "punning and elaborate conceits" (Foster 47). Puns are scattered throughout his "florid and extravagant" dedication of John Healey's translation of Epictetus' *Manual* (*Epictetus and Cebes*), which he published in 1610 (Rostenberg 68). Also in 1610, Thorpe dedicated, and George Eld printed, John Healey's translation of St. Augustine's *City of God* to William Herbert, Earl of Pembroke, "in his characteristic witty and punning style" (Kathman, "Thorpe"). Katherine Duncan-Jones called the dedication "florid and somewhat obscure" ("Unauthorized" 163).

Thorpe published one dedication before the 1609 Quarto, and three afterward, signing them with his initials, using one or two letters—Th. Th., Th. Th., T. Th.—just as he used T. T. on both the title page and the dedication page of the *Sonnets*.

All his dedications were attached to works by authors who were dead—Marlowe, St. Augustine and Epictetus (twice), as was the author of the *Sonnets*.

In 1616, Thorpe and Eld partnered again to republish Healey's translation of Epictetus' *Manual*. In his dedication, this time to William Herbert, Thorpe used the identical phrase, "*these ensuing*," that he had used in the *Sonnets*' Dedication, although spelling it slightly differently. Sidney Lee described both of Thorpe's dedications of the Healey translations as "fantastic and bombastic in style to the bounds of incoherence" ("Thorpe").

It is also noteworthy that in the dedications to Herbert, Thorpe referred to him as "The Honorablest Patron Of Muses And Good Mindes, Lord William, Earl Of Penbroke [*sic*] (1610); and "The Right Honorable William, Earle of Pembroke" (1616).

Although many scholars maintain that Thorpe was addressing Henry Wriothesley, third Earl of Southampton, or William Herbert, Earl of Pembroke in the *Sonnets*' Dedication, his failure to use their titles "is fatal to the pretension that any lord, whether by right or courtesy, was intended" (Lee, *Shakespeare* 687).

Similar dedications of earlier sonnet sequences by Barnabe Barnes, Henry Constable, and others had been made by the publisher, rather than the poet (Kathman, "Thorpe").

What's more, in his publication of Jonson's *Sejanus* in 1605, Thorpe printed a Senatorial proclamation in Act V in the same style that he printed the *Sonnets* Dedication, that is, "after the manner of a Roman inscription, capitalized, and with a stop after each word" (Duncan-Jones, "Unauthorized" 157).

Although most of Thorpe's books were legitimate printings of authorized works by well-known authors, such as Jonson, Chapman, Marston and

Nashe, he was not above publishing manuscripts that came to him in less legitimate ways. In 1611, apparently with the connivance of Ben Jonson, Thorpe published *The Odcombian Banquet*, a collection of complimentary and humorous verses and other preliminary matter by several dozen authors, that had already appeared in Thomas Coryate's *Coryats (sic) Crudities*, published earlier in the year. According to Duncan-Jones, Thorpe's publication of *The Odcombian Banquet* was "unauthorized," and "seems to be a deliberate piece of mischief." She described him as "something of a prankster" ("Unauthorized" 155, 163).<sup>3</sup>

Indeed, it was common for publishers and printers to use their initials on title pages and dedications. One obvious example is the second Quarto of *Hamlet*—"I.R." (James Roberts) for "N.L." (Nicholas Ling).<sup>4</sup> Thorpe's use of his initials to sign the *Sonnets*' Dedication was a common practice "when the dedicatee was a private and undistinguished friend of the dedicator" (Lee, *Sonnets* 34, n. 2).

Thorpe's dedications to Blount and Hall were a departure from the customary dedication, which was generally directed to a nobleman, monarch, or other person of distinction.

It should be noted that this practice of unauthorized publication of an author's work, especially that of poets, was common in the Early Modern era. Manuscripts of the poetry of Philip Sidney, Thomas Watson, Samuel Daniel and Henry Constable, as well as works by Thomas Nashe, Robert Southwell and John Earle, were obtained surreptitiously by rogue stationers, and published without their permission (Lee, *Shakespeare* 157, n. 1). Five of Shakespeare's poems, four sonnets, and a song, and others by other writers, but ascribed to Shakespeare, were published by William Jaggard in three editions of *The Passionate Pilgrim* (two in 1599, one in 1612), all "pirated" publications (Prince xxi–xxiii).

This array of facts confirms that the Dedication of the *Sonnets* was consistent with the style and method that Thorpe used in his other dedications, and, in at least one case, with the same purpose. Thorpe's authorship has been the nearly unanimous opinion of scholars of the Dedication for the last 300 years, including Oxfordian scholars. But, beginning about 20 years ago, other authors have been proposed.

Brenda James and William Rubinstein, who asserted more than a decade ago that the real Shakespeare was Sir Henry Neville, also attributed the *Sonnets*' Dedication to him on the grounds that the phrase *the well-wishing adventurer in setting forth* refers to "the granting of a royal charter, three days after the official registration of the [*Sonnets*], to the second London Virginia Company." Neville was a member of, and major participant in, the Company, as



was Henry Wriothesley, 3<sup>rd</sup> Earl of Southampton, and investors in it “were repeatedly described in its royal charter as ‘adventurers’” (183–7). Neither of these claims about Neville have any support among Shakespeare scholars or editors.<sup>5</sup>

In an article in *The Elizabethan Review* in 1997, Dr. John Rollett introduced the idea that Oxford himself, that is, Edward de Vere, wrote the *Sonnets*’ Dedication and concealed in it his name and the names “Henry” and “Wriothesley,” to identify Mr. W. H. and the Fair Youth. Nina Green, Sturrock and Erickson, and others have supported that claim.<sup>6</sup>

## The Role of Edward de Vere

The first question that arises about this claim is why Oxford would write a dedication to be attached to an unpublished manuscript of his *Sonnets*. Other than the dedications of *Venus and Adonis* and *Lucrece* in 1593 and 1594, there is no evidence that he had any interest or role in the publication of his plays or poems, except for publishing eight of them in *The Paradise of Dainty Devices* in 1576. The dedications of the two narrative poems were radically different in language, tone and sentiment from the *Sonnets* Dedication. In the *Sonnets*, he referred to the endurance and permanence of his “rhyme,” but aside from circulating some of them among his friends, there is no evidence that he wanted them published, either during his lifetime or after his death.

If he wished his sonnets to be published after his death and attributed to him, why would he compose an opaque dedication, and conceal his and his dedicatee’s identities in a hidden message? He had already, in his two previous dedications, revealed his heartfelt, if not abject, devotion to Henry Wriothesley, 3<sup>rd</sup> Earl of Southampton, the person alleged to be *the onlie begetter* by most scholars of the Dedication. The two previous dedications appeared over the name “William Shakespeare,” so Wriothesley’s name had already been associated with the name on the *Sonnets*’ title page.

Assuming he would write such a dedication, it is conceivable that he would address it to the person or persons who were the subjects of his sonnets. But if this were the case, why would he refer to *the onlie begetter* when his sonnets were addressed to two, or perhaps three, different people? Why would he address this *onlie begetter* as *M<sup>r</sup>*, an honorific entirely inappropriate, even insulting, to an earl? Those claiming Oxford’s authorship explain this as correct, since Wriothesley, upon his imprisonment in February 1601, was stripped of his earldom. For Oxford to address him as *M<sup>r</sup>* seems unnecessarily punctilious, especially since King James freed him and restored his title in 1603. And why, after Wriothesley’s earldom was restored, wouldn’t Oxford correct the text at some time during the following year?

Moreover, if Oxford were so involved in the typography of the Dedication, why would he have allowed his nom-de-plume, “Shakespeare,” which he had revealed more than 15 years earlier, to be printed as SHAKES-SPEARES on the *Sonnets* title page? As two of the most scrupulous Shakespeare scholars, Sidney Lee and E. K. Chambers, have asserted, Shakespeare had nothing to do with the *Sonnets* publication. “The book is a comparatively short one, consisting of forty leaves and 2,156 lines of verse. Yet there are probably on an average five defects per page or one in every ten lines (Lee, *Sonnets* 41).<sup>7</sup>

Why would Oxford wish *that eternitie* to the *begetter* when he had already promised eternity, that is, immortality, to that person in several sonnets? Whom had he in mind in the phrase *our ever-living poet*? The only poet visible in the Dedication is the author of the *Sonnets* themselves. It would be peculiar for de Vere, as that author, to refer to himself in that way. And finally, why would he refer to himself as *the well-wishing adventurer*? The only known connections between de Vere and an “adventure” were his investments between 1578 and 1582 in several expeditions in search of gold and new trade routes to the Far East. The only evidence that might suggest that he wrote the Dedication is his use of “beget” and “begetter” in the sense of “obtain” in several of his plays. But this fact is too trivial to associate him with the Dedication. Although there may be a reasonable answer to one or two of these questions, the collective improbability of these actions by Oxford outweighs any evidence that he had any role in the Dedication.

## The Disputed Words and Phrases in the Dedication

The meaning and interpretation of several words and phrases in the Dedication are the keys in determining who wrote it, to whom it was addressed, and what message the writer intended to convey.

The obvious recipient of the Dedication, *the onlie begetter*, was first described as the procurer or supplier of the *Sonnets* manuscript by George Chalmers in 1799 (52). In 1817, Nathan Drake agreed, describing *the onlie begetter* as the procurer or obtainer of the *Sonnets*’ manuscript, and identified him as Henry Wriothesley, 3<sup>rd</sup> Earl of Southampton (2:58ff.)

Another leading candidate for *the onlie begetter* is William Herbert, 3<sup>rd</sup> Earl of Pembroke, who was first proposed by James Boaden in 1832, and whom he also identified as the inspirer of the *Sonnets* (57–8).<sup>8</sup>

A third candidate for *the onlie begetter* is William Hall, an obscure stationer active in London between 1598 and 1614, who was first proposed as the procurer of the *Sonnets*’ manuscript by Sidney Lee in 1898. Both Lee and, later, B. R. Ward asserted that Hall, a resident of Hackney, obtained the manuscript and provided it to Thorpe (Lee, *Shakespeare* 672–85).

The last important candidate for *the onlie begetter* is Sir William Harvey or Hervey, who, in 1598, became the third husband of Mary Wriothesley, Countess of Southampton and mother of Henry Wriothesley. In 1867, Gerald Massey suggested that he was the procurer of the *Sonnets* manuscript, having inherited the Southampton papers on his wife's death in 1607. This view was supported by C. C. Stopes in 1922 (343–4), and in 1965 by A. L. Rowse (x–xii), both of whom associated Thorpe's wish of *all happinesse* to Sir William because of his remarriage, in 1608, to a younger woman.<sup>9</sup>

There are, perhaps, ten other candidates for the role of *begetter*. His identity depends on what the author of the Dedication meant by his use of the word *begetter*—inspirer, procurer, or the *Sonnets'* author. There are numerous scholars on all three sides of this question.

The noun *begetter* is an obvious derivative of the verb *beget*, which, according to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, is a “word inherited from Germanic” and “cognate with or formed similarly to Old Saxon *bigetan* to seize, Old High German *bigezzan* to obtain, get hold of, attain, Gothic *bi-gitan* to find...the Germanic base of BE- *prefix* + the Germanic base of GET *v.*” The prefix *be* has the effect of intensifying the verb to which it is attached, such as in the words *besiege*, *bedeck*, *beguile*, *beloved*, *begrudge*, etc.

In the words of Sidney Lee:

‘Beget’ came into being as an intensive form of ‘get’, and was mainly employed in Anglo-Saxon and Mediaeval English in the sense of ‘obtain’. It acquired the specialized signification of ‘breed’ at a slightly later stage of development, and until the end of the seventeenth century it bore concurrently the alternative meanings of ‘procure’ (or ‘obtain’) and ‘breed’ (or ‘produce’). Seventeenth century literature and lexicography recognized these two senses of the word and no other (*Sonnets* 38, n.1).

Lee cited a contemporary example of the use of *beget* to denote “procure” or “obtain” in Jonson's dedication of *Sejanus*: “[this play] hath *begot itself* (i.e. procured for itself or obtained) a greater favour than he (i.e. Sejanus) lost, the love of good men.” The play was published by Thomas Thorpe in 1605. Lee cited a half dozen other examples of identical usage (*Sonnets* 38–9).

The *OED* supplies two definitions of “begetter”:

1. The agent that originates, produces, or occasions something; a creator or originator.
2. A person who begets a child; a procreator; a parent.

We may discard definition 2 as inappropriate in this context. The *OED* cites Thorpe's phrase in the Dedication as an example under definition 1. But the multiple synonyms listed include all three meanings, that is, someone who "obtains" something, someone who "occasions" something, and someone who "creates" something. Considered by itself, the word could be defined by any of these three alternatives. In the context of the Dedication, however, the correct meaning will be the one that agrees with the definitions of the other words in the Dedication to result in a coherent message. These other definitions will determine which is the correct one for *begetter*. The most reasonable meaning of the word is that of an originator or producer. These could be the creator of the *Sonnets* or the person who produced or provided the manuscript. Neither of these meanings suggests an inspirer or animator who is the subject of a poem. And it would be extremely unusual, if not bizarre, for a book of poems to be dedicated to its author.

Nevertheless, scholars, from the earliest commentators to the most recent, have been deeply divided between "procurer" and "inspirer." In support of his interpretation, Lee cited the views of Edmond Malone, George Steevens and James Boswell the Younger (*Sonnets* 38–9). Others of the same opinion include Knight, Collier, Hazlitt, and Halliwell-Phillipps (Rollins 2:166–9). More recently, C. C. Stopes (344), C. W. Barrell (50–1), A. L. Rowse (xi), Ruth L. Miller (Looney 2:234), Eva Turner Clark (449–50), Alden Brooks (141), Mark Anderson (365) and Brian Vickers (8) have agreed with Lee's definition of *begetter*.

However, most modern scholars of the *Sonnets*, such as Katherine Duncan-Jones (*Sonnets* 108), G. B. Evans (115–6) and Ingram and Redpath (3–4) consider the *begetter* the inspirer of the *Sonnets*. These two contradictory interpretations of the phrase, as provider or inspirer, have persisted to the present day.

The phrase *our ever-living poet* can mean no one other than the author of the *Sonnets*, a person either dead, or immortal in the sense that he will never be forgotten. In John Benson's edition of the *Sonnets* (1640), Leonard Digges praised "never-dying" Shakespeare (Chambers 2:232).

Of the five meanings of *adventurer* supplied in the *OED*, the most appropriate in this context is:

1. A person who undertakes or invests in a commercial adventure or enterprise; one who ventures capital in some project, esp. trade or settlement; a speculator. With capital initial: a member of an association of such people established by royal charter or some other authority.

The *OED* cites the use of the word in Thorpe's Dedication as an example under this meaning.

There are several other examples of stationers using the word in connection with their publications.<sup>10</sup>

But, again, as with *begetter*, the multiple synonyms listed allow different interpretations. The correct one will be the one that fits most appropriately into the meaning of the entire Dedication. The adjective *well-wishing* identifies the *adventurer* as the person, that is, the author of the Dedication, wishing *Mr W. H. all happiness*.

The *OED* supplies several meanings for the verb phrase *to set forth* (set, v.1. Phrasal Verbs 2). None is appropriate in the context of the Dedication except no. 5—“To publish (a literary work).” This is clearly the meaning intended in the Dedication, that is, Thomas Thorpe, the *adventurer* is publishing a literary work. Sidney Lee supplied several examples of identical usage (*Sonnets* 37, n.1).

Thus, by adopting the meanings of *begetter* as provider of the *Sonnets* manuscript, of *our ever-living poet* as the author of the *Sonnets*, of *the well-wishing adventurer* as Thomas Thorpe, and of *setting forth* as publishing a literary work, the result is the sentence proposed above:

On the occasion of this publishing venture, I wish Mr. W. H., the sole provider of the manuscript of these sonnets, all happiness and that eternity promised by our immortal poet.

Only by adopting these particular meanings does the entire Dedication not only make sense, but also accurately describe the circumstances of the publication by Thomas Thorpe of a book of *Sonnets*, after he was provided the manuscript by William Hall.

## The People in the Dedication

The best evidence is that *the onlie begetter*—*Mr. W. H.*— is William Hall, a fellow stationer who appears to have had access to manuscripts left by de Vere at his death. The phrase *Mr. W. H. ALL* is an obvious visual pun that should be read as “Mr. W. Hall,” a reading first proposed in 1867 by Ebenezer Forsyth (24). He went no further than that, being unable to locate a W. Hall among the relatives and friends of William Shakspeare of Stratford.

But in 1898, in his biography of Shakespeare, Sidney Lee proposed that the stationer William Hall was *Mr. W. H.* on the following grounds:

On at least one previous occasion, Hall had acquired a manuscript by a deceased author, and arranged its publication. In 1606, he obtained the manuscript of *A Foure-Fould Meditation*, a collection of poems by Philip Howard, 13<sup>th</sup> Earl of Arundel, and several other Catholic



writers. Howard had been attainted and imprisoned in 1589 and died in 1595. On the title page, the work was falsely attributed to “R. S. *the author of St. Peters complaint*.” Because of the popularity of the Jesuit martyr Robert Southwell, it was common for printers at the time to attach his name to devotional works by other writers (Southwell v; Pollen and Macmahon 326–7).

In a lengthy dedication, Hall extolled “these meditations,” and how they had come to him: “Long have they lien hidden in obscuritie, and haply had never seene the light, had not a meere accident conveyed them to my hands.”<sup>11</sup> Hall then signed the dedication of Eld’s edition of Howard’s poems with the initials “W. H.” In a Bibliographical Note to a reprint of this edition in 1895, the editor, Charles Edmonds, wrote, “I have always presumed this ‘W. H.’ to be the same ‘W. H.’ who gave Shakespeare’s Sonnets to the world...” (Southwell viii). As Alden Brooks wrote in 1943, “it is most unlikely that there should have been about the year 1609 two persons with the initials W. H. both engaged in procuring poems for the publishing trade” (141). *A Foure-Fould Meditation* was printed in 1606 by George Eld, the printer of the *Sonnets* three years later.

In 1608, Hall was granted permission to publish a manuscript by Justin, the Christian martyr, which he did the next year (Arber 3:396). With this publication, his name appeared on a title page for the first time, representing “the earliest credential of his independence. It entitled him to the prefix ‘Mr.’ in all social relations” (Lee, *Shakespeare* 683 n.1). By 1612, Hall had set up his own printing business, and in that year printed *The Araignment of John Selman* (*sic*), an account of the execution of a pickpocket. On the title page appears the phrase “Printed by W. H.”<sup>12</sup>

These facts confirm that William Hall used the initials “W. H.” both before the *Sonnets* were printed (on a dedication) and afterward (on a title page), and that it was not unusual for him to acquire a manuscript of a deceased author.

Pursuing the case in 1922, Col. B. R. Ward was able to place William Hall in the parish of Hackney in 1608, and to associate the passing of the *Sonnets* manuscript from him to Thomas Thorpe with the dissolution of Oxford’s household in Hackney, and his widow’s sale of Brooke House in 1609 (18–21).

To this end, Ward found the christening of a Margaret Gryffyn recorded in a register at St. Saviour’s Southwark in 1592 (Looney 2:219). Further, in the Hackney Parish Registers, Ward found an entry recording the marriage of a William Hall and Margery Gryffyn in August 1608 (Looney 2:220). More than one scholar has noticed that Thorpe’s wish of *all happiness* might well be an appropriate sentiment to extend to a newly married man (Stopes 344; Anderson 365).

Additional evidence for William Hall's presence in the parish of Hackney appeared in three articles by Col. Ward, published in the *Hackney Spectator* in August and September 1924.

In the Feet of Fines for Hackney, a transaction was recorded in 1600 “between James Knowles and John Costerdyne, plaintiffs, and William Hall and Elizabeth his wife and William Watkinson defendant of 5 acres of meadow...in Hackney 41 pounds” (Looney 2:219). The supposition here is that Hall's wife, Elizabeth, died sometime before 1608. Although it is not certain that the William Hall and Margaret or Margery Gryffyn mentioned in these documents are those now under scrutiny, the possibility that they are the same people requires that this evidence be included in the discussion.

Additional evidence that William Hall may have had access to manuscripts left by Edward de Vere at his death lies in Hall's relationship with Anthony Munday, playwright, translator, and a known associate of de Vere.

First, William Hall and Anthony Munday were both apprenticed to the printer John Alde in the late 1570s (Turner 5, 14, 26; McKerrow 121). Munday's first surviving publication, *The Mirrour of Mutabilitie*, was printed by John Alde in 1579. After Munday's effusive dedication to the Earl of Oxford, there follow several verses commending the author, including one from William Hall “in commendation of his kinsman Anthony Munday,” and signed with the initials “W. H.” (Munday 19).

Munday had been associated with Oxford since his teenage years and had dedicated a novel and half-a-dozen translations to him during the 1580s and 1590s. Moreover, Munday was also involved with Oxford/Shakespeare in the composition and revision of *Sir Thomas More*, a play dated as early as 1593 and as late as 1608 (Jowett 424–43). Even later, in 1619, in his dedication of *Primaleon* to the 18<sup>th</sup> Earl, Henry de Vere, Munday was still lavish in his praise of “that most noble Earl your father of famous and desertful memory” (B. M. Ward 200–202).<sup>13</sup>

A manuscript of *Troilus and Cressida*, certainly composed before 1603, apparently became available in 1609, and was printed by the *Sonnets* printer, George Eld. A second state of this printing contained a “publisher's advertisement” that referred to “the grand possessors' wills” [intentions] and the “scape it [the play] hath made” (Bevington 120–2).

These facts support the claim by Sidney Lee that *the onlie begetter* was William Hall<sup>14</sup>, and the subsequent claim by Col. Ward that William Hall likely had access to a manuscript of Oxford's *Sonnets*, and perhaps other manuscripts, around the year 1609 through his “kinsman,” Anthony Munday.

Because of the prefix *M* attached to the initials *W. H.*, neither the Earl of Southampton nor the Earl of Pembroke can be *the onlie begetter*. At the time, the use of such a designation for an earl was strictly forbidden. The government was “always active in protecting the dignity of peers,” and an offense of this type would have constituted defamation.<sup>15</sup> (Pembroke was a member of the Privy Council at the time.) As mentioned above, Henry Wriothesley’s title had been restored in 1603, long before the *Sonnets* were printed. In addition, Thomas Thorpe, in 1610 and 1616, dedicated publications to William Herbert, addressing him in both instances as Earl of Pembroke.

Although the initials of Sir William Harvey or Hervey are in the right order; and although he was appropriately addressed as “Mr.”; and although he inherited his wife’s “goods and chattels, household stuff and estate” in 1607 (Stopes 335), it is extremely unlikely that he would have found the *Sonnets* manuscript among his deceased wife’s papers and delivered it to Thomas Thorpe. Nor is it likely that, had Henry Wriothesley possessed the manuscript, he would have left it in his mother’s household.

## The Message in the Dedication

It should be pointed out, first, that the words and phrases in the *Sonnets* Dedication were not unusual at the time. In the words of Donald Foster, “The same basic sentence, with varying incidentals, appears in hundreds of Renaissance book dedications, most frequently as an epigraph to a longer ‘epistle dedicatory,’ as in another of Thorpe’s publications, *The Preachers Travels*, by John Cartwright” (figure 2):

TO THE VERTVOVS AND  
Worthy Knight, Sir THOMAS HVNT,  
one of his Maiesties lustices of the  
Peace and Quorum in the Countie of  
Surrey, I. C wisheth all ter-  
restriall and celestiaall happinesse.

(A2r)<sup>16</sup>

The message alleged by Dr. John Rollett to be hidden in the *Sonnets* Dedication consists of the two names “Henry” and “Wriothesley.” The first question that arises about such a message, hidden or not, is why it was necessary in this publication of the *Sonnets*. Wriothesley had already been associated in the most intimate way with Shakespeare in the dedications of *Venus and*

*Adonis* and *Lucrece* years earlier. Moreover, if Thomas Thorpe found it necessary to connect Wriothesley with the *Sonnets*, why didn't he simply do so, rather than conceal his name in such a way that it remained hidden for hundreds of years?

Because of the Dedication's "unusual appearance, peculiar syntax, and obscure meaning," as well as the questions about it raised by various scholars, Rollett surmised that it contained a cipher (97). From the numerous types of ciphers possible, he chose to seek the message in a "transpositional cipher," that is, a cipher that rearranges the letters in the plain text. Rollet produced the following rearrangement of the text in what he called a "perfect rectangular array" of 8 rows of 18 letters in which the name WR IOTH ESLEY could be made out in three unattached sequences, reading vertically downward, upward and down again in columns 2, 11, and 10 (figure 3):

T	O	T	H	E	O	N	L	I	E	B	E	G	E	T	T	E	R
O	F	T	H	E	S	E	I	N	S	V	I	N	G	S	O	N	N
E	T	S	M	r	W	H	A	L	L	H	A	P	P	I	N	E	S
S	E	A	N	D	T	H	A	T	E	T	E	R	N	I	T	I	E
P	R	O	M	I	S	E	D	B	Y	O	V	R	E	V	E	R	L
I	V	I	N	G	P	O	E	T	W	I	S	H	E	T	H	T	H
E	W	E	L	L	W	I	S	H	I	N	G	A	D	V	E	N	T
V	R	E	R	I	N	S	E	T	T	I	N	G	F	O	R	T	H

"Support for the correctness of this decipherment," Rollett continued, "comes from the perfect array with 9 rows of 16 letters," which, reading downward diagonally from the second row spells HENRY (figure 4).

T	O	T	H	E	O	N	L	I	E	B	E	G	E	T	T	
E	R	O	F	T	H	E	S	E	I	N	S	V	I	N	G	
S	O	N	N	E	T	S	M	r	W	H	A	L	L	H	A	
P	P	I	N	E	S	S	E	A	N	D	T	H	A	T	E	
T	E	R	N	I	T	I	E	P	R	O	M	I	S	E	D	
B	Y	O	V	R	E	V	E	R	L	I	V	I	N	G	P	
O	E	T	W	I	S	H	E	T	H	T	H	E	W	E	L	
L	W	I	S	H	I	N	G	A	D	V	E	N	T	V	R	
E	R	I	N	S	E	T	T	I	N	G	F	O	R	T	H	

“In an array with 15 letters in each row (the last being incomplete),” Rollett continued, “the name can be read out vertically in the 7th column” (figure 5):

T	O	T	H	E	O	N	L	I	E	B	E	G	E	T
T	E	R	O	F	T	H	E	S	E	I	N	S	V	I
N	G	S	O	N	N	E	T	S	M	r	W	H	A	L
L	H	A	P	P	I	N	E	S	S	E	A	N	D	T
H	A	T	E	T	E	R	N	I	T	I	E	P	R	O
M	I	S	E	D	B	Y	O	V	R	E	V	E	R	L
I	V	I	N	G	P	O	E	T	W	I	S	H	E	T
H	T	H	E	W	E	L	L	W	I	S	H	I	N	G
A	D	V	E	N	T	V	R	E	R	I	N	S	E	T
T	I	N	G	F	O	R	T	H						

From these three arrays, or grids, Rollett concluded that “It is a reasonable deduction (though perhaps not an inescapable one) that the full name ‘Henry Wriothesley’ was deliberately concealed in the Dedication, in order to record for posterity his identity as ‘Mr. W. H’”. He also concluded that Henry Wriothesley was indeed “the young man to whom many of the sonnets were addressed...” (98).

It will be noticed, first, that the last grid shown is five letters short of symmetrical, and that if it were symmetrical, or “perfect” as Rollett describes the other two, the name HENRY would not line up vertically. This illustrates a feature of all three grids—they are arbitrary. The number of possible grids, symmetrical or not, in a message of 144 letters is over 70. The decoder would, therefore, have to try out dozens of possible grids to locate the hidden message.

Another such “perfect” grid would produce, in the same disjointed fashion as in the WR IOTH ESLEY grid, both spellings, HA RV EY and HE RV EY, of the name of another candidate for Mr. W. H. (figure 6):

T	O	T	<u>H</u>	<u>E</u>	O	N	L	I	E	B	E	G	E	T	T	E	R
O	F	T	H	E	S	E	I	N	S	U	I	N	G	S	O	N	N
E	T	S	M	r	W	H	A	L	L	<u>H</u>	<u>A</u>	P	P	I	N	E	S
S	E	A	N	D	T	H	A	T	<u>E</u>	T	E	R	N	I	T	I	E
P	R	O	M	I	S	E	D	B	Y	O	U	R	E	V	E	R	L
I	V	I	N	G	P	O	E	T	W	I	S	H	E	T	H	T	H
E	W	E	L	L	W	I	S	H	I	N	G	A	D	V	E	N	T
U	R	E	R	I	N	S	E	T	T	I	N	G	F	O	R	T	H

In either spelling, Sir William’s initials are in the right order.

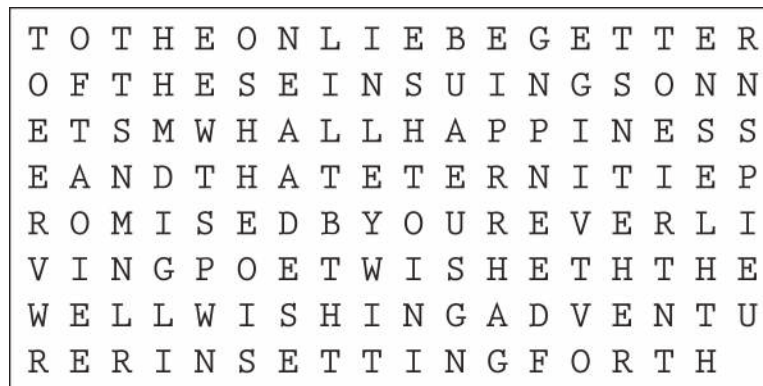


In the same grid, yet another name, HER BE RT can be pieced out (figure 7):



Sir William Herbert, whose initials are also in the right order, is another candidate for Mr. W. H.

Another feature of Rollett's three grids is that the letter "r," which was printed in superscript in the Quarto, is given the same weight as the other letters, another arbitrary decision to be made by the decoder. If the writer intended the "r" to be included in the grid, and given the same weight as the other letters, why wouldn't he simply print it as a capital, or leave it out entirely? An "MR" would have left no doubt. As it happens, including the "r" in the grid is essential to obtaining the names "Henry" and "Wriothesley." Eliminating it removes each name from its respective grid (figure 8):



In his article, Rollett repeatedly cited the "criteria for assessing whether a solution of a supposed cipher is genuine or not" that appeared in *The Shakespearean Ciphers Examined* by William and Elizebeth Friedman:

- "the key to the cipher should be given unambiguously, either in the text or in some other way, and not contrived to fit in with preconceived ideas;"

- “the decoded message should make good sense, and have been sufficiently important to have been worth concealing;”
- “the message should have been hidden where it had a high probability of being found.”

As to the first criterion, Rollett writes, “With regard to the cipher keys, these are factors of 144, the number of letters in the text...” Presumably, by “factors” Rollett is referring to the number of columns and rows used in his grids. It is true that in two of his three grids the number of columns and rows are “factors,” that is, exact divisors of 144. But, as pointed out above, there are scores of differently-shaped grids, more than a dozen of which are symmetrical or “perfect.” How is it unambiguous that one or another should be used? One such “perfect” grid produces “Harvey,” “Hervey” and “Herbert,” three entirely different solutions. And how is it unambiguous that the “key” to the hidden message requires a repositioning of the letters of the plain text into grids?

As to the second criterion, the two names, “Henry” and “Wriothesley” make “good sense” with respect to *Mr W. H.* only if it occurs to the decoder to reverse their initial letters and discard the inappropriate title. As to the names being “sufficiently important to have been worth concealing,” it is simply not credible, as pointed out above, that Thomas Thorpe found it necessary to hide Wriothesley’s name when it had already been intimately and publicly associated with Shakespeare’s.

As to the third criterion, Rollett simply states that it is “clearly fulfilled,” that is, it was “hidden where it had a high probability of being found” (99). The fact that no one, until nearly 400 years after the *Sonnets* were published, found this alleged solution, belies this claim.

Another criterion advanced by the Friedmans, one that Rollett failed to mention, is that “if any element of the key is such that it demands a decision by the decipherer which is based on subjective considerations..., then it will be difficult for the decipherer to get an incontestable answer” (214–5). As described above, each of the steps that the decipherer must take in Rollett’s process requires a decision—that is, what type of cipher to use, which grid to use, how many grids to use, which names found in the grids to use (Henry, Harvey, etc.), and which person or persons in the Dedication have been identified—the onlie begetter, *Mr W. H.*, the well-wishing adventurer or our ever-living poet. In each of these instances, the decipherer must make the correct decision to arrive at the solution that Rollett proposes. In the words of the Friedmans, “the method allows so much room for choice on the part of the ‘decipherer’ that he can produce any answer he likes. The method, in other words, carries its own refutation with it” (74).

Rollett further claimed that the likelihood that the names he found in the grids occurred by accident was one in several billion (109). But considering that different names, “Harvey,” “Hervey” and “Herbert,” each relevant to the question, also appeared in a grid renders this calculation meaningless.

It is striking that the one name that appears unmistakably in all the grids is *WHALL*.

## The Appearance of the Dedication

Rollett suspected that the arrangement of the words of the Dedication, in three inverted triangles, contained a clue to “concealed information.” He reasoned that the full-stops or periods after each word suggested that *counting* them would reveal the clue. After trying several methods of counting, and finding nothing promising, he noticed that the number of lines in each triangle produced a set of three numbers—6, 2 and 4. He continued: “Counting through the Dedication, using these numbers as the key, we obtain the following sequence of words: “THESE . SONNETS . ALL . BY . EVER . . .” From this, he concluded that “these words appear to point to an author other than Shakespeare” (108).

It is obvious that this series of actions requires at least four different decisions by the decoder as to how to proceed. More than that, it requires that only the first two syllables of the compound word *ever-living* be used to obtain the sequence, even though there is no period after *ever*. From this point, it was an easy step to find the name Edward de Vere among the multiple candidates for the authorship of the Shakespeare canon, and to conclude that the layout of the Dedication contained a statement that it was he who had composed the sonnets, and that therefore he was Shakespeare.

On the face of it, it is hard to believe that any reader could find his way through this tortuous process, making four or five correct decisions as to which way to proceed, and arrive at the revelatory phrase. It is hard to imagine Thomas Thorpe, or anyone else, constructing this unstable assemblage of letters that contained both a plain and a hidden message. Did he start with three names and try to write a dedication around them? Or did he start with a dedication and try to conceal three names in its text? No one, in the centuries since the *Sonnets* were printed, nor anyone in the nearly 80 years since the revelation that Edward de Vere wrote them, detected any hint of his name in the Dedication until Rollett did so in 1997.

Despite Rollett's claims to the contrary, the appearance of the Dedication is not unusual. Inverted triangles and capital letters were common in many title pages and dedications of the period, such as those in figures 9–16. They were also prominent in publications by Thomas Thorpe and those printed by George Eld both before and after they collaborated on the *Sonnets* in 1609. At least two scholars have commented on their similarity to the *Sonnets* Dedication. On Jonson's dedication of *Volpone*, printed by Eld for Thorpe in 1607 (fig. 9), Katherine Duncan-Jones wrote: "This elaborate capitalized dedication, set out like a lapidary inscription, but in English, is perhaps worth quoting in full for its visual and syntactical resemblance to that of the *Sonnets*" ("Unauthorized" 159).

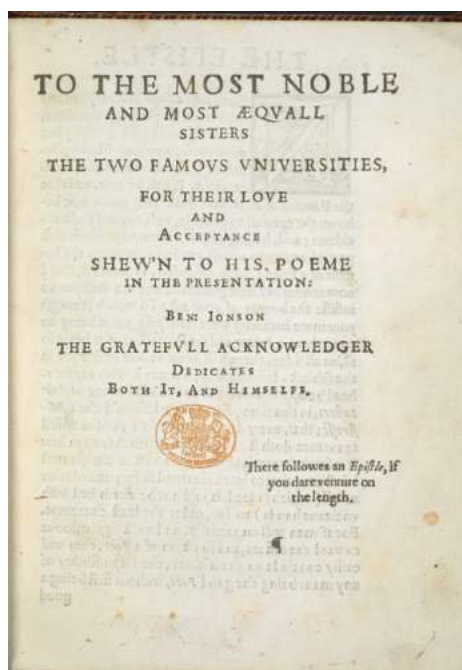


Figure 9: Ben Jonson's dedication of *Volpone*, printed by George Eld for Thomas Thorpe in 1607.

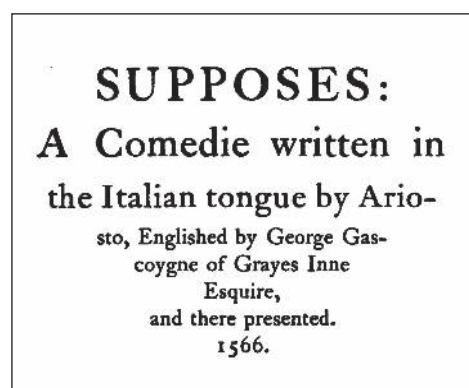


Figure 10: *Supposes* title page.

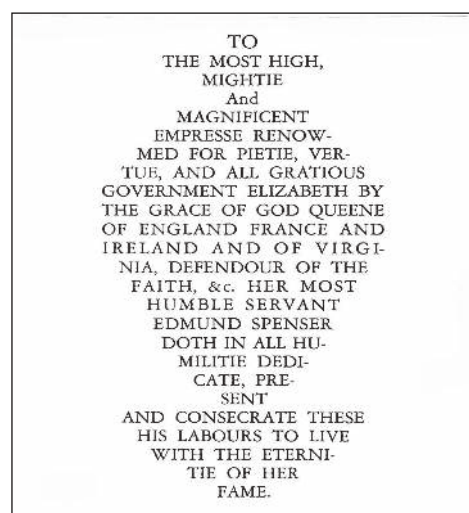


Figure 11: Dedication page of *Spenser's Fairie Queene*. 1596.

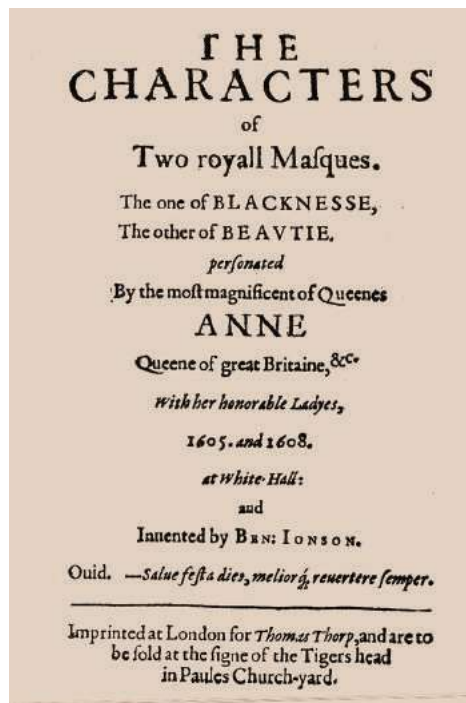


Figure 12: Title page of one of Thomas Thorpe's earlier publications.

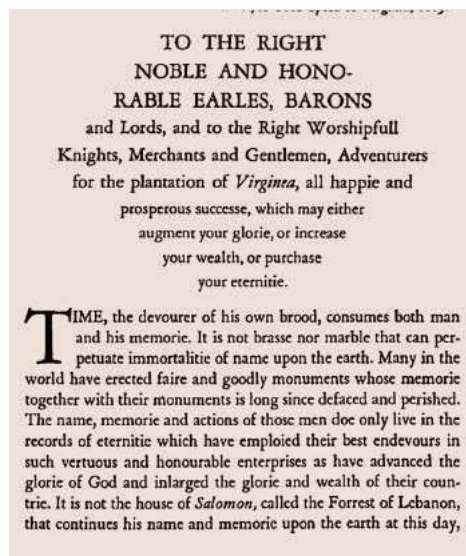


Figure 14: Dedication of A Good Speed to Virginia by R. G. 1609.

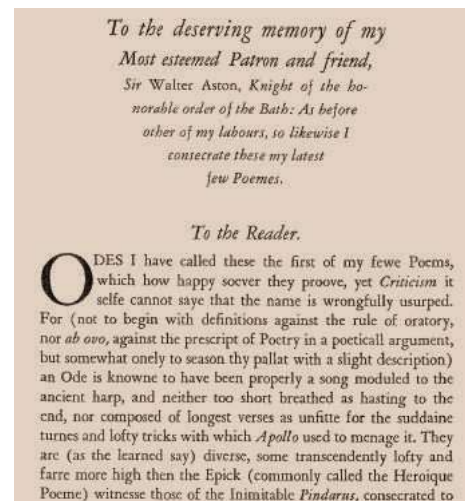


Figure 13: Dedication page of Michael Drayton's Poems, Lyrick and Pastorall 1606.

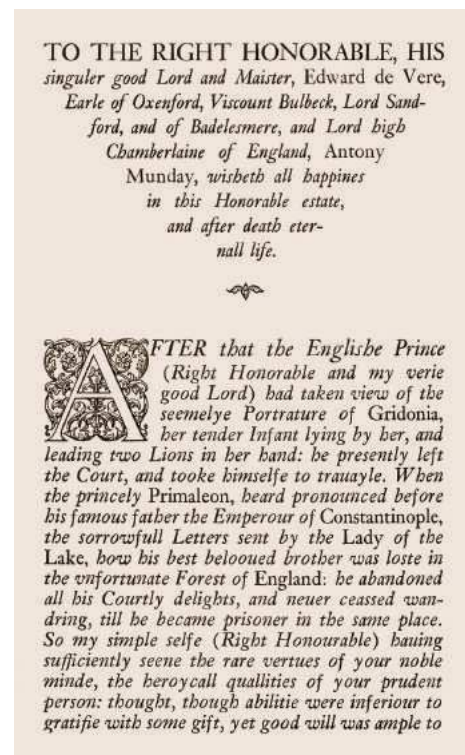


Figure 15: First page of Anthony Munday's Dedication of Zelauto to Edward de Vere. 1580.



George Eld's title page of *Troilus and Cressida* (figure 16), which he printed just months after printing the *Sonnets*, drew the following comment from Johann Gregory: "To a certain extent, the symmetrical prose at the bottom of the title page, so alike to the shape of the dedication to the *Sonnets*, might in part be a signature printing style of George Eld; several of his other title pages include the use of text centered symmetrically, although other printers did this too" (192).

The only distinctive feature of the Dedication, the period after each word, is hardly indicative of "concealed information." It is simply "a printer's convention used in imitation of lapidary inscriptions and monumental brasses.... The lapidary format, though cryptlike, is anything but cryptic" (Foster 43).

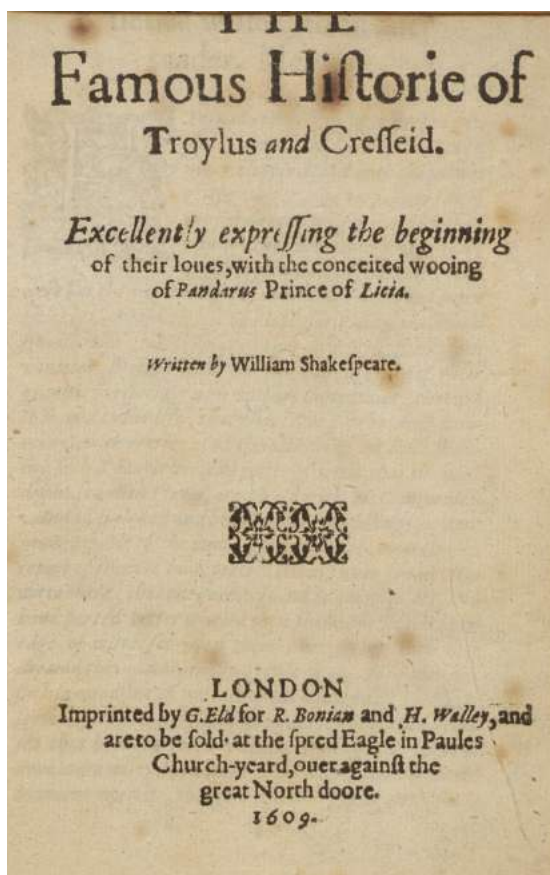


Figure 16: Title Page of *Troilus and Cressida*, printed by George Eld. 1609. STC 22332, Houghton Library, Harvard University.

Furthermore, to whom was Thorpe communicating this hidden message? And from whom was he concealing it? If he wanted to tell the ordinary reader that de Vere was Shakespeare, he picked a devilish way to do it. If he wanted to give one or more specific people the same message, why didn't just tell them, rather than conceal it in an elaborate puzzle in a printed work? The simplest answer is that he had neither intention in mind, but merely wanted, in his usual clever and jocular way, to thank William Hall for the manuscript, and extend to him his wishes for happiness.

In 2004, in an unusual act of intellectual honesty, Rollett wrote that the fact that the phrase he found lacked a verb "cast doubt on the validity of the proposed solution." He conceded that "a three-element key such as 6-2-4 is far too ingenious or sophisticated for the Elizabethan or Jacobean period."<sup>17</sup>

In the same year, Rollett abandoned Oxford as the genuine Shakespeare, and then, a few years before his untimely death in 2015, proposed William Stanley, 6th Earl of Derby, as the author of the canon.

The explanation of the Dedication that John Rollett proposed is burdened with too many arbitrary decisions and too little evidence. A message of thanks and good wishes to a friend from Thomas Thorpe is the most parsimonious explanation. It is the simplest, the most sensible, and the one supported by the facts.

## Endnotes

1. The name William Shakespeare was the pseudonym of Edward de Vere, 17th Earl of Oxford.
2. Sidney Lee reworded it as follows: “The well-wishing adventurer in setting forth [*i.e.* the publisher] T[homas] T[horpe] wisheth Mr. W. H., the only begetter of these ensuing sonnets, all happiness and that eternity promised by our ever-living poet” (*Shakespeare* 673). Lee’s brackets.
3. Thorpe’s piracy of *Coryats Crudities* is unusual because he reprinted only the preliminary material from the book, but none of the text. The epigraph that he attached to the book—*Asinus portans mysteria*—“donkey carrying a secret,” is typical of his drollery. The name *Odcombian* derives from the village of Odcombe in Somerset, the birthplace of Thomas Coryate.
4. Additional examples can be found in Lee’s biography (678) and in Hazlitt at 231–3, 269–70, 288.
5. See a review of their book *The Truth Will Out* in *The Shakespeare Oxford Newsletter*. 41:4, Fall 2005. 24–7.
6. “It’s Oxford/Shakespeare’s style to a ‘T’—the mindset, the complex sentence structure, the puns and jests, the turns of phrase, etc. etc.” Nina Green: Phaeton posting Jan. 24, 1999.
7. “there are sufficient misprints...to make it clear that the volume cannot have been ‘overseen’...by Shakespeare” (Chambers 1:559).
8. Boaden acknowledged that one B. Heywood Bright had proposed this solution to him in 1819.
9. John Dover Wilson also favored him (163–4).
10. “The stationer Thomas Walkley in 1622, in his preface to the Second Quarto of Beaumont and Fletcher’s *Philaster*, wrote that he ‘had *adventured* to issue a revised edition knowing how many *well-wishers* it had abroad’. Another ‘stationer’, Richard Hawkins, who published on his own account the third edition of the same play in 1628, described himself in the preliminary page as ‘acting the *merchant adventurer’s* part’” (Lee, *Sonnets* 37).

11. A fuller description of this matter can be seen in Lee, *Shakespeare* 682.
12. The title page of the British Museum copy can be seen at [https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/P\\_1896-1230-96](https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/P_1896-1230-96).
13. Oxfordian biographer Mark Anderson suggested that Philip Howard's brother Thomas may have given the manuscript of *A Four-Fold Meditation* to de Vere in the early 1590s as part of an effort to obtain "royal clemency" for Philip, who had been attainted and imprisoned in 1589. Howard, an avowed Catholic, and Oxford were frequently seen together during the 1580s at tournaments and court events. "Thus one suspects *A Four-Fold Meditation* among de Vere's books and papers at the time of his death in 1604" (365). If the manuscript remained in de Vere's household, it may, after his death, found its way to William Hall and to Thomas Thorpe in the same way as the *Sonnets* manuscript did.
14. Brian Vickers agreed with this conclusion as recently as 2007 (8).
15. Because of a similar discourtesy just a year earlier, "Sir Henry Colte was indicted in the Star Chamber for addressing a peer, Lord Morley, as 'goodman Morley.'" See Lee, *Shakespeare* 689, n. 1.
16. Foster 44. The title page reads "Printed for Thomas Thorppe, [*sic*] and are to bee [*sic*] sold by Walter Burre, 1611." It will be noticed that the dedication is arranged in three triangles.
17. He added that "An unverifiable cipher solution, employing techniques not recorded as having been used until the 20th Century is unlikely to be the genuine solution of a hypothetical cryptogram dating before 1609." Malim, ed. *Great Oxford*, 265–6.

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## *The Strange Case of “Mr. W. H.”:*

How we know the dedication to Shakespeare’s  
Sonnets is a cryptogram, and what it reveals

by John M. Shahan

On May 20, 1609, publisher Thomas Thorpe registered for publication a book titled *Shake-speares Sonnets*. The quarto printed with that title contains 154 sonnets, followed by the long poem “A Lover’s Complaint.” Despite the quality of the poems and the fame of Shakespeare, there was no second printing, and no commentary on it has been found in any document from the period, suggesting that it may have been suppressed. Thirteen copies of the volume survive.

The Sonnets are the only works in which the author speaks in the first person, seemingly revealing his innermost thoughts and feelings about his closest relationships. Most of Sonnets 1–126 are addressed to an attractive young man, commonly referred to as the “Fair Youth”; the rest deal mostly with his tortured relations with a “Dark Lady.” Neither is named, and their identities have been the subject of endless speculation. The leading Fair Youth candidate is Henry Wriothesley, 3rd Earl of Southampton, because Shakespeare’s first two published poems, *Venus and Adonis* (1593) and *Lucrece* (1594), were both dedicated to him around the time the early sonnets are thought to have been written, and because what is known about Wriothesley seems to match the Fair Youth.

A possible clue to the Fair Youth’s identity is in the dedication to the Sonnets, after the title page, which refers to “the onlie begetter” of the Sonnets as “Mr. W. H.”



Could this be a reference to Wriothesley, the initials reversed to avoid being transparent? Other candidates have been proposed,<sup>1</sup> but in this paper we focus on the case for Wriothesley. What about the rest of the dedication, which is strikingly odd in both appearance and wording, with no other dedication remotely like it in the Elizabethan-Jacobean period?

In 1997, Dr John M. Rollett, a British physicist who became a notable Shakespeare researcher, published an article entitled “The Dedication to Shakespeare’s Sonnets” in *The Elizabethan Review* (1997, 93–122). Rollett proposed that the strange dedication is in fact a double cryptogram, including (1) a transposition cipher<sup>2</sup> revealing the identity of “Mr. W. H.,” and (2) an innocent letter cipher<sup>3</sup> revealing the identity of the author of the Sonnets—that is, someone other than the traditional author, William Shakspeare,<sup>4</sup> as his family name was usually spelled in his hometown of Stratford-upon-Avon (Pointon 2011, 11–24).

Knowing that supporters of Sir Francis Bacon as the true author of the plays and poems ascribed to William Shakespeare had long sought to find ciphers in the works without success, I was skeptical of Rollett’s claim. Upon reading his article, however, despite each of the proposed solutions having an apparent imperfection, there was something clearly non-random with each that suggested intentionality. Rollett’s article listed several oddities about the dedication that could have been due to it being a cryptogram, and it cited

TO . THE . ONLIE . BEGETTER . OF .  
THESE . INSVING . SONNETS .  
M<sup>r</sup> . W . H . ALL . HAPPINESSE .  
AND . THAT . ETERNITIE .  
PROMISED .  
  
BY .  
  
OVR . EVER-LIVING . POET .  
  
WISHETH .  
  
THE . WELL-WISHING .  
ADVENTVRER . IN .  
SETTING .  
FORTH .  
  
**T . T .**

Figure 1: The dedication page of Shakespeares Sonnets, published in 1609.

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leading scholars who had previously suggested that it might be one. Rollett also checked his solutions against the validation criteria in William F. and Elizabeth S. Friedman's book *The Shakespearean Ciphers Examined* (Rollett 1997, 99–110, 109).

Finding Rollett's article intriguing, I contacted the former head of my doctoral program at UCLA—a mathematician who also consulted for the Rand Corporation. She introduced me to a colleague then on the board of the journal *Cryptologia*. An initial contact elicited a skeptical response to the idea of a valid Shakespearean cipher. I sent him a copy of Rollett's paper. While he gave no opinion about the validity of either solution, neither did he reject them. I proposed to write an article supporting the validity of Rollett's solutions, and he emphasized the importance, if I did, of addressing the imperfections. I began a dialogue with Rollett, focusing on the imperfections, and started work on an article.

Perhaps our most helpful communications involved advocates for Shakspeare of Stratford, testing our views against those of scholars who disagreed with us. One called our attention to an invalid assumption and a common error in estimating the odds of the transposition cipher occurring by chance. Another noted errors in the application of the Friedmans' criteria for validating proposed cipher solutions. We appreciated their help, and the errors are corrected in this paper.

The most important contribution, however, was to clarify that, despite the strengths of Rollett's proposed solutions, we could not fully explain the meaning of the message produced by the concealment system, which pointed to another authorship candidate. Given the contentiousness of the authorship controversy, nothing less than a complete explanation would suffice. I therefore decided to wait until a full explanation of the message became available, which has now come to light. Also, I recently noticed a feature of the dedication not previously commented on that virtually proves the dedication was designed as a cryptogram and was not a chance occurrence. These developments warranted writing this long-delayed paper.

Rollett's article focuses first on the transposition cipher identifying "Mr. W. H.," and then on the concealment system identifying someone else as author of the Sonnets. He did so because he regarded the former as the more clearly valid of the two, based on his estimates of the odds of each occurring by chance, and because his original aim was to identify "Mr. W. H." In this article the order is reversed because (1) in fact, the concealment system is less likely to have occurred by chance, and (2) its message identifying another author was discovered first, as the designer of the dedication may have intended. It may be easier to follow in the order in which they were discovered.

This article quotes extensively from Rollett’s article<sup>5</sup> to give readers sufficient background to fully understand both of his proposed solutions. Part One deals with the “hidden message” that identifies another author of the Sonnets. After recapping Rollett’s account of its discovery, it addresses (1) the meaning of the two words “THE FORTH,” (2) whether the key “6-2-4” is due to chance, (3) whether the proposed solution meets the Friedmans’ validation criteria, and (4) whether it is consistent with other aspects of the Sonnets publication.

Part Two deals with the question of the identity of “Mr. W.H.,” again beginning with Rollett’s description of his discovery. This is followed by (1) whether it meets the Friedmans’ validation criteria, (2) additional considerations in evaluating the proposed solutions, (3) Rollett’s subsequent decision to reject the validity of the hidden message, and (4) a discussion of the question of who most likely created the dedication. The Appendix estimates the odds that the proposed name of “Mr. W.H.” is due to chance.

## Part One: The Hidden Message

Rollett first calls attention to the mysteries presented by the dedication, citing leading scholars, including some who speculate that it was a cryptogram (Rollett 1997, 93–4):

One of the most enduring of literary mysteries is the identity of “Mr. W. H.,” the man to whom *Shake-speares Sonnets* were dedicated in 1609.... Commentators for over two hundred years have admitted to being puzzled by its unusual appearance, peculiar syntax, and obscure meaning (Rollins 1944, 166–176).

The Dedication to the Sonnets is unlike any other literary dedication of the period (Gebert 1933), quite apart from the mystery of “Mr. W. H.,” and some scholars have speculated that it may be a cipher. As Richard Dutton says, “The grammar of the piece is almost sufficient to quell interpretation in itself. How many sentences are hidden within the unusual punctuation (which... [may be] essential to some cryptogram...) (Dutton 1989, 41)?” Who is “the onlie begetter”? Is he the “Fair Youth”, the young man to whom many of the sonnets were addressed (and who is identified with “Mr. W. H.” by most commentators), or is he the agent who procured the manuscript? Is “T. T.” referring to himself as the “well-wishing adventurer”, or is he merely signing off as the publisher, Thomas Thorpe? And, asks Kenneth Muir, “Is there any significance in the way the Dedication is set out (Muir 1982, 152)?”

Undoubtedly, as Stanley Wells says, “‘Mr. W. H.’ provides the biggest puzzle of all” (Wells 1987, 6), and Samuel Schoenbaum calls it “a riddle that to this day remains unsolved (Schoenbaum 1970, 67).” The mystery is compounded by the difficulty of understanding what the writer of the Dedication was trying to convey by the rest of the text, which Northrop Frye characterizes as “one floundering and illiterate sentence” (Frye 1962, 28). This is the more surprising, in view of the fluency and wit displayed in Thorpe’s other dedications.... A student of cryptography might well ask him or herself whether there was more in this piece than meets the eye, since as Helen Fouche Gaines has said, “awkwardness of wording” may be a pointer to a “concealment cipher”, that is, a cipher designed so that superficially it appears innocent of hidden information (Gaines 1940, 4).

According to Rollett (1997, 94–5), the first person to try to decipher the dedication was Shakespeare scholar Leslie Hotson, who described it this way:

Thorpe’s inscription has been termed enigmatic, puzzling, cryptic, recalling the Elizabethans’ characteristic fondness for anagram, acrostic, concealment, cryptogram, ‘wherein my name ciphered were’. In these ensuing sonnets Shakespeare declared, your monument shall be my gentle verse, and Thorpe has set out a monumental inscription TO...Mr. W. H. Is there possibly something more than initials, hid and barr’d from common sense here...which we are meant to look for? (Hotson, 1964, 145–157)

## Peculiarities of the dedication

Rollett (1997, 95–6) describes Hotson’s solution in detail, but found it arbitrary and thus rejected it. Yet he was intrigued by the possibility of a cryptogram and decided to try to decipher it himself. He first noted these seven peculiarities:

- (a) The natural order for a dedication of this kind would be...‘To the dedicatee: (1) the dedicator (2) wisheth (3) blessings.’ But in this dedication the natural order is inverted, and it has the form ‘To the dedicatee: (3) blessings (2) wisheth (1) the dedicator.’ Hotson comments that it is the only dedication he has seen “which puts the sentence backwards”. To “expose its conspicuous peculiarity,” he reproduces nine other dedications as examples of normal word order....
- (b) Awkwardness of wording is evidenced further by the close conjunction of “wisheth” and “well-wishing”; surely the writer could

have avoided the repetition of the root word “wish” by saying something such as ‘well-willing’, ‘well-disposed’, ‘benevolent’, ‘amiable’ or ‘friendly’? Also, the phrase “these insuing sonnets” jars slightly...; one might...have expected either ‘these sonnets’, or ‘the insuing sonnets’....

- (c) It is all in capital letters (except for the ‘r’ of “Mr.”). As far as has been ascertained, there are only two other lengthy dedications of the period all in capital letters (those to Spenser’s *The Faerie Queene* and Jonson’s *Volpone*).
- (d) The spelling of the word “onlie” is very unusual; the most common spelling of the word at the time was ‘onely’. In the First Folio of 1623, the word appears as ‘onely’ 67 times, ‘only’ 5 times, ‘oneli’ twice, and ‘onlie’ once. (In the sonnets, ‘onely’ occurs 4 times, ‘only’ twice, and ‘onlie’ not at all.)
- (e) There are full stops after every word, a most remarkable feature, believed to be unique to this dedication; to date, no other example has been reported.
- (f) The hyphens joining two pairs of words into compound adjectives are unusual in being lower-case, instead of the expected upper-case hyphens.
- (g) The lines of the Dedication are carefully proportioned to form three blocks, each in the shape (roughly) of an inverted triangle. The line spacing is subtly increased between the middle five lines, as if to emphasize this feature. (Rollett 1997, 96–7)

## The dedication as an innocent letter cipher

Turning to how he discovered what he calls the “hidden message,” Rollett writes:

The full stops placed after every word are the most unusual of all the oddities listed—they immediately suggest counting words. One can imagine someone with a pencil touching the point on the paper after each word (or letter) as it is checked off, the small hyphens... indicating that compound words are to be counted separately. This prompts the idea of seeing whether a message might be found by selecting words evenly spaced, e.g., every third word, starting from the beginning, or maybe fourth or fifth, etc.... The result in every case is nonsense.



The next simplest scheme would be to alternate two numbers, and (for example) to take the third word, followed by the fifth word after that, then the third, fifth, third, and so on. But there are so many possible choices of two numbers that trial and error would get us nowhere.... If the scheme were of this kind, the creator of this cipher, supposing it to be there, *must* have recorded the numbers somewhere.... Yet the page is devoid of other symbols, not even compositors' code marks... to show the binder how to collate the sheets.

The arrangement of the text into three distinct blocks, each an inverted triangle, is another strange feature, and this...provides us with a set of three numbers—6, 2, 4—the numbers of lines in each block, something...within the control of a possible cryptographer. Counting through the Dedication, using these numbers as the key, we obtain the following sequence of words:

“THESE . SONNETS . ALL . BY . EVER . . . .”

Although they lack a verb, these words appear to point to an author other than Shakespeare. Reference to the Encyclopedia Britannica shows that a leading alternative candidate for the authorship...is one Edward de Vere, 17<sup>th</sup> Earl of Oxford, whose name might perhaps be indicated by “E(.)VER”.... If the supposed message had been deliberately encoded into the text, the need to incorporate these words in the right order, at predetermined intervals, could provide an explanation for the strange syntax and obscure meaning.

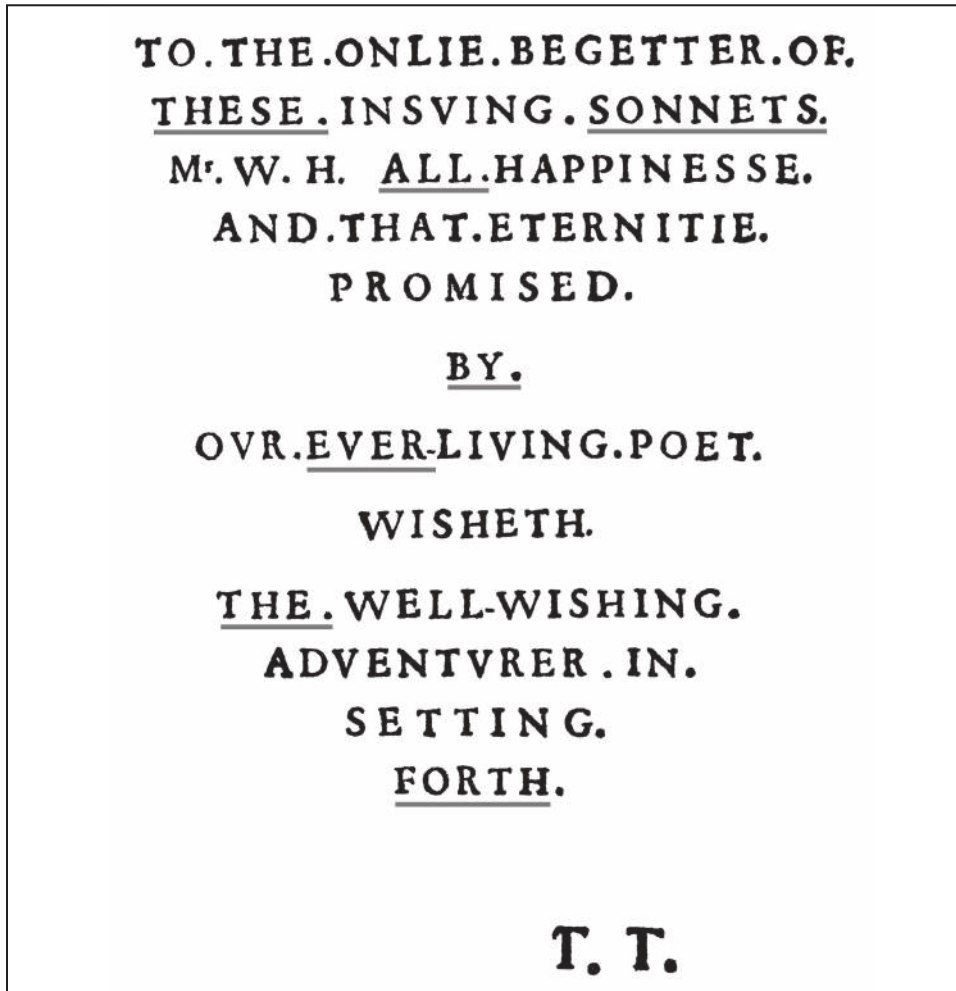
We now come to a crucial point. It might be wondered why the hypothetical designer of the cipher should choose, apparently at random, the set of numbers “6, 2, 4” as the cipher key (coded into the layout). But this set, remarkably enough, consists of the numbers of letters in the three parts of the name “Edward de Vere”. Thus, out of perhaps a hundred available choices of sets of two or three small numbers, our cryptographer (and we can now feel more confident of his existence) chose the one set which would serve to confirm the correctness of the decipherment, once it had been carried out. (Rollett 1997, 108–9)

Finding such a message using a key encoded into the shape of the dedication, which matches the number of letters in the name “Edward de Vere,” is, indeed, remarkable—a hidden message pointing to Edward de Vere, with “Edward de Vere” as its keyword.

But Rollett’s article does not show the dedication at the point where he counts words to get the five-word message, so inattentive readers might not

notice that using the key 6-2-4 to count to the end of the dedication produces this seven-word sequence:

“THESE . SONNETS . ALL . BY . EVER - THE . FORTH”



*Figure 2: The dedication page showing the words selected using the key 6-2-4.*

Unable to explain the two additional words “THE FORTH,” Rollett ignored them because he did not consider THE FORTH part of the message, then proceeded with the five-word message, which he found sufficient. Only in the discussion section did he later address the issue of the length of the message in response to a reader’s comment, but even there he ignored the possibility of

the two additional words having any meaning. He writes, for example, that “it had to be sufficiently long to provide enough lines of text to set out in three inverted triangles in order to record the key ‘6, 2, 4’” (Rollett 1997, 116).

This is not a credible solution. Why devise a system to communicate a secret message but leave it ambiguous as to what the message includes? Using the key to count off words to the end, one gets seven words, not five, and nothing justifies stopping after five words. It was an arbitrary, subjective decision. The two additional words “THE FORTH” appear to be part of the message and should mean something, especially because “FORTH” is the last word in the dedication.<sup>6</sup> No conscientious cryptographer would allow such a coincidence, if meaningless, knowing how misleading it would be.

In Appendix C to his article, Rollett (1997, 118–9) makes a case that “EVER” was, by itself, a clear reference to Edward de Vere. He claims that on several occasions de Vere used the words “ever” and “Ver” (spring) to refer to himself, but his examples do not demonstrate it. Shakespeare’s plays contain numerous examples of the author possibly referring to himself as “ever,” but none that could be said to be beyond dispute. Rollett correctly notes that “Those who support [de Vere’s] authorship of the works of Shakespeare point to Sonnet 76, where lines 5 and 7 appear to employ the same device:

Why write I still all one, ever the same  
And keep invention in a noted weed, (well-known guise)  
That every word doth almost tell my name (Rollett 1997, 119).

Does line 7 here refer to “ever” in “ever the same” in line 5, meaning that “ever” is “that every word” (with “every” now used as an adjective) that almost tells his name? Maybe, but regardless of whether the author intended to refer to himself as “ever,” the mere fact that “Vere” is a perfect anagram of “ever” is enough to suggest this may have been what the cryptographer intended, with the discovery that the key matches the number of letters in the three parts of Edward de Vere’s name providing strong confirmation. This was enough for Rollett, but others, including myself, thought that the two additional words “THE FORTH” must mean something that would clarify the message.

It is worth mentioning here that Rollett was not looking for an alternative author in the dedication when he began his journey in trying to decipher it in the late 1960s. He was merely seeking to identify “Mr. W. H.” In fact, he took it for granted that the author of the Sonnets was William Shakspere of Stratford and was not even aware of Edward de Vere. When he noticed the hidden message, he writes that “it appeared to be meaningless and was promptly forgotten” (1997, 117). It was a few years later that he learned Edward de

Vere was a leading alternative candidate and realized that his name might be indicated by “EVER.” Even then, Rollett dismissed it as “a curiosity of no significance” (ibid). It would be 20 years before he decided to investigate the possibility further.

## Meaning of “THE FORTH”

The word FORTH cannot be understood in its primary sense as an adverb since it does not fit grammatically or syntactically. Was it meant to be a homonym? Spellings were highly variable at that time, so it is natural to speculate that “FORTH” might have meant FOURTH. Rollett found a couple of obscure examples of Edward de Vere being the fourth something, but nothing a cryptographer would use to refer to him. Also, if the cryptographer meant “fourth” here, he did not include the word that “fourth” was intended to modify. The message is therefore incomplete if “fourth” was intended.

Another possibility would be an anagram, but no iteration is meaningful.

Perhaps a cryptographer at that time would have made use of another language. Most people were illiterate then, but many who were literate also knew other European languages. The literate generally learned Latin, and many also were fluent in French, Spanish, Italian, or Dutch-German, especially after England joined the Netherlands in its war with Spain in 1585. In Latin, fourth is “quartus;” in French “quatrième;” in Spanish “cuarta,” or “cuarto;” in Italian “il quarto.” It makes sense that they are all similar, deriving from the same root. Nothing about them seems to shed light on the meaning of our alleged message. What about German and Dutch? In German, fourth is “vierte,” and in Dutch “vierde,” with “vier” meaning four. Thus, in “vierde” we have a near-homonym of “Vere.” Is “THE FORTH” meant to be interpreted as “de Vierde”?<sup>7</sup>

Note that the punctuation mark immediately following “EVER” is a hyphen. If retained in the hidden message, it might be viewed as a dash: “EVER–THE FORTH.” In that case, “THE FORTH” should elaborate on, or confirm, the meaning of “EVER,” giving the seven-word message “THESE SONNETS ALL BY EVER–DE VIERDE.” Could it be that “THE FORTH” confirms the meaning of “EVER” as Edward de Vere?

This is the solution proposed by Jonathan Bond in his book *The De Vere Code*.<sup>8</sup> Bond points out that “the fourth,” translated into Dutch, is “de Vierde,” which some English soldiers who served in the Netherlands would have recognized as a pun on the name “de Vere” (Bond 2009, 52). We cannot know now how “vierde” and “Vere” were pronounced then, but they may have been virtually indistinguishable.

Is it credible that a cryptographer would have referred to de Vere this way? Was the association strong enough that it would have been recognized? It seems that it was. Furthermore, Edward de Vere himself almost certainly knew of the Dutch translation.

On August 19, 1585, Antwerp fell to the Spanish, and the next day Elizabeth I signed a treaty committing England to war against Spain on the Netherlands' behalf. On August 29, de Vere left to join the English forces, serving as Commander of the Horse. Within two months, after his political rival Robert Dudley, Earl of Leicester, became overall commander, de Vere left the Netherlands, never to return. (Ogburn Jr 1984, 683–4). Why, then, would “de Vierde” bring to mind the name “de Vere?” Bond writes:

Though de Vere's involvement in the war was curtailed, his family name would become synonymous with the great martial exploits that would eventually lead to the establishment of the independent Dutch republic. Leading English troops through the next 30 years were his...cousins Francis and Horatio, the “Fighting Veres.” Francis rose to the rank of Commander in Chief of the English forces, his younger brother Horatio followed him, and between them they orchestrated the most successful years of the Dutch campaigns, leading to the truce with Spain in 1609. The association of the name de Vere with the Low Countries conflict through Francis, Horatio, and briefly Edward... was inescapable. (Bond 2009, 51–2)

A fourth Vere also fought in the Netherlands, serving under both Francis and Horatio—Sir Edward Vere, the illegitimate son of Edward de Vere. Sir Edward Vere began his military service there in the late 1590s, remaining with the English forces after 1604 when they transferred to Dutch service, returning to England often. He died in Holland in 1629 (*History of Parliament Online*: [www.historyofparliamentonline.org/volume/1604-1629/member/vere-sir-edward-1581-1629](http://www.historyofparliamentonline.org/volume/1604-1629/member/vere-sir-edward-1581-1629)).

Sir Francis Vere and his brother, Sir Horace Vere (also known as Horatio Vere), were first cousins of Edward; moreover, both were celebrated on the London stage and in verse for their triumphs in the Dutch War of Independence. Both were interred in Westminster Abbey. Some educated persons who knew Dutch would have recognized the pun on “de Vere.”

De Vere was close to both cousins, and if he helped in designing the dedication himself, as seems likely, he may have had them in mind. In 1604, de Vere named Francis as guardian of his son Henry (Ogburn Jr 1984, 765). More than most, they would have known that the translation echoed their family name, and they, or Sir Edward Vere, may have commented on it to the 17<sup>th</sup> Earl. Or he may have noticed it and commented on it to them, prompting



him to use it later when writing the dedication, knowing that they would recognize the pun as his doing.

Some Oxfordians hold that de Vere’s cousins are represented in *Hamlet*, which they regard as Shakespeare’s most autobiographical play (Looney 1920, 407–9; Ogburn and Ogburn 1952, 648). In this view, Francisco, the sentry standing watch on Elsinore Castle’s platform at the start of the play, represents de Vere’s cousin Francis.<sup>9</sup> Soon relieved, he exits, never to appear again. As he exits, Marcellus calls after him: “O, farewell, honest soldier.”—high praise for such a minor character. We know nothing about him, but the author seems to know that he is someone deserving.

Throughout the play, Hamlet’s one true friend is “Horatio” (de Vere’s cousin?). At the end of the play, the dying Hamlet calls out to him:

Horatio, I am dead,  
Thou liv’st. Report me and my cause aright  
To the unsatisfied...  
O good Horatio, what a wounded name,  
Things standing thus unknown, shall live behind me.  
If thou didst ever hold me in thy heart,  
Absent thee from felicity awhile,  
And in this harsh world draw thy breath in pain,  
To tell my story.  
(*Hamlet*: 5.2.341–3, 347–52)

Is the author calling out to his own cousin to “report his cause aright?” We cannot know, but it is a striking coincidence, and it is credible that de Vere had his cousins in mind as being among those familiar with Dutch who would grasp the meaning of “THE FORTH.”

Regardless, as Bond writes, “The ‘De Vierde’ translation cypher means there is a straightforward derivation of the whole phrase, and a derivation of its meaning, all of which is directly connected to de Vere” (Bond 2009, 53). This solution is more than just plausible, rendering the entire seven-word message meaningful and self-contained. The “de Vierde” translation elaborates on the meaning of the fifth word in the message, “EVER.” Rather than introducing a new idea, it corroborates what is already there.

It is important to see those two words in the context of the time. If de Vere was the author Shakespeare, this is something he might have done, confident that someone would eventually solve it. The imperfection in the hidden message that confounded Rollett has therefore now been explained. We cannot be totally certain what the author intended, but this is a credible explanation.

## Is the key 6-2-4 due to chance?

We now turn to a question that has received little or no scrutiny in previous examinations of the validity of the alleged “hidden message”: is the key 6-2-4, found in the shape of the dedication, due to chance, or was it intentional? Rollett made three observations about the shape that show he thought it was intentional (all quoted above):

The lines of the Dedication are *carefully* proportioned to form three blocks, each in the shape (roughly) of an inverted triangle. The line spacing is subtly increased between the middle five lines, *as if to emphasize this feature* [emphasis added]. (Rollett 1997, 97)

And:

Thus, out of perhaps a hundred available choices of sets of two or three small numbers, our cryptographer (and we can now feel more confident of his existence) chose the one set which would serve to confirm the correctness of the decipherment, once it had been carried out. (Rollett 1997, 109)

These observations seem reasonable, but they can still be challenged. The lines *appear* carefully proportioned, but they would be even if it were due to chance. The increased spacing between the middle lines *suggests* intentionality but is not proof. Rollett may be right in estimating that there are “perhaps a hundred” ways that two or three small numbers might have appeared at random in the shape of the dedication (ignoring the added factor of the odds that the dedication would have a discernible shape at all), but 1 in 100 odds that the key is due to chance is not enough to resolve the question.

Now let us take a closer look at the first six lines of the dedication to see if we can uncover anything else that might shed light on the issue. First, notice that the inward slope is relatively gradual through the first four lines before turning

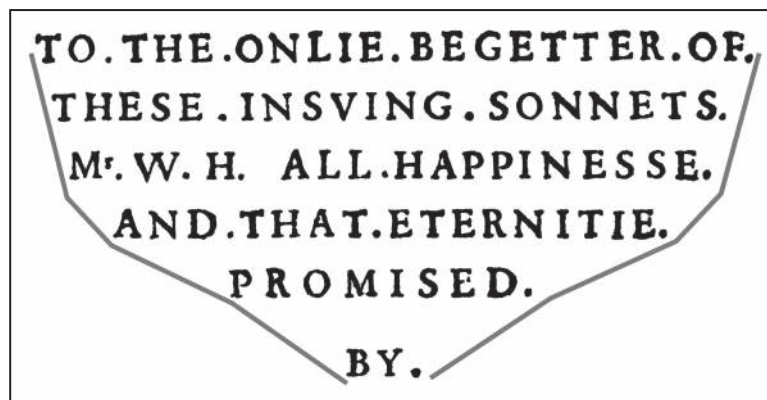


Figure 3: Close-up of the dedication's first six lines, with the unique “r” in “Mr.”.

more sharply inward with “PROMISED” and “BY.” This smoothness helps to call our attention to the shape, suggesting that it was intentional. But if the intent was a smooth slope, why put “BY” beneath “PROMISED” rather than up on the same line after it? Because then there would have been only five lines and six were needed? It certainly appears so, again suggesting intentionality.

Finally, and most important, look at the lower-case “r” in “Mr.” and consider why it is there. Many reproductions of the dedication, even if otherwise accurate, make it “MR.,” with an upper case “R,” so infectious is the idea that the dedication is all caps (see, for example, *The Yale Shakespeare*, or *The De Vere Code*, Bond 2009, loc. 1004). What is the effect of making the “R” upper case? It usually makes the third line longer than the second, altering the first inverted triangle with six lines, making it two lines, then four (2-4-2-4). Here are the second and third lines in Times New Roman font:

THESE . INSUING . SONNETS.  
MR. W. H. ALL . HAPPINESSE.

But what matters is the type used in printing the dedication. Looking at it, an upper case “R” would make it difficult, though perhaps not impossible, to get the third line shorter than the second. There is a little extra space between “W. H.” and “ALL,” but it is needed to cue a pause before wishing the dedicatee “ALL . HAPPINESSE.”

There is almost no space, however, between “Mr.” and “W. H.,” or between “ALL” and “HAPPINESSE” in the third line—unlike in the second line, where there is space on both sides of the two full stops. This suggests an intent to increase the spacing in the second line, and decrease it in the third, to keep the latter shorter than the former. This, in turn, supports the idea that the reason for the lower-case “r” in “Mr.” is to help keep the third line shorter than the second without the third looking too tightly spaced.

Now look again at the lower-case “r” in “Mr.” in the facsimile of the original. Notice that it is *not* a standard lower-case “r.” There is not another like it in

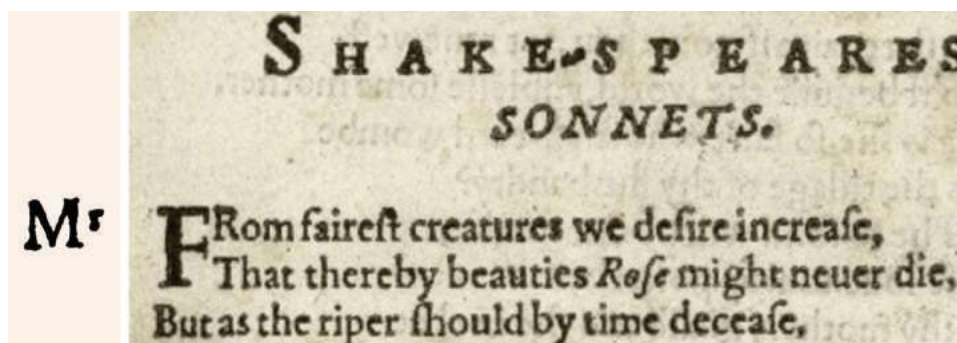


Figure 4: The “r” in “Mr.” compared to those in the first three lines of sonnet 1.

the entire volume of the Sonnets! Note the difference between that lower-case “r” and those in the first three lines of sonnet 1 shown in figure 4. It is miniscule and sits high above the line of print (unlike every other lower-case “r” in the volume), in the narrow space between the “M” in “Mr.” and the full stop after it. Why would this be? This lower-case “r” appears to be a unique contrivance, designed just for that position, to take as little space as possible in that line to keep it shorter than the line above.

What does it mean to suggest that the shape of the dedication is due to chance? It means that a typesetter with a standard set of type, intending to make it symmetrical but otherwise making random decisions, chanced upon the shape with 6, 2, and 4 lines. The unique lower-case “r” shows that this is not what happened. There was nothing the least bit random about creating a unique contrivance and putting it in that specific spot. And it is not credible to think it accidentally got mixed in with the standard lower-case “r’s” and the typesetter picked it at random at that point without noticing the difference.

If the process were random, the typesetter would have placed an upper-case “R” there along with the other upper-case letters. The fact that he chose a lower-case “r” for that position shows a clear intent to encode the key 6-2-4 in the shape of the dedication. The fact that he also went to the trouble to create a unique lower-case “r” for that spot shows that he was willing to go further and call attention to the fact that he had done it. That lower-case “r” clearly shows that the dedication was designed as a cryptogram, as the cryptographer probably knew. It is not too strong to say that it amounts to proof.

## The Friedmans’ validation criteria

In their seminal book *The Shakespearean Ciphers Examined*, William F. and Elizebeth S. Friedman<sup>10</sup> rejected every proposed Shakespearean authorship cipher they examined. Yet they took the controversy seriously and did not rule out the possibility that a valid cryptographic solution might one day be discovered. To help future cryptologists avoid the errors of their predecessors, they included a chapter titled “Cryptology as a Science” (Friedman and Friedman 1957, 15–26), giving criteria for validating cipher solutions.

Rollett sought to apply their criteria, but his effort was flawed. For example, he writes that a message should be “sufficiently important to have been worth concealing,” and “hidden where it had a high probability of being found” (Rollett 1997, 99). In fact, however reasonable these might sound, they are not among the Friedmans’ criteria.

Rollett correctly writes that “the key...should be given unambiguously, either in the text or in some other way, and not contrived to fit...preconceived ideas” (Rollett 1997, 99). The key 6-2-4 is unambiguous, and it clearly meets this criterion. Yet Rollett neglected to also quote and follow the related criterion that “once the key to be used in a cryptogram is decided, the rest of the process must follow automatically...and he must not be allowed to exercise his judgment at all” (Friedman and Friedman 1957, 19–20). Rollett violated this criterion when he stopped counting off words before reaching the end of the dedication, rather than following the process automatically to the end. This was an arbitrary decision, based on his judgment that the words “THE FORTH” were not part of the hidden message because he could not explain their meaning. The full seven-word solution proposed here does meet this criterion.

The Friedmans also give this criterion for validating a solution: “the plain-text message must make sense, in whatever language it is supposed to have been written; it must be grammatical...and it must mean something.... The important thing is that it must say something and say it intelligibly” (Friedman and Friedman 1957, 20).

The first part of the message, “These Sonnets all by ever,” lacks a verb, but “are” and “written” can be treated as understood—(These Sonnets [are] all [written] by ever). It is clear enough in pointing to an alternative author of the Sonnets if one is willing to accept that “ever” means E. Vere—by far the leading alternative authorship candidate. Confirmation is provided in two ways: (1) the key 6-2-4 corresponds to the number of letters in the three parts of his name, and (2) the additional words “the forth,” translated as “the fo(u)rth” into Dutch, yield “de Vierde,” which would have been seen at the time as a pun on “de Vere.” The fact that part of the message is in another language makes sense in context. Thus, the seven-word message is both grammatical and meaningful.

Next, the Friedmans call for the calculation of the odds that the key occurred by chance. They write that, “The mathematical theory of probability can be applied, and the chances calculated exactly” (Friedman and Friedman 1957, 21). Rollett’s estimate of odds on the order of 1 in 100 that the key 6-2-4 occurred by chance seems reasonable, but it does not account for the additional odds that the dedication would have any discernible shape, or that the typesetter would randomly place a unique lower-case “r” in the third line, where it had to be located to achieve the correct shape. Though subjective, it strains credulity to think that the odds of these two additional factors, and especially the latter one, occurring by chance are anything other than extremely remote.

In Appendix D to his article (1997, 119–21), Rollett estimates the odds that the five-word message occurred by chance at 1 in 10 billion. He manages this



by estimating odds for separate components and then combining them, the separate components being the odds that (1) a key like 6-2-4 would randomly produce *any* grammatical five-word statement in published material, (2) such a statement might have some bearing on some significant matter treated therein, (3) it would appear to focus on the issue of authorship of the work in which it appeared (an issue with a long history), identify the person now regarded as the leading alternative author, and be found in a text long seen as a cipher, and (4) the key that led to the discovery of the concealed message occurred by chance.

Rollett gives ranges for his estimates and makes no claim to having achieved precision. He concludes: “Even if this figure [1 in 10 billion] is off by a factor of 10 or 100, it might still be regarded as good evidence...that the dedication was designed as an innocent letter code...” (Rollett 1997, 121). I concur and would add that the odds of the message occurring by chance may be much more remote than Rollett estimates because the message has seven words, not five, and we now know it is much less likely that the key occurred by chance than Rollett assumes. Several aspects of the dedication suggest the shape was no accident, most notably the unique lower-case “r,” and it is extremely unlikely that all of them occurred by chance.

Finally, according to the Friedmans, “The most important thing to remember is that for a solution to be valid it must be possible to show that it is the only solution.... Any method which claims to follow valid cryptographic procedures, must yield unique solutions” (Friedman and Friedman 1957, 24–5). Both the key found in the shape of the dedication and the message produced by it have proved to be unique. As far as I know, neither the advocates of William Shakspeare whom we consulted after Rollett’s article appeared, nor anyone in the years since, have come up with a credible alternative.

In a final observation about concealment systems such as the one involved here, the Friedmans write:

Nor is it reasonable to expect that, if cryptic messages were inserted in the text [of some Shakespeare writing], they would be signaled in some way. One does not put something in a secret hiding place and then put up a sign saying ‘Notice: Secret hiding place’.... There must be no external clues. (Friedman and Friedman 1957, 26)

Here we find that our solution meets an additional criterion that the Friedmans did not require—an “external clue” to its presence. The reference to “Mr. W. H.” in the dedication to a volume of poetry in which the poet promises immortality to the person to whom most are addressed, but without naming him, is an invitation to investigate—a virtual sign put up by the author of the dedication implying it is a “secret hiding place.” Such a clue was needed; otherwise, the hidden message might never have been found.

Continuing, the Friedmans write:

We shall not...demand any external guide to the presence of the secret texts. We shall only ask whether the solutions are valid:...whether the plain texts make sense, and the cryptosystem and the specific keys can be, or have been, applied without ambiguity. Provided that independent investigation shows an answer to be unique, and to have been reached by valid means, we shall accept it, however much we shock the learned world by doing so. (Friedman and Friedman 1957, 26)

I suspect the Friedmans would have thought the seven-word message is valid.

## Other oddities in the Sonnets publication

The foregoing analysis stands entirely on its own in making the case for the validity of the hidden message. The question arises, however, whether it makes sense to think that Edward de Vere, not Shakspeare of Stratford, wrote the Sonnets as the message suggests. It is beyond our present scope to examine thoroughly the evidence for Edward de Vere. There are several books that do so for anyone who is interested (Anderson 2005; Looney 1920; Ogburn Jr 1984; Sobran 1997; Whalen 1994). It does seem appropriate, however, to look at the rest of the volume that contains the dedication—*Shake-speares Sonnets*—for other oddities that suggest things related to authorship are not as they appear, or which point to de Vere as the author. Curiosity should lead us to do so.

### *Author's name not on title page*

We start by examining the title page of the publication (figure 5). Notice the two parallel lines about a third of the way from the bottom. Those lines mark the place where the name of the author would normally appear, but the name is missing. One could say that the author's name is in the title so it is not needed there, but it would not have been difficult to also print “by William Shakespeare” where those lines appear. And including the two lines calls attention to the fact that the author's name is not there. Also, the hyphen in “*Shake-speares*” in the title suggests that it may be a pseudonym.<sup>11</sup>

### *Author died by 1609*

Regarding the title, “*Shake-speares Sonnets*” could imply that it is a complete body of work with no further sonnets expected from this author, implying that he is deceased. Otherwise, one might expect a title such as “Sonnets, by William Shakespeare.” While there could be other sonnets not included in this volume, no additional sonnets seem to be expected. The title refers to the author in the third person, as if he is not a party to the publication. It seems unlikely that a living author would give a book of his poems such a

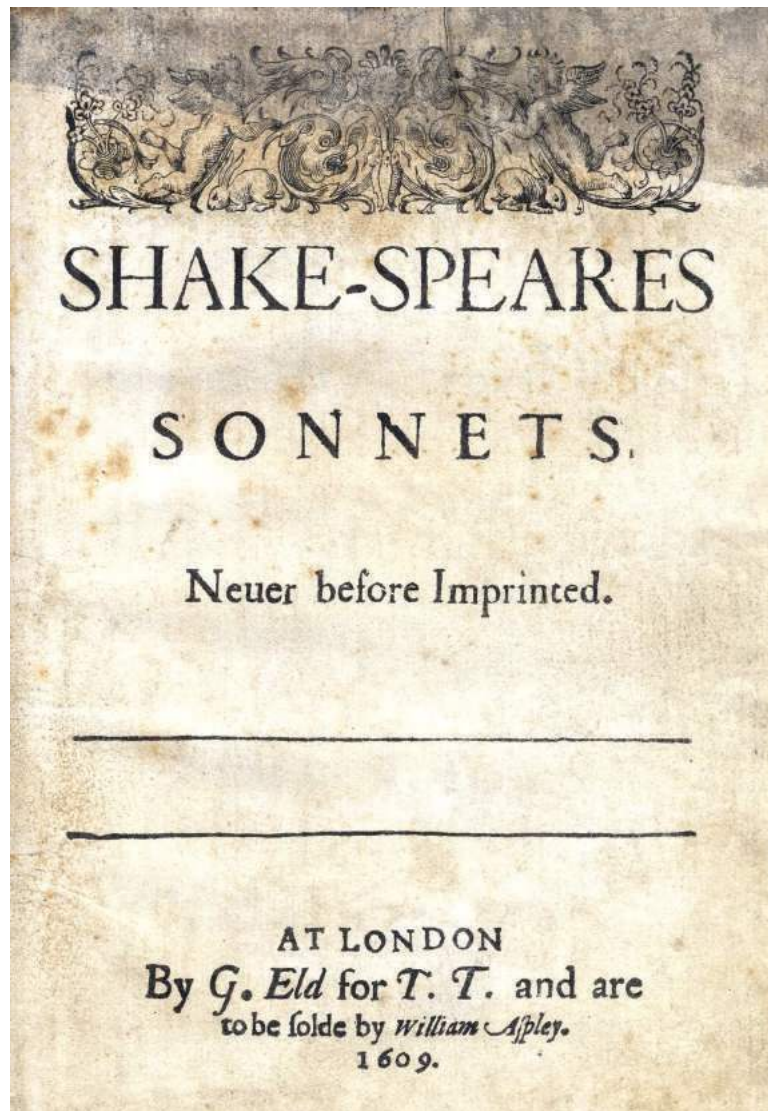


Figure 5: The title page of Shake-speares Sonnets, published in 1609.

title. This is the first of five reasons to think the author of the Sonnets had already died by 1609. By itself it is only suggestive, but seen in context, it seems to be part of a pattern.

The next reason is the dedication's odd reference to the author as "OUR EVER-LIVING POET." An "ever-living" poet would have been understood to mean one who has died and lives on through his works. There is no example of a living author being referred to as "ever-living" during the Elizabethan-Jacobean period (Sobran 1997, 94). The use of "our" also suggests the author has died and become a common possession.

## The Strange Case of “Mr. W. H.”

The third reason is that the dedication was ostensibly written not by the author of the Sonnets but by the publisher, Thomas Thorpe, whose initials, “T. T.,” are at the bottom. This would have been highly unusual if the author were alive at the time. The author had written the dedications to his two previous published works of poetry, *Venus and Adonis* and *The Rape of Lucrece*. (The author’s name is not on their title pages either. The name only appears beneath the two dedications to Wriothesley.)

The fourth reason is that many of the Sonnets are scandalous, depicting a love triangle involving an older and a younger man sharing a dark lady (sonnets 40–42, 144). No author would have wanted such poems published during his lifetime, yet no record shows that Shakspeare of Stratford objected or tried to have the publication suppressed, suggesting that he was not the author. The real author, having died, could not object.

### *Author an older man*

The fifth reason is that the sonnets depict an older man who was nearing death, while Mr. Shakspeare was still a relatively young 39 when the sequence ends about 1603. Sonnet 107, for example, appears to refer to the death of Elizabeth I, the succession of James I, and Henry Wriothesley’s release from prison, all of which took place in 1603:

The mortal moon hath her eclipse endur’d,  
And the sad augurs mock their own presage;  
Incertainties now crown themselves assur’d,  
And peace proclaims olives of endless age.  
Now with the drops of this most balmy time  
My love looks fresh, and death to me subscribes...

Edward de Vere died the following year.

The author also makes it clear in several other sonnets that he is an older man:

Sonnet 22:

My glass shall not persuade me I am old,  
So long as youth and thou are of one date

Sonnet 62:

But when my glass shows me myself indeed,  
Beated and chopp’d with tann’d antiquity

Sonnet 63:

Against my love shall be, as I am now,  
With Time’s injurious hand crush’d and o’erworn

Sonnet 73:

That time of year thou mayst in me behold  
 When yellow leaves, or none, or few, do hang  
 Upon those boughs which shake against the cold,  
 Bare ruin'd choirs, where late the sweet birds sang.

There is thus strong evidence that the author of the Sonnets was (1) much older than Mr. Shakspeare, and (2) had already passed away by 1609. Edward de Vere died in 1604.<sup>12</sup> Indeed, he is the only major alternative candidate who died before the Sonnets appeared.

### *The author's lameness*

In addition to being an older man, the author twice describes himself as lame:

Sonnet 37:

So I, made lame by fortune's dearest spite,  
 Take all my comfort of thy worth and truth

Sonnet 89:

Speak of my lameness and I straight will halt

This is odd because nothing in the historical record shows that Mr. Shakspeare was ever lame. De Vere, on the other hand, was seriously wounded in 1582, when attacked by Thomas Knyvet, uncle of Anne Vavasour, with whom de Vere had an illicit affair (Ogburn Jr 1984, 650). Then in 1597, in a letter to his father-in-law, Lord Burghley, de Vere wrote that he regretted being unable to attend her Majesty as "I have not a well body" (Ogburn Jr 1984, 742).

### *Author a nobleman?*

At least two sonnets suggest that the author was a nobleman. In Sonnet 91 he does not seem to be speaking hypothetically, but from experience, when he writes:

Sonnet 91:

Thy love is better than high birth to me,  
 Richer than wealth, prouder than garments' cost,  
 Of more delight than hawks or horses be

Sonnet 10:

Make thee another self, for love of me,  
 That beauty still may live in thine or thee.

This is the final couplet from one of the "procreation sonnets" (Sonnets 1–17) in which the poet urges the Youth to beget a son to perpetuate his beauty. It is remarkable that he would urge the Youth, presumably Henry



Wriothesley, to procreate “for love of me.” The idea that Mr. Shakspeare would have addressed an earl in this way is absurd, given the social distance between them. But the line makes perfect sense if written by Edward de Vere—an earl a generation older than Southampton and his prospective father-in-law—since Southampton was at that time a candidate to marry de Vere’s daughter Elizabeth (Ogburn Jr 1984, 716). In this regard, de Vere’s authorship accounts for *all* the procreation sonnets.

### *Author in disgrace*

In several sonnets the author says that he is in disgrace for unspecified reasons:

Sonnet 29:

When, in disgrace with fortune and men’s eyes,  
I all alone bewep my outcast state,

Sonnet 36:

I may not evermore acknowledge thee,  
Lest my bewailed guilt should do thee shame,

Sonnet 112:

Your love and pity doth the impression fill  
Which vulgar scandal stamped upon my brow;

Again, nothing in the historical record shows that Mr. Shakspeare was ever in disgrace—nothing that could account for the tone of these sonnets. De Vere, on the other hand, was often in trouble with the Queen and his father-in-law William Cecil, the Lord Great Treasurer. He abandoned his wife Anne Cecil for five years (1576–81), believing he was not the father of her child before concluding that he had been mistaken (Ogburn Jr 1984, Chapter 28). While estranged from Anne, he fathered an illegitimate child with Ann Vavasour, a Maid of Honor to the Queen. Elizabeth was furious and imprisoned de Vere and Vavsour in the Tower of London, where de Vere remained for over two months (Ogburn Jr 1984, 646). The year before this episode, de Vere had turned against three Catholic-leaning friends—Lord Henry Howard, de Vere’s first cousin; Charles Arundel; and Francis Southwell—accusing them of conspiring with Spain, which they had. In turn, they viciously slandered him to save themselves (Ogburn Jr 1984, 638–45). By 1586 he had sold most of his lands to pay off debts, and Elizabeth granted him a £1,000 annuity, an enormous sum, for the remainder of her reign (Ogburn Jr 1984, 688). All of this and much more weighed heavily on his reputation.

The author’s disgrace is such that he says he wants his name to be forgotten:

Sonnet 72:

My name be buried where my body is,  
And live no more to shame nor me nor you,

Notice that this implies his real name was not then associated with his works. And remarkably, the author promises the Fair Youth that *his* name will be “immortal,” while the author himself will be forgotten. He draws the contrast three different ways:

Sonnet 81:

Or I shall live your epitaph to make,  
 Or you survive when I in earth am rotten;  
 From hence your memory death cannot take,  
 Although in me each part will be forgotten.  
 Your name from hence immortal life shall have,  
 Though I, once gone, to all the world must die:  
 The earth can yield me but a common grave,  
 When you entombed in men's eyes shall lie.

The poet has power to immortalize others with his poetry, but not himself.

Here again, the implication is that the author's real name is not associated with his works and “Shakespeare” is a pseudonym. Otherwise, how could he, and his name, possibly be forgotten? Yet he says he expects that this is what will and must happen.

And after promising the Fair Youth that his “name” will be immortal, his name never appears in the volume, as if the author deliberately created a mystery to be solved in Sonnet 81 and then signaled to look for the name of “Mr. W. H.” in the dedication.

### *Pyramidal structure of the Sonnets*

In 1970, Renaissance literary scholar Alastair Fowler, then at Brasenose College, Oxford, published *Triumphal Forms: Structural Patterns in Elizabethan Poetry*. His theme is that, although we have lost sight of its importance, structural art was “common to the best medieval and Renaissance poets and almost universal in the period 1580–1680, when it reached its greatest height of sophistication” (Fowler 1970, ix). In the first eight chapters he examines various types of structural patterns, leading up to a final chapter on numerical patterns in Elizabethan sonnet sequences. There he examines Philip Sidney's *Astrophil and Stella* and Edmund Spenser's *Amoretti*, showing that both have clear numerological structures, before addressing Shakespeare. Fowler writes:

It is hardly to be expected that the sonnet sequence of a poet so intellectually brilliant as Shakespeare should lack the structural art and finesse valued in his age. And in fact his sequence abounds with the intricate formal devices requisite to its genre. Of all Elizabethan sequences [except Spenser's] Shakespeare's is the most complex formally. Yet to

understand the main lines of its structure, we have only to keep in mind the same two features in other sequences: first, that poems published with the sonnets belong to the structural pattern; second, that words may refer literally to their own arrangement, providing a self-referring commentary on the form. By attending to these features, Shakespeare’s *Sonnets*...are easily seen to exhibit an elaborate structural symmetry.

This has interesting critical implications. But the textual implications are...still more far-reaching, since [most] scholars have believed the 1609 *Sonnets* to be disordered, so that trying to rearrange them in a better order (an order more intelligible as a biographical sequence) is a useful activity.... As we shall see, however, the rules of that game are based on false assumptions. The spatial arrangement of Shakespeare’s sequence...asserts a design far too positive for us to be free to change it at will. (Fowler 1970, 183)

One implication of Fowler’s observation that the sonnets are in authorial order and “exhibit an elaborate structural symmetry” (that was preserved during publication) is that the author himself most likely supervised and approved the layout of the volume. Otherwise, it is very unlikely that the publisher would have recognized and maintained the complex structure which depended on the precise execution of many subtle details. This has implications for the authorship of the dedication.

For present purposes I will call attention to just one key structural feature of *Shakespeare’s Sonnets*: their triangular, or pyramidal, structure.

Fowler first points out that three of the 154 sonnets are irregular: Sonnet 99 has 15 lines; Sonnet 126 has 12 lines; and Sonnet 145 is in tetrameters, not pentameters. He writes that, “The first step in any structural analysis must be to examine the pattern formed by the irregular sonnets” (184).

He then observes that a passage in Sonnet 136, “which has never received a satisfactory explanation,” may be self-referring:

In things of great receipt we may approve,  
Among a number one is reckoned none.  
Then in the number let me pass untold,  
Though in thy store’s account I one must be,  
For nothing hold me... (ibid.)

He finds in this a reference to the sonnet itself, saying that it is to be “excluded from, yet at the same time included in, the reckoning” (ibid.). He notes that if we leave Sonnet 136 out, the total is 153, “one of the best-known symbolic numbers” (ibid.), its distinctive mathematical feature in

Shakespeare's time being its triangularity. "As the sum of the first 17 natural numbers, when set out in Pythagorean fashion it forms an equilateral triangle with a base of 17 (as in the diagram below)" (185).

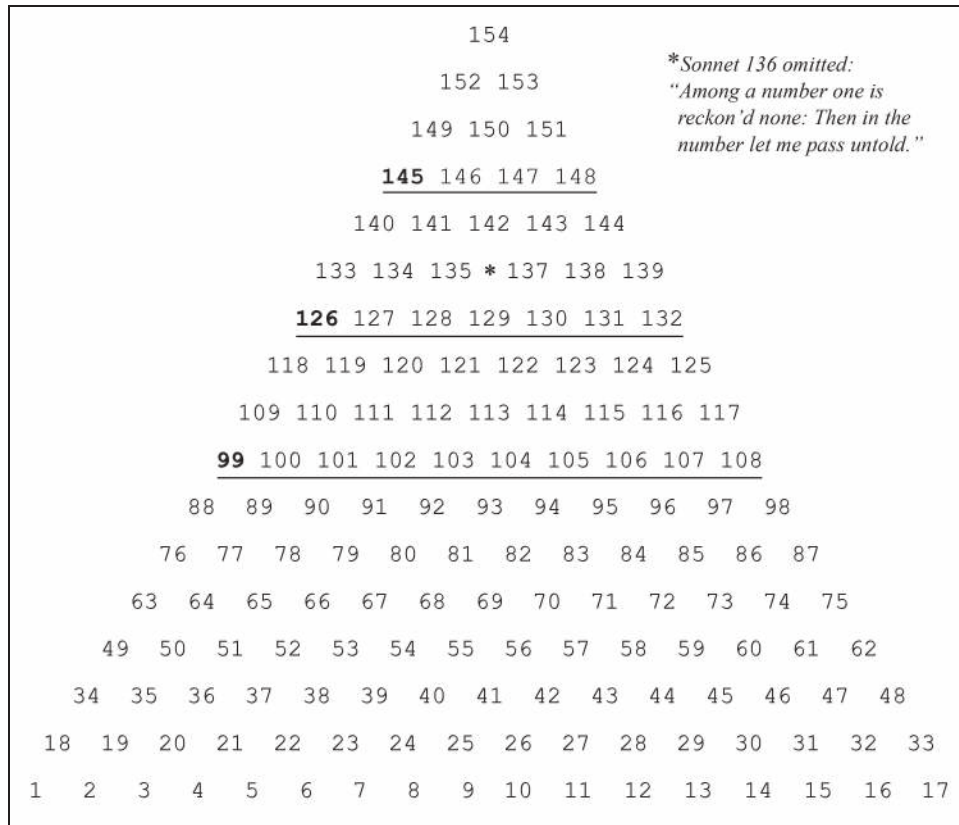


Figure 6: The 153 sonnets (omitting sonnet 136) set out as an equilateral triangle with 17 sonnets on a side, subdivided by the three irregular sonnets on the left side.

The case for the base of the triangle being Sonnets 1–17 is clear in that they all address a single theme—the “procreation sonnets” already mentioned—with the famous Sonnet 18 being a clear departure from that theme (figure 6). The triangle thus appears intentional; and Fowler points out another feature of the triangle that clearly suggests intentionality: the three irregular sonnets line up on the left side of the triangle, equidistant from each other, subdividing the overall triangle into smaller triangles with 10, 28, and 55 sonnets. Two of these triangular numbers, he notes, “had great arithmological significance, 10 as the principal of divine creativity, 28 as a symbol of moral perfection” (186). He neglects to mention that the conspicuous position of the omitted Sonnet 136—the location of the eye in a Masonic pyramid—also clearly suggests intentionality.

Fowler gives several more examples of the numerological significance of the triangular number 153, but none provides a compelling explanation of why the poet would have chosen it. He notes that “pyramid and triangle were often synonymous” at that time (187), and that, “The pyramidal numbers imply, most obviously, that Shakespeare designed the sequence to function as a monument’ (188). Sonnet 81 openly declares: “Your monument shall be my gentle verse.” But why a pyramid with 17 sonnets on a side rather than some lesser or greater number? Why not make it 120 sonnets with a base of 15, or 136 sonnets with a base of 16, for example? Fowler gives no reason why the number 17 would have had any special meaning for Shakspeare of Stratford. But if the poet was Edward de Vere, 17<sup>th</sup> Earl of Oxford, the reason becomes clear. He was extremely proud of his ancestry and title, and it was an obvious way to refer to himself.

Fowler describes several other structural patterns in the Sonnets, which, again, suggest authorial involvement in the publication. What is presented here is just one aspect of the overall design.

In this brief examination of the Sonnets, we find that there are, indeed, oddities. They suggest that (1) the author’s real name may not be on the title page, (2) the author had died by 1609, (3) he was an older man, anticipating death in 1603, (4) he was lame, (5) a nobleman, (6) in deep disgrace, and (7) did not want, or expect, to be remembered. None of this proves that Edward de Vere wrote the Sonnets, but it does strongly support the idea; and their pyramidal structure with 17 sonnets on a side offers additional support. The hidden message therefore seems consistent with the rest of the Sonnets publication.

## Conclusion to Part One

Dr. Rollett deserves much credit for his persistence in analyzing the dedication to *Shake-speares Sonnets* in detail over many years and for publishing his findings. The dedication was especially difficult to solve, and it is understandable that he could not fully grasp all its subtleties and made errors in applying the Friedmans’ validation criteria. He set us on the right path, and the later discoveries presented here vindicate his effort.

It is also understandable that Rollett could not find the meaning of the additional words “THE FORTH” and concluded they were not part of the message. We cannot be certain that the cryptographer intended for “the forth” to be interpreted as a pun on the name “de Vere” when translated into Dutch, but it is a credible explanation, which means we have a seven-word grammatical message that strongly points to de Vere.

More important is that Rollett overlooked the unique lower-case “r” in “Mr.” and did not see its importance in encoding the key 6-2-4 in the shape of the



dedication. This is the most significant new discovery, virtually proving that the dedication is a cryptogram. It was already remarkable that the key 6-2-4 corresponds to the number of letters in the three parts of the name Edward de Vere, which has the appearance of being intentional. The case for intentionality is greatly strengthened by our examination of the dedication. Several features suggest the shape was deliberate, especially the unique lower-case “r.”

Examination of the rest of the Sonnets publication reveals several other oddities that call the authorship into question and are consistent with the authorship of de Vere. The most important of these is the overwhelming evidence that the author was an older man who had already died by 1609—this fits de Vere and no other authorship candidate. Fowler’s discovery of their structure suggests that de Vere oversaw the layout before he died.

Rollett did not conclude that the message “THESE SONNETS ALL BY EVER” was necessarily valid. Being cautious, he wrote only that, “The apparent indication that the Sonnets were written by someone other than the man from Stratford may contribute to the debate on the authorship controversy...” (Rollett 1997, 118). I will go further and conclude that compelling new evidence has been found that greatly strengthens the case for the validity of a seven-word hidden message since Rollett published his article in 1997. This evidence, suggesting that the Sonnets were written by Edward de Vere, and not by Mr. Shakspeare, is sufficiently compelling that it deserves to be brought to the attention of a wider audience for their consideration, including, especially, leading cryptologists. I think the Friedmans, who took the Shakespeare Authorship Question seriously, would have agreed.

## **Part Two: The Identity of Mr. W. H.**

In Part One it was shown that the dedication to the Sonnets was designed to contain an innocent letter cipher with a hidden message pointing to Edward de Vere as the author of the Sonnets. The possibility that it might contain hidden information was suggested by the mystery of the identity of “Mr. W. H.” plus the seven peculiarities that Rollett listed. Three of these—the full stops, the lower-case hyphens, and the arrangement of the text into three blocks—are explained by the requirements of the innocent letter cipher, as is a fourth peculiarity Rollett did not mention as such: the unique lower-case “r” in “Mr.”

The hidden message, however, was unexpected, and the question of the identity of Mr. W. H. remains, while the other four peculiarities—the inverted syntax, awkward wording, use of capital letters and unusual spelling of “onlie”—are yet to be explained.

## The Dedication as a Transposition Cipher

Here is how Rollett describes his discovery of the name that presumably reveals the identity of “Mr. W.H.”:

The fact that the Dedication is all in capital letters (apart from the ‘r’ of “Mr.”) suggests the possibility of a ‘transposition cipher’ (Gaines 1940, 4), a technique known in Elizabethan times to scholars such as John Dee (Deacon 1968, 290–1). The total number of letters in the text of the dedication (disregarding Thomas Thorpe’s initials “T. T.” at the end, offset to one side) is 144, which has many factors. It is characteristic of this kind of cipher that information is concealed in arrays of letters which form perfect rectangles, and we therefore examine each of these arrays in turn. If the Dedication is written out in 8 rows of 18 letters, we obtain the perfect rectangular array shown in figure 7.

T	O	T	H	E	O	N	L	I	E	B	E	G	E	T	T	E	R
O	F	T	H	E	S	E	I	N	S	V	I	N	G	S	O	N	N
E	T	S	M	r	W	H	A	L	L	H	A	P	P	I	N	E	S
S	E	A	N	D	T	H	A	T	E	T	E	R	N	I	T	I	E
P	R	O	M	I	S	E	D	B	Y	O	V	R	E	V	E	R	L
I	V	I	N	G	P	O	E	T	W	I	S	H	E	T	H	T	H
E	W	E	L	L	W	I	S	H	I	N	G	A	D	V	E	N	T
V	R	E	R	I	N	S	E	T	T	I	N	G	F	O	R	T	H

Figure 7: The dedication as a rectangular array with 8 rows of 18 letters (originally in “The Dedication to Shakespeare’s Sonnets” by Dr. John Rollett, Autumn 1997 issue of The Elizabethan Review. Reprinted with permission of the publisher).

Inspection reveals the name “WR - IOTH - ESLEY” located in columns 2, 11, and 10, reading out down, up, down. This is precisely how the family name of the Earls of Southampton was always spelt officially. It is remarkable then that the candidate favored by many scholars as the “Fair Youth” and “Mr. W.H.” is *Henry Wriothesley*, 3<sup>rd</sup> Earl of Southampton, his initials reversed in a simple device.... It was to this man that Shakespeare dedicated the two long poems *Venus and Adonis* and *Lucrece*, in 1593 and 1594, respectively.

Support for the correctness of this decipherment comes from the perfect array with 9 rows of 16 letters, displayed in figure 8.

T	O	T	H	E	O	N	L	I	E	B	E	G	E	T	T
E	R	O	F	T	H	E	S	E	I	N	S	V	I	N	G
S	O	N	N	E	T	S	M	r	W	H	A	L	L	H	A
P	P	I	N	E	S	S	E	A	N	D	T	H	A	T	E
T	E	R	N	I	T	I	E	P	R	O	M	I	S	E	D
B	Y	O	V	R	E	V	E	R	L	I	V	I	N	G	P
O	E	T	W	I	S	H	E	T	H	T	H	E	W	E	L
L	W	I	S	H	I	N	G	A	D	V	E	N	T	V	R
E	R	I	N	S	E	T	T	I	N	G	F	O	R	T	H

Figure 8: The dedication as a rectangular array with 9 rows of 16 letters (originally in “The Dedication to Shakespeare’s Sonnets” by Dr. John Rollett, Autumn 1997 issue of The Elizabethan Review. Reprinted with permission of the publisher).

The name “Henry” can be found running diagonally down and left from the “H” of “THESE” to the “Y” of “BY”. In an array with 15 letters in each row (the last being incomplete), the name can be read out vertically in the 7<sup>th</sup> column, as shown in figure 9. (It will be noticed that “Henry” and “Wriothesley” share the one ‘Y’ in the text.)

T	O	T	H	E	O	N	L	I	E	B	E	G	E	T
T	E	R	O	F	T	H	E	S	E	I	N	S	V	I
N	G	S	O	N	N	E	T	S	M	r	W	H	A	L
L	H	A	P	P	I	N	E	S	S	E	A	N	D	T
H	A	T	E	T	E	R	N	I	T	I	E	P	R	O
M	I	S	E	D	B	Y	O	V	R	E	V	E	R	L
I	V	I	N	G	P	O	E	T	W	I	S	H	E	T
H	T	H	E	W	E	L	L	W	I	S	H	I	N	G
A	D	V	E	N	T	V	R	E	R	I	N	S	E	T
T	I	N	G	F	O	R	T	H						

Figure 9: The dedication arranged in rows of 15 letters (figure originally appeared in “The Dedication to Shakespeare’s Sonnets” by Dr. John Rollett, Autumn 1997 issue of The Elizabethan Review. Reprinted with permission of the publisher).

It is a reasonable deduction (though perhaps not an inescapable one) that the full name “Henry Wriothesley” was deliberately concealed in the Dedication in order to record for posterity his identity as “Mr. W.H.” and the young man to whom many of the sonnets were addressed, and to whom the poet wrote, “Your monument shall be my gentle verse (sonnet 81).” (Rollett 1997, 97–8)

Rollett was impressed that (1) the name includes two five-letter segments (“Henry” and “esley”), (2) “esley” and “ioth” are in adjoining columns, and (3) the segment “esley” reads down from the top of a column, making it easy to spot if one is looking for the name “Wriothesley,” long the leading candidate. He writes that, “The objective...is not only to conceal a name or message from casual inspection, but also to ensure that it is recognized when the right approach is adopted” (Rollett 1997, 104).

At this point Rollett addresses the possible objection that an earl would never have been referred to as “Mr.” He points out that Southampton played a leading role in the Essex rebellion in 1601, and “was convicted of treason... stripped of his Earldom, and confined to the Tower, where he signed himself “of late Southampton, but now H. Wriothesley” (Stopes 1922, 226; Rollett 1997, 98–9). Thus, until his release and the restoration of his earldom by James I in April 1603, he was a commoner, “Mr. H. W.” The dedication may have been written during this time when no pardon was in sight.

## Friedmans’ criteria revisited

Here again, Rollett looked to the Friedmans’ published criteria to validate his solution, but again his interpretations are at times flawed. Regarding the criterion that the keys to a solution be given unambiguously (above), he writes that the cipher keys “are factors of 144, the number of letters in the text” (Rollett 1997, 99). This is not a genuine “key.” It is not free of ambiguity (which of the many sets of factors is correct?), nor does its use follow automatically with no need for judgment.

Rollett’s solution is what the Friedmans call an “unkeyed transposition cipher” (Friedman and Friedman 1957, 18, 20). They depend for their solution on rearranging, scrutinizing, and spotting meaningful patterns in texts thought to conceal information. The validation of such systems requires the use of the two remaining Friedman criteria: estimation of the odds that a solution occurred by chance and showing that it is unique.

In Appendix B to his article, Rollett shows his calculation of the odds that the name “Henry Wr-ioth-esley” occurred by chance. There he finds that the odds are “of the order of 1 in (very roughly) 30 billion” (Rollett 1997, 104). This estimate is not correct. He made two errors that greatly reduced his odds estimate. First, he multiplied his final calculation by an additional factor

of 100 because it was not just any name that he had discovered but that of the leading candidate to be Mr. W. H. This step was not warranted. Second, David Webb, a mathematician at Dartmouth College, pointed out that:

Rollett only calculated the probability of chance occurrence of the *particular* way of dividing Southampton's name into shorter segments *that he found*; there are many other ways, e.g. "Wri-oth-esley," Wrioth-esley, etc., and presumably he would have been just as [satisfied] to find any of those, yet he does not count them in determining the probability.... Rollett has made a very common but serious error here.... He should have assessed the combined odds of all possible permutations of the letters in the name "Wriothesley" which might have occurred by chance which he would have considered roughly *equally or less likely to occur* than the permutation he found [emphasis in original]. (David Webb, email to author, July 10, 1998)

Realizing that Webb was correct, I defined all possible permutations which are roughly equally or less likely to occur than what Rollett found and assessed the combined odds that one of them would occur by chance at roughly 1 in 8.3 million. While not near 1 in 30 billion, these are still very remote odds and strongly support the view that the occurrence of the complete name "Henry Wr-ioth-esley" was no accident but was deliberate. The various scenarios and calculations are presented in the Appendix.

Rollett put great effort into checking to see if his proposed solution was unique. He scanned the columns of all arrays with rows of from 6 to 30 letters, reading both up and down, to spot words three or more letters in length. Reading down only, he found "180 3-letter words, 42 4-letter words, and 3 5-letter words, plus the segment 'esley,'" with similar results reading upwards (Rollett 1997, 104). One of our advocates for Mr. Shakspeare<sup>13</sup> did a computer search of all arrays against words allowed in Scrabble and lists of names. He found 1 seven-letter word ("tibials"), 12 six-letter words, 82 five-letter words, and 481 four-letter words. But neither he, nor anyone else I know of, has found a name as unlikely to occur by chance as "Henry Wr-ioth-esley," nor the name of anyone else from the period. Rollett's proposed solution therefore qualifies as unique.

Between the long odds of the name occurring by chance and the uniqueness of the solution, that is sufficient to meet the validation criteria specified by the Friedmans.

## Additional considerations

Rollett does not stop there. First, he studies the dedication carefully and then explains how it was likely constructed as a double cryptogram (Rollett 1997,



109–112). His reconstruction is detailed and credible. He explains how each of the unusual word usages and spellings is needed to get the name Henry Wriothesley correct. He also explains why the name Henry is not in the same array as Wriothesley and why the last name had to be in at least two segments:

the cryptographer has to decide whether to place the name “Wriothesley” in the same array, and introduce a second letter ‘Y’, or to use the same ‘Y’ and go for an array of a different size. The second option has the advantage...that he does not have to search for another usable word containing a letter ‘Y’, and also that the name will be less obvious, since the presence of two ‘Y’s in the text might alert someone to the possibility that a name containing two ‘Y’s was concealed in the text.

To make use of the ‘Y’ of ‘BY’, the name “Wriothesley” must be broken up into segments, since the letter occurs roughly halfway through the text. (We may deduce from this that the message was composed first, and the two names then built around appropriate letters of the plaintext....) (Rollett 1997, 111)

Second, Rollett includes a discussion section in which he answers questions from readers of his draft, e.g., “If, as many writers have commented, the Dedication looks like a cryptogram, how is it that no solution has been put forward before now? Nearly 400 years have elapsed...” (Rollett 1997, 113). His answer is incisive. His main points are: (1) “it must be assumed that it was necessary, for important personal or political reasons...for the protagonists to be suppressed. Thus, no-one at the time would have published the solution, even if they had found it” (ibid.), and (2) after the first edition, the great majority of reproductions of the dedication changed the design, odd spellings, or both, making it indecipherable. Getting the details of the dedication right is critical.

A question related to the main imperfection in the “Wriothesley” cryptogram—the wide separation of the letters “WR” from the rest of the name—is this one:

The fact that the name “Wriothesley” is split up into three segments tends to cast doubt on the proposition that it was deliberately enciphered. Why did the...cryptographer not arrange for the whole name to be formed by letters regularly spaced, so that it filled a single column....? And why not fit the name “Henry” into the same array, perhaps at the head of the same column? Similarly, the message would be easier to find if it consisted of every fourth word, or fifth or sixth, for example. (Rollett 1997, 115)

Rollett's reply is worth quoting in full:

A sophisticated cipher argues strong motives; this is no recreational puzzle to while away a leisure hour. If it was important not to print the names of the protagonists on the title or dedication pages, it was equally important not to make the recovery of the hidden names too easy, otherwise the objective of concealment (for perhaps two or three decades...) would have been lost at the outset. The cryptographer may have begun by trying to get the name "Wriothsesley" into one column, but soon realised that this might prove too easy to solve, since a "W" near the beginning of the text would have afforded an obvious clue to anyone hearing rumours about the identity of "Mr. W. H." He chose instead to try for two columns (11 and 10 in figure 7), and if he had succeeded there would now be no doubt that the cipher was genuine. In the event, he might well have been content to fit the name into three columns, so that it would be that much more difficult to decipher. He would then have been able to argue, if the name was discovered and he was questioned by the authorities, that it was just a coincidence; he might avoid an unpleasant fate thereby.

For the same reason he might prefer to hide the name "Henry" in a different array, so that again he could rely on coincidence as a defence. If both names were enciphered, then two 'Y's would have been needed, which might perhaps have alerted someone to the possibility that a name which included two 'Y's had been concealed there. ('Henry Wriothsesley' would immediately have come to mind, since the two long narrative poems had been dedicated to him.)

Similar arguments apply to the encoding of the concealed statement. If it had been made up of words regularly spaced (e.g., every fifth word), it would not have remained secret for long, and the consequences for the cryptographer or his patron might have been serious. (Rollett 1997, 115)

I agree with all of this, and especially with Rollett's point that if the entire name "Wriothsesley" had appeared in two columns with the letters "WR" beneath "IOTH" in column 11, next to "ESLEY" in column 10, there would be no question as to its validity. The odds of this occurring by chance are 1 in 82.4 million (see Appendix, scenario 13). But the cryptographer decided to leave the letters "WR" widely separated from the rest of the name. This is the only real flaw in the "Wriothsesley" cryptogram—the one needing an explanation. Rollett provides two: that it could not be too easy to solve, and that it be deniable if discovered too soon—both valid reasons, but not the only ones.

There are two other reasons why the cryptographer may have been satisfied with leaving it as is that Rollett does not mention. First, it is important to remember that it is a *double* cryptogram. It is extremely difficult to design a cryptogram with a cover text and not just one, but two plain text messages and get all three of them to appear perfect. The cryptographer may have decided that the message pointing to an alternative author was the more important of the two, so he was willing to compromise on “Wriothesley.” This fits with Rollett’s deduction, quoted above, “that the message was composed first, and the two names then built around appropriate letters of the plaintext...” (1997, 111).

Second, anyone attempting to decipher the dedication would have been trying to identify “Mr. W. H.” and would not be expecting a message about an alternative author. If the name, when found, had appeared perfect, or nearly perfect, the decipherer would have thought that he had succeeded and so there would be no need to look for anything else. The message pointing to de Vere might never have been suspected and so never found. This might have defeated the cryptographer’s main purpose. Leaving the letters “WR” widely separated from the rest of the name in the same array makes the decipherer ask why and suggests that he should keep looking for something else that made it necessary. If enciphering the name was the main objective, it seems strange that the letters “WR” would be so separated from the rest of the name, but if not the main objective, it is not.

Rollett makes this final point about the validity of the Wriothesley cryptogram: “If there were indisputable evidence that the Dedication was a cryptogram (over and above the [peculiarities listed above])...any doubts would vanish” (Rollett 1997, 100). We now have such indisputable evidence in the unique lower-case “r” in “Mr. W. H.,” which virtually proves that the dedication was designed as a cryptogram. It is incredible to think that the name of the leading candidate to be “Mr. W. H.” appeared by chance, at odds of 1 in 8.3 million, in the same dedication where a key was deliberately encoded in its shape, yielding a message that points to the leading alternative Shakespeare authorship candidate. The two solutions answer the two questions that one would most like to have answered about the Sonnets: who was the “onlie begetter,” and who wrote the Sonnets? The odds against both solutions occurring by chance in the dedication are astronomical.

## Rollett Recants

In a strange twist, Rollett changed his mind about the validity of the five-word message in 2004. He announced this in a postscript to a chapter he wrote on the dedication in an anthology published that year (Rollett 2004, 265–6). He gives three reasons: (1) the odds of the message occurring by chance are very small, but not zero: “the two coincidences (‘EVER’ = Edward

de Vere = 6-2-4) are highly suggestive, but the human mind is always on the lookout for coincidences...which may just be the random workings of chance,” (2) The Friedmans imply “that a sentence needs to be reasonably long before it can be confirmed as the solution of a possible cipher. Though the five words found may be grammatical (allowing ellipsis), the fact that they lack a verb (e.g., ‘made’ or ‘written’) is sufficient to cast doubt on the validity of the proposed solution,” and (3) “a three-element key such as 6-2-4 is far too...sophisticated for the Elizabethan or Jacobean period. Extensive reading...found only one similar instance... (in 1888).”

Remember that Rollett is referring to the five-word message. He did not know that the additional words “THE FORTH” confirm the other references to de Vere, making it a seven-word message, nor did he appreciate that the lower-case “r” in “Mr.” virtually proves intentionality in encoding the key 6-2-4 in the shape of the dedication. The case for the validity of the hidden message is now much stronger than in 2004.

Yet even in the context of 2004, his reasons are inadequate. Yes, rare coincidences do occur, but is it reasonable to dismiss odds of 1 in 10 billion (his estimate) so easily? The Friedmans say that if “the chances of [a solution] appearing by accident are one in [1 billion], confidence in the solution will be more than justified” (Friedman and Friedman 1957, 21).

There is no Friedman criterion “that a sentence needs to be reasonably long (whatever that means) before it can be confirmed” as a valid solution. They specified that it “must be grammatical...and it must mean something,” as stated above. If the message is long enough to do that, it is long enough. Nor is there a Friedman criterion requiring an explicit verb if a message is grammatical and says something intelligible. The message here meets the experts’ validation criteria, and that should be sufficient.

Rollett’s assertion that a three-element key is too sophisticated for the Elizabethan period because he could not find another example of one is irrelevant. In his article, explaining why it took so long to discover the dedication cryptograms, he cites “a lack of appreciation of the delight the Elizabethans took in word play and word games, puns, anagrams, acrostic verses, concealed dates on tombs...literary puzzles of all kinds. The intellectual climate which produced such effective ciphers had been lost sight of” (Rollett 1997, 114). A three-element key was “too sophisticated” for these Elizabethans? If one understands keys and can make one with two elements, what is difficult about three? Here again, Rollett ignores the Friedmans’ criteria and substitutes his own views. They write: “If...there are several keys, or several elements in the key...” (Friedman and Friedman 1957, 19). It does not sound as if they would have balked at a three-element key. Nor did they require a precedent for an encryption method to be considered valid. We are not talking about a

significant qualitative difference, going from two elements to three; and even if we were, there is a first time for everything. No precedent is required for a solution that otherwise meets all the validation criteria because it is “too innovative.” That would be a formula for rejecting encryptions because they are “too good.”

The fact that Rollett was the first person to call attention to the hidden message does not imbue him with special authority to determine its validity. He is subject to the same rules and validation criteria as every other scholar, and, sadly, his revised position is illogical. It is unfortunate that he did not live to see the intentionality of the key 6-2-4 encoded in the shape of the dedication confirmed. If he had, he might have accepted the solution. If he heard the explanation of the meaning of “THE FORTH,” he never informed me.

What seems to underlie Rollett’s rejection of his own discovery is his conclusion that William Stanley, 6<sup>th</sup> Earl of Derby, and not Edward de Vere, wrote “Shakespeare.” He wrote a book on this topic published shortly before he died (Rollett 2015). If he wanted to claim Stanley wrote Shakespeare, he had to repudiate his earlier article. Unfortunately, a big obstacle to Stanley’s candidacy is the fact that he lived until 1642, 19 years after publication of the First Folio. If he wrote everything published in that collected edition of his plays, why would he then write nothing more during the last 19 years of his life?

## Discussion: Who wrote the dedication?

Whoever devised the dedication as a cryptogram, revealing the identity of “Mr. W. H.” and suggesting that Edward de Vere wrote the Sonnets, went to a lot of trouble to execute it. Our unknown cryptographer must have been strongly motivated to reveal these secrets.

Although Thomas Thorpe’s initials are beneath the dedication, it is unlikely that he would have taken the trouble to create something so complex on his own initiative. Even if he knew the identities of the principals, the nature of their relationship, and that de Vere had promised Wriothesley that his “name from hence immortal life shall have,” Thorpe would have had no stake in seeing that the promise was fulfilled, plus he would have been taking a huge personal risk in revealing what was evidently a sensitive secret. Wriothesley was still alive, and he would not have wanted to be identified as the Youth. It is also very unlikely that Thorpe, or anyone else, writing after Wriothesley’s earldom was restored to him by King James in April 1603, would have referred to him as “Mr.”

If de Vere authored the Sonnets and promised the Youth that his name would be immortal, no one could have had a stronger motive to see that the promise was fulfilled. Unless one believes “Shakespeare” was a feckless



wonder, whose word meant nothing, then he probably had a plan in mind for fulfilling his promise when he made it. He also would have known how to create, or find someone to help with, such a communication. And by creating a *double* cryptogram to reveal not only the name of the Youth, but that he, and not Mr. Shakspeare, wrote the Sonnets, he would eventually gain his recognition. It is difficult to imagine anyone other than the author thinking to do something like that. Even if Thorpe wanted to reveal the identity of the Youth, why also the author, after the author explicitly said that he neither wanted, nor expected, his name to be remembered? Only the author would have thought to create the mystery of the identity of “Mr. W. H.” to reveal the identity of the Youth and at the same time reveal his identity as the author.

Why would the author design a cryptogram revealing his identity after saying in Sonnets 72 and 81 that he did not want to be remembered? He was probably ambivalent about it, resigned to the necessity of it in the short term for political or dynastic reasons, but still wanting the truth to come out eventually when the need for secrecy had passed. Although Wriothesley is warned to forget him, posterity may have been another matter. The author was complex, and probably capable of having two minds about such things. If he had really wanted never to be remembered, he would not have written Sonnets 72 and 81 at all, since both clearly suggest that the author’s real name was not yet known. He may also have known that the idea that Mr. Shakspeare had written the works was not credible and wanted to provide confirmation for anyone who suspected he was the real author.<sup>14</sup>

The use of “Mr.” is an important clue to when the dedication was written and by whom. Rollett suggested that the dedication may have been written while Wriothesley was in the Tower, no longer an earl, just “Mr.” Henry Wriothesley (Rollett 1997, 98–9). This makes sense, and if de Vere created the dedication during that period, he may not have been up to revising it before he died, just over a year after Wriothesley’s earldom was restored. Getting everything to come out right again would have been a challenge.

Rather than Thorpe, it is more probable that de Vere wrote the dedication himself before dying in June of 1604, and that he supervised the layout of the dedication, and possibly the entire publication, leaving instructions that it be published some years after he died. The complex structures that Fowler found suggest authorial involvement in the publication. If he was involved in designing the rest of the publication, why not the dedication?

Perhaps he collaborated on it before dying, with Thorpe and/or a math expert like Dr. John Dee. He could have paid Thorpe enough to make it worth his while and worth taking the risk; and he could have reduced the risk by documenting that Thorpe had acted on his behalf. They both may have thought it unlikely that the encrypted information would be found soon,

which turned out to be the case, as far as we know. Or maybe it *was* found before they anticipated and that explains why the 1609 publication may have been suppressed.

Finally, it seems doubtful that anyone other than de Vere would have thought to use “THE FORTH” to pun on his name in Dutch, so only certain people would understand it, but to them it would be powerful confirmation. It was obscure enough to be difficult for others to understand and offered a degree of deniability, which was evidently important. It may have helped him persuade Thomas Thorpe it would be safe to serve as publisher.

This is all speculation; we will probably never know who devised the dedication, but it is a scenario that is coherent and logically consistent with all the facts.

In hindsight it seems almost obvious that the dedication is a cryptogram and that the Sonnets was a logical place to encrypt such a message if there was a secret about the author. Only in the Sonnets does the author refer to himself in the first person, revealing personal secrets. Among the other secrets he revealed, why not include a message revealing his identity? It is unfortunate that Rollett’s discovery came too late to be assessed by the Friedmans.

## Conclusion to Part Two

Here again, Rollett deserves a great deal of credit for his analysis of the dedication, discovery of the name, explanation of the peculiarities in the dedication, and for his insights into the likely situation and motives of the cryptographer that led him to design it as he did. Despite errors in applying them, his solution meets the Friedmans’ validation criteria. It conveys a meaningful message, confirming the identity of “Mr. W. H.” as the man who was already the leading candidate. It is a unique solution, unlikely to be due to chance.

Rollett said he hoped that “The discovery that the name *Henry Wriothesley* was recorded in the Dedication...will...be welcomed by Shakespeare scholars as putting an end to more than two hundred years of speculation about the identity of ‘Mr. W. H.’ and the ‘Fair Youth’” (Rollett 1997, 100). But his discovery has been ignored by nearly all orthodox scholars and rejected by many fellow skeptics because “Wr-ioth-esley” is in three segments, and, especially, “Wr” is widely separated from the rest of the name.

As stated above, the separation of “Wr” is the only real flaw in the way the name appears—the “imperfection” mentioned in the introduction that requires an explanation. Rollett’s arguments that (1) it could not be too easy to solve, and (2) it had to be deniable if discovered too soon, make sense.

To these we have now added the two new points that (1) it is a *double* cryptogram, making it difficult to get both messages right and the one pointing to another author may have been viewed as more important, and (2) if the name appeared perfect, the decipherer may have seen no need to look for anything else and the message pointing to de Vere might never have been suspected and never found. We thus now have credible explanations for the alleged imperfections in both solutions. The unique lower-case “r” in “Mr.” virtually proves that the dedication is a cryptogram. Rollett’s solutions (hidden message as amended) should, therefore, be considered valid.

What are the implications? First, researchers should consider the possibility that the Sonnets contain additional information that sheds light on the Authorship Question. If information was encrypted in the dedication, perhaps there is also hidden information elsewhere in the publication. Second, orthodox Shakespeare scholars should reconsider their opposition to the Shakespeare Authorship Question as a legitimate academic issue. Specifically, they should reassess their position on the authorship of the Sonnets in light of (1) the hidden message pointing to Edward de Vere as their author, (2) other oddities about the publication that call its authorship into question, and (3) the many sonnets that strongly suggest an author unlike Mr. Shakspeare and much more like Edward de Vere.

### Acknowledgements

First, I want to thank Gary Goldstein, publisher of *The Elizabethan Review*, for granting permission to quote extensively from Dr. Rollett’s article, for encouraging me to pursue this article, and for his helpful comments on it. My special thanks to Alex McNeil, J.D., former administrator of the Massachusetts Appeals Court and editor of *The Shakespeare Oxford Newsletter*, for his extensive editing and proposed revisions, which have greatly improved the article. Thanks to Dr John Varady for his expert opinion as a professional statistician that the statistical arguments and analyses appear to be valid and compelling. Thanks also to Lucinda Foulke for her excellent work creating the nine figures in the article. Thanks to the anonymous Stratfordians who identified the errors that are now corrected herein. Finally, I wish to acknowledge the invaluable achievement of John Rollett. He deserves credit for priority of discovery that the dedication to the Sonnets is a double cryptogram.

## Endnotes

1. For example, William Herbert, 3<sup>rd</sup> Earl of Pembroke, and William Hall, a manuscript procurer who some speculate obtained the Sonnets and passed them on to Thorpe. These scenarios are unlikely for the reasons given by Charlton Ogburn Jr, who among other reasons quotes Edward Dowden: “No example in English literature of ‘begetter’ in the sense of procurer has been discovered,” and “it would have seemed absurd...to speak of begetting a manuscript or poem unless the begetter had been either the author or inspirer.” (1984, 332). A more recent candidate is William Holme, who also knew Thomas Thorpe. Holme died in 1607, and Geoffrey Caveney proposes that Thorpe found the Sonnets among his possessions soon after he died (Caveney 2015). This also relies on “begetter” meaning procurer, and how Holme could have acquired the Sonnets is not explained. This scenario also seems unlikely.
2. “Ciphers are basically of two types: *transposition*, in which the letters of the original or plain-text message are rearranged; and *substitution*, in which they are replaced by other letters, by numbers, or symbols. In transposition the letters retain their identities, but their relative positions are changed; in substitution the letters retain their relative positions, but their identities are changed” (Friedman and Friedman 1957, 15).
3. An innocent letter cipher uses a cover text designed to appear as an ordinary communication, “innocent” of any hidden information, but which conceals some type of encrypted message.
4. Throughout, I have used “Shakespeare” to refer to the author, whoever he may have been, and “Mr. Shakspeare,” or “Shakspeare of Stratford,” to refer to the man from Stratford-upon-Avon. Some such convention is needed to refer to them separately, and this convention is standard.
5. Dr Rollett being deceased, the author secured the permission of Gary Goldstein, publisher of *The Elizabethan Review*, to use the extended excerpts from Rollett’s article quoted herein.
6. Neither Rollett nor I continue the count past the word “FORTH” to include the second “T” at the bottom of the page. The two “T”s are much larger, in a different type face, much lower and off to the side, suggesting that they are not meant to be viewed as part of the message. They are the initials of the publisher, Thomas Thorpe, which seems very straightforward.

7. All translations given here are from Google Translate: <https://translate.google.com/>.
8. Please note that this is not an endorsement of all the proposed solutions in the book.
9. In fact, Sir Francis Vere is referred to as “Francisco” in the Latin inscription on his monument in Westminster Abbey, in the chapel of St. John the Evangelist.
10. William F. and Elizebeth S. Friedman are widely regarded as the greatest cryptologists of the 20th Century. They developed basic methods still used by the U.S. National Security Agency.
11. Doubts about the authorship began soon after the name Shakespeare first appeared in 1593. See, for example, *Early Shakespeare Authorship Doubts* (Bryan H. Wildenthal, 2019).
12. The main argument against Oxford has been that some of the plays were written after he died, but the traditional play dates of 1590-1612 are incorrect. Nothing proves that any of them was written after 1604, and several were written too early for Mr. Shakspeare. See, for example, *Shakespeare’s Apprenticeship: Identifying the Real Playwright’s Earliest Works* (Ramon Jiménez, 2018). De Vere’s death in 1604 is one of the strongest arguments in *favor* of his authorship claim.
13. An anonymous Stratfordian who would most likely disagree that Rollett’s solution is unique. The web page where his search results were posted in 1998 is no longer available. He called the web page to my attention in a private email at the time, and I made and kept a hard copy.
14. For a summary of evidence and arguments for and against Mr. Shakspeare, see the Declaration of Reasonable Doubt About the Identity of William Shakespeare: <https://doubtaboutwill.org>.



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## Appendix: Odds Estimate

Here we estimate the odds that the name “Henry Wr-ioth-esley” appeared by chance in the arrays shown in Figures 7–9. We begin with Rollett’s description of the procedure he used to estimate the odds that the name “Henry” appeared by chance, which is relatively straightforward because the name appeared in its entirety, not in segments:

First, we consider the name “Henry.” We will assume that a good estimate of the odds that it might appear in any 5-letter vertical site in any array can be assessed by imagining letters picked one-by-one at random out of a notional “black bag” containing all the letters of the Dedication.

There are 144 letters in the text (disregarding Thomas Thorpe’s initials “T. T.” printed in larger type and offset to one side at the end); the number of ‘H’s is 10, ‘E’s 23, ‘N’s 13, ‘R’s 9, and there is just one ‘Y.’ The chance that an ‘H’ is picked first from the bag is thus 10 out of 144, and so on. The fractional likelihood of the name “Henry” being drawn from the bag is therefore the product of these 5 numbers divided by the joint product of 144, 143, 142, 141, and 140 since the total number of letters remaining in the bag is reduced by 1 after each selection.

Thus:

$$(10 \times 23 \times 13 \times 9 \times 1) \div (144 \times 143 \times 142 \times 141 \times 140)$$

If we take 30 as the maximum array row size, and 6 as the minimum, the total number of possible vertical sites (reading down only) for a 5-letter word is 1,800. (In terms of picking letters out of an imaginary black bag, this means that we may make 1,800 trials of extracting 5 letters, since it is immaterial in which site the word is found.) Thus, the probability that one of these sites might contain the name “Henry” is:

$$1800 \times 26,910 \div (144 \times 143 \times 142 \times 141 \times 140) = \text{ca. 1 in 1192.}$$

(Rollett 1997, 102-3)

Similarly, Rollett calculated the odds that the segment “esley” occurred by chance in a site in any of the same arrays:

$$1800 \times 30,360 \div (144 \times 143 \times 142 \times 141 \times 140) = \text{ca. 1 in 1056 (ibid.)}$$

He then calculated the odds that the segment “ioth” occurred by chance somewhere in the rest of the same array (with 18 letters in each row), which has 85 possible sites:

$$85 \times 17,920 \text{ (*sic*: should be 19,040)} \div (139 \times 138 \times 137 \times 136) =$$

ca. 1 in 235,

and the odds that the segment “Wr” occurred by chance somewhere in the same array:

$$116 \times 36 \div (135 \times 134) = \text{ca. } 1 \text{ in } 4.33 \text{ (ibid.)}$$

He then multiplied the separate odds together to obtain the overall odds that the name “Wr-ioth-esley” appeared by chance in the dedication: “(roughly) 1 in 1.1 million.” This he divided by 4, since it would have been acceptable for two of the segments to be read upwards, doubling the number of possible sites, giving 1 in about 270,000.

He then multiplied the odds for the first and last names to yield overall odds for the full name “Henry Wriothesley” appearing by chance of “1 in about 320 million” (ibid.).

As mentioned above, however, Rollett made the error of only calculating the odds of chance occurrence of this *particular* way of dividing Wriothesley’s last name into segments. He should have assessed the combined odds of all permutations of the letters in the name which might have occurred by chance roughly *equally or less likely to occur* than the one he found. We now correct the error by doing so.

Permutations equally or less likely to occur than his are defined here as those with (1) the full last name appearing in any single array, rectangular or not, in three or fewer segments, (2) one segment with at least five letters, as in Rollett’s solution, (3) the main segment reading down, making it easy to spot, as in Rollett’s, (4) a second segment anywhere in the same array, reading either up or down, and (5) any third segment anywhere in the same array, reading either up or down. Allowing second and third segments to be read either up or down is equivalent to Rollett having them read down and then dividing by four. This definition is conservative in that it does not require a second segment to be in a column adjacent to the main segment, nor any third segment to be in the bottom rows, as in Rollett’s permutation.

There are 53 permutations that meet this definition, including the one Rollett found. The odds of each of them occurring by chance are calculated the same way he did for his permutation: the frequencies of the letters in each segment are multiplied together, then multiplied by the number of sites where each segment could have appeared, then divided by the number of remaining letters in the dedication multiplied together. This gives the odds of each segment appearing by chance. These are then multiplied together to get overall odds for that permutation of “Wriothesley.” The odds for each of the 53 permutations are then combined to get overall odds that some permutation equally or less likely to occur by chance than Rollett’s permutation would appear.

## The Strange Case of “Mr. W. H.”

We also make one additional change: Rather than Rollett’s assumption of “30 as the maximum array row size, and 6 as the minimum” (see above) for either “Henry” or the longest segments of “Wriothesley” to appear, we will use the more conservative assumption that the name or segments could appear in arrays of *from 5 to 36 rows*. For “Henry,” this is a total of 2,112 possible sites, rather than Rollett’s 1,800. Using this assumption, the probability that one of the sites might contain “Henry” is:

$$(2112 \times 26,910) \div (144 \times 143 \times 142 \times 141 \times 140) = 1 \text{ in } 1016, \text{ v. Rollett's } 1 \text{ in } 1192.$$

Here then, for example, are our calculations for Rollett’s permutation:

$$\text{ESLEY: } (2112 \times 30,360) \div (144 \times 143 \times 142 \times 141 \times 140) = 1 \text{ in } 900.19862$$

$$\text{IOTH: } (170 \times 19,040) \div (139 \times 138 \times 137 \times 136) = 1 \text{ in } 110.41741$$

$$\text{WR: } (232 \times 36) \div (135 \times 134) = 1 \text{ in } 2.16595$$

$900.19862 \times 110.41741 \times 2.16595 = 1 \text{ in } 215,290 = \text{the odds}$   
 Rollett’s permutation occurred by chance (versus Rollett’s figure of 1 in about 270,000).

Using this same procedure, the 53 permutations equally or less likely to occur than the one Rollett found, with the odds of each occurring by chance, are as follows:

1. 2, 4, 5 Wr-ioth-esley* (1 in 215,290)	19. 1, 6, 4 W-rioth-esley (1 in 499,473)	37. 2, 2, 7 Wr-io-the-sley (1 in 257,762)
2. 2, 5, 4 Wr-iothe-sley (1 in 215,290)	20. 1, 4, 6 W-riot-hesley (1 in 499,473)	38. 8, 3 Wrioth-esley (1 in 86,183,545)
3. 5, 2, 4 Wriot-he-sley (1 in 215,290)	21. 6, 3, 2 Wrioth-esl-ey (1 in 236,819)	39. 3, 8 Wri-othesley (1 in 86,183,545)
4. 5, 4, 2 Wriot-hesl-ey (1 in 215,290)	22. 6, 2, 3 Wrioth-es-ley (1 in 236,819)	40. 8, 2, 1 Wrioth-es-le-y (1 in 559,633)
5. 4, 5, 2 Wrio-thesl-ey (1 in 215,290)	23. 3, 6, 2 Wri-otheshl-ey (1 in 236,819)	41. 8, 1, 2 Wrioth-es-l-ey (1 in 559,633)
6. 4, 2, 5 Wrio-th-esley (1 in 215,290)	24. 3, 2, 6 Wri-ot-hesley (1 in 236,819)	42. 2, 8, 1 Wr-iothesl-ey (1 in 559,633)
7. 5, 5, 1 Wriot-hesl-y (1 in 472,986)	25. 2, 6, 3 Wr-iothes-ley (1 in 236,819)	43. 2, 1, 8 Wr-i-othesley (1 in 559,633)
8. 5, 1, 5 Wriot-h-esley (1 in 472,986)	26. 2, 3, 6 Wr-iot-hesley (1 in 236,819)	44. 1, 8, 2 W-riotheshl-ey (1 in 559,633)
9. 1, 5, 5 W-rioth-esley (1 in 472,986)	27. 7, 4 Wrioth-esley (1 in 83,721,165)	45. 1, 2, 8 W-ri-othesley (1 in 559,633)



10. 5, 3, 3 Wriot-hes-ley (1 in 206,093)	28. 4, 7 Wrio-thesley (1 in 83,721,165)	46. 9, 2 Wriothesl-ey (1 in 89,701,242)
11. 3, 5, 3 Wri-oth-es-ley (1 in 206,093)	29. 7, 3, 1 Wriothe-sle-y (1 in 528,543)	47. 2, 9 Wr-iothesley (1 in 89,701,242)
12. 3, 3, 5 Wri-oth-esley (1 in 206,093)	30. 7, 1, 3 Wriothe-s-ley (1 in 528,543)	48. 9, 1, 1 Wriothesl-e-y (1 in 1,255,079)
13. 6, 5 Wrioth-esley (1 in 82,413,024)	31. 3, 7, 1 Wri-oth-esle-y (1 in 528,543)	49. 1, 9, 1 W-riothesle-y (1 in 1,255,079)
14. 5, 6 Wriot-hesley (1 in 82,413,024)	32. 3, 1, 7 Wri-o-thesley (1 in 528,543)	50. 1, 1, 9 W-r-iothesley (1 in 1,255,079)
15. 6, 4, 1 Wrioth-else-y (1 in 499,473)	33. 1, 7, 3 W-riothes-ley (1 in 528,543)	51. 10, 1 Wriothesle-y (1 in 192,072,838)
16. 6, 1, 4 Wrioth-e-sley (1 in 499,473)	34. 1, 3, 7 W-r-io-thesley (1 in 528,543)	52. 1, 10 W-r-iothesley (1 in 192,072,838)
17. 4, 6, 1 Wrio-thesle-y (1 in 499,473)	35. 7, 2, 2 Wriothe-sl-ey (1 in 257,7562)	53. 11 Wriothesley (1 in 30,190,350,000)
18. 4, 1, 6 Wrio-t-hesley (1 in 499,473)	36. 2, 7, 2 Wr-iothesl-ey (1 in 257,7562)	*Rollett's permutation

To get combined odds for all 53 permutations, we divide the odds for each of the 53 into 1, sum those results, and then divide into 1. This yields odds of “Wr-ioth-esley,” or some other permutation equally or less likely to occur by chance, of 1 in about 8175 (vs. Rollett’s estimate of 1 in 270,000 just for “Wr-ioth-esley”). We multiply this by the odds of “Henry” appearing by chance (1 in 1016) to get the overall odds of the full name appearing by chance in a form equally or less likely to occur by chance than what Rollett found:

$$8175 \times 1016 = 1 \text{ in } 8,305,800, \text{ or roughly } \underline{1 \text{ in } 8.3 \text{ million}}$$

While nowhere near Rollett’s estimate of 1 in 320 million (or 30 billion), it is still highly unlikely that the presence of the name “Henry Wr-ioth-esley” is due to chance.



# *Did Edward de Vere Translate Boccaccio's Decameron into English, Published in 1620?*

by Richard M. Waugaman, M.D.

The year 2020 saw the world's worst pandemic since the "Spanish" flu of 1918. It also marked the 400<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the first English translation<sup>1</sup> of a book set in Florence in 1348, during Europe's "Black Death," the deadliest plague in human history, which may have killed three-fourths of the population of Florence (Cohn, 2010). So it is timely to take a fresh look at that influential but anonymous translation.<sup>2</sup>

Before going any further, since most readers will be unfamiliar with this 1620 translation, let me offer a sample:

Having thus spoken, he hung downe the head in his bosome, weeping as abundantly, as if it had beene a childe severely disciplinde. On the other side, *Ghismonda* hearing the speeches of her Father, and perceiving withall, that not onely her secret love was discovered, but also *Guiscardo* was in close prison, the matter which did most of all torment her; shee fell into a very strange kinde of extasie, scorning teares, and entreating tearmes, such as feminine frailety are alwayes aptest unto: but rather, with height of courage, controlling feare or servile basenesse, and declaring invincible fortitude in her very looks, she concluded with her selfe, rather then to urge any humble perswasions, shee would lay her life downe at the stake. For plainly shee perceived, that *Guiscardo* was already a dead man in Law, and death

was likewise as welcome to her, rather then the deprivation of her Love; and therefore, not like a weeping woman, or as checkt by the offence committed, but carelesse of any harme happening to her: stoutly and courageously, not a teare appearing in her eye, or her soule any way to be perturbed, thus shee spake to her Father (482; IV.i, that is, first tale of the fourth day).

## Oxford and *Decameron* in Historical Context

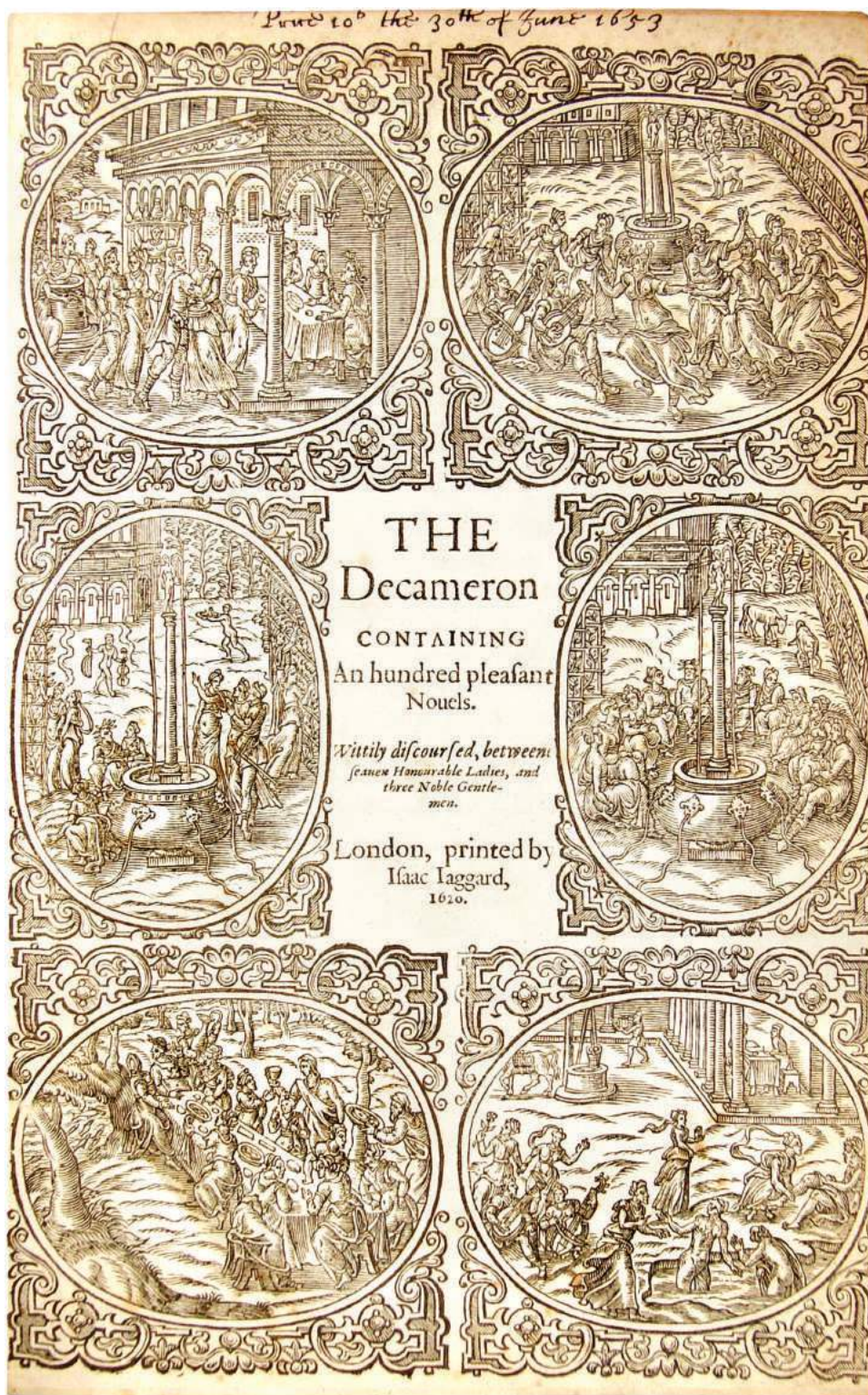
We know *Decameron* influenced some of the plays of William Shakespeare, the pseudonym of Edward de Vere, 17<sup>th</sup> Earl of Oxford. In a 2019 study, Melissa Walter shows that a large number of Shakespeare's plays, and especially his comic heroines, were shaped by Italian novellas, particularly *Decameron*.<sup>3</sup> Scholar Herbert Wright speaks of "the problem of Shakespeare's knowledge of Boccaccio" (221 n.3)—that is, how he was familiar with tales in *Decameron* that had not yet been translated into English, and then used them in plays such as *Cymbeline*.<sup>4</sup> In this article, I will present evidence that suggests that Edward de Vere wrote the translation, which would highlight just how important *Decameron* was to him. Oxford's interest in Italy; in translations in general; in personally financing translations of works by Italian authors (*Cardanus Comfort*; *The Book of the Courtier*); and in literary classics are all consistent with having undertaken this translation. Most notably, the translator's use of anonymity is fully consistent with Oxford's pattern of concealing his authorship of many of his works.

We might pause here for a moment to reflect on anonymous authorship in the Renaissance. Marcy North, who has done seminal work on this topic, warns us that we suffer from some unscholarly prejudices about anonymous works. For example, "scholars have traditionally preferred works with [known] authors," and anonymous works are assumed to be "far inferior to those of known authors" (2003, 10–1). One cannot help thinking of a parallel with the stigma of illegitimate birth, and even of Oxford's older sister taking him to court after their father died to claim he was illegitimate. It is noteworthy that Oxford's childhood guardian and later father-in-law, William Cecil, Lord Burghley, "used anonymity in printing surreptitious propaganda" (26). So he may have encouraged Oxford to conceal authorship of his own works.

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North even names Oxford as one of the Elizabethan poets whose attributed work is so scarce because of “the courtiers’ fashion of limiting readership through close manuscript circulation” (1999, 8). North concludes that scholars dislike an authorship vacuum, and that once it is filled with a speculative attribution, scholars may move on, without re-examining the accuracy of that initial authorship attribution. North uses the anonymous *Arte of English Poesie* as a salient example—the speculation that it was the work of George Puttenham is now nearly carved in stone. The history of the attribution of the 1620 *Decameron* translation to John Florio also illustrates this problem. Herbert Wright, the first to make this attribution, admitted he was uncertain, but in the years since he did so it is often treated as established fact, hanging on to the translation like barnacles. Just as with the false attribution of the works of Shakespeare to William Shakspeare of Stratford, we face a struggle when we challenge such a flawed but traditional authorship assumption.

The 1620 translation was dedicated to Oxford’s son-in-law, Philip Herbert, Earl of Montgomery; moreover, it was published just three years before the First Folio. As with the lavish folio size of the book, even the publisher was the same as that of the First Folio—Isaac Jaggard.<sup>5</sup> It was published in an ornate, two-volume edition. It is intriguing that, in 1587, the printer John Wolfe entered an anonymous edition of *Decameron* into the Stationers’ Register. It was never published, unless it was the translation published in 1620. I suggest that this 1587 work was Oxford’s translation, but that it was too controversial to be published until 1620.

Why was the book so controversial? For centuries, Boccaccio was widely respected for his scholarly works in Latin. Eventually, the salacious and fiercely anti-clerical content of *Decameron* overshadowed his earlier reputation. In fact, the book was entered into the Catholic Church’s first Counter-Reformation Index of banned books in 1559. It was apparently offensive to the Vatican, and, in England, to Puritans, and probably to some Protestants as well. In 1582, Liornado Salviati published a new, bowdlerized translation that returned *Decameron* into the Church’s good graces, through deleting its more offensive material. In Salviati’s version, more than half of the 100 stories were significantly altered from Boccaccio’s original version. One can imagine the tension between the fame of this book, on the one hand, and its power to offend the Church with its relentless anti-clericalism.

Still, the 1620 English translation had difficulties with the legal authorities. The Bishop of London gave his approval for the book’s publication, only to be overruled by the Archbishop of Canterbury. Ultimately, though, the book found its way into print in 1620. The translation appeared in further editions in 1625, 1634, 1657, and 1684, attesting to its great popularity. Changes in the text—such as its faux-moralizing tone—may have been required to get past both Papal as well as British censorship.

It may seem surprising that so many years elapsed between Oxford's translation of this work by 1587 and its publication only in 1620. But recall that Shakespeare's *As You Like It*, for example, was first entered into the Stationers' Register in 1600, yet was not published for 23 years. In fact, half the plays in the First Folio were written by the time of Oxford's death in 1604 but remained unpublished until 1623. *Decameron* being published in 1620 by Jaggard, with a dedication to Philip Herbert, may be related to the circumstances that led the First Folio to be published in 1623, by the same publisher, and with Herbert and his noble brother as dedicatees. Herbert's wife was Oxford's daughter, Susan Vere, and she may well have been the owner of the manuscript of this translation.

*Decameron* was controversial not just in Oxford's time, but in many other eras. Boccaccio is remembered to this day in the Italian word "boccaccio," meaning "licentious." Oxford, however, would have known that there was much more to Boccaccio's contributions than this one book. As Boccaccio was writing it, he met Petrarch, who persuaded him to "turn away from the vernacular and from medieval genres...and [produce] scholarly works in Latin that looked forward to...the Renaissance" (Rebhorn xxiii–xxiv). Indeed, Boccaccio had a profound influence on medieval and early modern English literature. He was a major source for Chaucer, and his *De Casibus* was the model for *The Mirrour for Magistrates*. Boccaccio became an idealist about the need for people to put their obligations to their city and country above self-interest. Ironically, before he wrote *Decameron*, Boccaccio was regarded as a great moralist—at one time, "Boccaccio had the approval of the Church everywhere" (H. Wright, 1957, 4).

Herbert Wright notes that E.K., in *A Shepheard's Calendar*, "recalls how many poets, including Boccaccio, wrote pastorals before they had attained their full [poetic] power" (44). E.K. uses a touching metaphor and compares such early pastoral poems of famous poets with "young birdes, that be newly crept out of the nest, by little first to prove theyr tender wyngs, before they make a greater flyght" (Spenser 29). And in E.K.'s "Glosse" after the poem for April, he explains the mythological Graces, adding "and Boccace [adopting the French spelling] saith [in his *Genealogy of the Gods*], that they be painted naked..." (69).

What else may have appealed to Oxford about translating this work? We know that Oxford devoted much of his life and his career to establishing English as a respected literary language, at a time when few Europeans knew English. Given his interests, he knew that just as Dante and Petrarch made the "vulgar" language of Italian as respectable for poetry as Latin, so Boccaccio did the same for Italian for works in prose. Ovid was one of Oxford's models for poetry; Boccaccio may have been such a model for literary prose.

Herbert Wright has shown that the Italian source text for the 1620 translation was Liornado Salviati's heavily censored Italian edition, first published in 1582, which is consistent with the English translation then being registered five years later.<sup>6</sup> He notes that the translator also made heavy use of Antoine le Maçon's 1545 French translation (which went through 20 further editions by 1600). Melissa Walter concludes that Shakespeare could read Italian and speculates that "Shakespeare could also have read *Decameron* in French, possibly alongside Italian" (loc. 563)—that is, precisely the two versions that scholars have concluded the anonymous translator of the 1620 edition used.

Herbert Wright speculated that John Florio was the translator, but other scholars "are skeptical about this attribution, claiming that there is insufficient evidence" (Armstrong 91). I doubt that Wright thought of Oxford as an alternative translation candidate, despite evidence that Oxford financed the translation of such Italian works as *Cardanus Comfort* and *The Book of the Courtier*. For Oxford, translations were an important means of making foreign texts widely accessible to English readers, honing his writing skill, and enriching the English language in the process.

## Attributes of the Translator

A review of Herbert Wright's 1953 book by Douglas Bush states, "The translator, like Elizabethan translators in general, and more than most of them, gave free rein to his own personal and stylistic idiosyncrasies..." (227). Further, "In general, he is exuberantly, not to say intemperately, word-conscious" (228). Bush is ambivalent about Wright's attribution of the translation to Florio, wondering if Wright developed his list of parallel characteristics in the anonymous translator and in Florio because he had already chosen Florio (which would illustrate the well-known phenomenon of confirmation bias). Bush gives the example of Florio's Montaigne being "moralistic," but he does not find an equivalently moralistic strain in the Boccaccio translation. Bush concludes that "Until we have a better claimant to suggest, we may *provisionally* assent" (my emphasis) to Wright's attribution (228). In fact, Wright himself declined to state he was certain his attribution was accurate.

It is worth listing the characteristics that Herbert Wright found in the anonymous translator: "in addition to his competence in both French and Italian, [he] manifests a special interest in dogs and horses,<sup>[7]</sup> the sea,<sup>[8]</sup> the law,<sup>[9]</sup> drama and fine arts and music;<sup>[10]</sup> a courtly relish for ceremony and rank..." (Bush 227). While many of those qualities describe Oxford, Bush does not agree with Wright that they describe Florio. It is instructive that Wright's methodology for identifying an unknown author resembles J. Thomas Looney's for identifying Oxford as Shakespeare. In fact, let us compare Wright's

findings with Looney's relevant "characteristics" of the author of Shakespeare's works, shown in square brackets:

"The translator...more than most {Elizabethan translators} gave free rein to his own personal and stylistic idiosyncracies ["eccentric and mysterious"; "unconventional"]...in addition to his competence in both French and Italian ["an enthusiast for Italy"], {the translator} manifests a special interest in dogs and horses ["a follower of sport"], the sea, the law, drama ["an enthusiast in the world of drama"] and fine arts and music ["a lover of music"]; a courtly relish for ceremony and rank ["a member of the higher aristocracy"]...he heightens emotional effects through vivid phrasing and dramatic particularity. The translator's style...reveals a concern for rhythm and balance, for alliteration in a score of various forms (including doublets and triplets and compound adjectives), and for repetition of words. In general, he is exuberantly, not to say intemperately, word-conscious" ["a lyric poet of recognized talent"].

What of the dedicatory epistle to the Earl of Montgomery? Having died in 1604, Oxford could not have written it in 1620. However, it is possible that he was hoping his translation would finally be published after his death and wrote this dedication in his final months of life, when his daughter Susan was engaged but not yet married to Phillip Herbert. Alternatively, Oxford may have written the dedication to someone else in 1587, when the book was entered in the Stationers' Register, and Jaggard and Oxford's family later changed the dedicatee in 1620.

What was happening in Oxford's life in the early 1580s, when he may have obtained the new, expurgated Salviati translation, which brought *Decameron* out of its exile on the Church's Index of banned books, and in 1587, when a new edition of the book was entered into the Stationers' Register? A great deal. Highly relevant was Oxford's purchase of Fisher's Folly in 1580, which Mark Anderson has called "a bohemian retreat for *Euphuist* writers [my emphasis]." Euphuism, which scholars acknowledge heavily influenced the style of the 1620 translation, was at its height in the 1580s, then fell out of favor. Oxford was exiled from court in 1581 and was re-admitted to court two years later. In 1586, Queen Elizabeth granted him a £1,000 annuity. About the same year, I believe he probably wrote *The Arte of English Poesie*, though it was not published until 1589. Finally, Oxford may also have been attracted to Salviati's 1582 edition in part because being in exile from court himself made him identify with the 10 young people in the *Decameron*, who were in self-imposed exile from Florence.

So, Oxford may have executed the translation in the years following 1582, then decided against publication at the request of Queen Elizabeth, who

may have found its racy, “de-bowdlerized” stories too controversial. Oxford would have been more compliant with her wishes than previously, not wanting to jeopardize his generous annuity from the state.

## Linguistic Parallels with Oxford/Shakespeare

At this point it is vital to answer the question of Oxford's fluency in Italian. The definitive answer is given by a contemporary of Oxford's named Orazio Coquo, a 17-year-old choirboy from Venice who accompanied Oxford to England from Italy and stayed with him for 11 months. On his return to Italy in 1577, Coquo appeared before the Venetian Inquisition and testified that, among other things, Oxford was fluent in both Italian and Latin (Nelson 157).

In the same vein, it is necessary to determine Shakespeare's knowledge of Italian. According to Shakespeare scholar Roger Prior, Shakespeare's “knowledge of Italian was extensive” (275). In support of this assessment, he writes: “As he wrote it [*Love's Labour's Lost*], Shakespeare consulted four poems in the original Italian... Ariosto's *Orlando Furioso*, Boiardo's *Orlando Innamorato*, Berni's *rifacimento* of that poem... and Torquato Tasso's pastoral drama in verse, *Aminta*...” (269).

In the same vein, Andrew Cairncross concluded that “Shakespeare's knowledge and use of Italian... can be illustrated and established by reference to Cantos IV–VI of *Orlando Furioso*. These cantos provided Shakespeare with material not only for the Hero-Claudio theme in *Much Ado About Nothing*, but also for *King Lear* and *Othello*.” Further, “Shakespeare had at least a reading knowledge of Italian and had read and been fascinated by certain sections of *Orlando Furioso*, which he used, so far as the present evidence goes, independently of translations” (Cairncross 178, 182). In short, Shakespeare was not only fluent in Italian but used Italian literary sources in his plays.

In this regard, we can start our linguistic analysis by examining the wording of the translation's dedication. Strikingly, the phrase “foule mouthed slander and detraction” also appears word for word in the dedication of Munday's 1618 *Sidero-Thriambos*. Even the context is comparable. The 1620 dedication asserts that the book, with Herbert as patron, will “be safely sheelded from foule mouthed slander and detraction.” Similarly, Munday's work asks a patron to be “protector from *foule-mouthed slander and detraction*” (these are the only two works in EEBO [Early English Books Online] that contain the highlighted phrase). One explanation might be that, as one of Oxford's former literary secretaries, Munday played a role in writing the 1620 dedication. Alternatively, he may have borrowed the wording from Oxford's manuscript. For that matter, given the phrases from the translation that also appear in Munday's later works, it is even conceivable that he collaborated with Oxford in writing the translation. Munday's entry in the *Oxford Dictionary of National*



*Biography* (ODNB) asserts that, “In the late 1580s and 1590s particularly, he [Munday] functioned single-handedly as a major translation factory,” translating works into English from French, Italian, and Spanish.<sup>11</sup>

Herbert Wright did much to renew interest in the 1620 translation. He suggested that it led to increased appreciation of *Decameron* in England. Wright comments that this translation “is often marked by an emotional and a dramatic quality as well as by a partiality for significant detail. This vividness is strengthened by a considerable range of stylistic effects from the simple and racy to the elaborate and ornate. The translator makes extensive use of *balance*, and his work has a well-defined rhythm. These unite with a complicated and skillfully devised system of *alliteration* to leave a deep impression on the ear” (191; my emphasis). Desmond O’Connor, in his entry on Florio in the ODNB, concludes that Florio “lacked the inspiration and originality of the poet and playwright.” Unlike Oxford, Florio wrote no dramas, and Wright’s praise sounds far more consistent with the writings of Shakespeare. O’Connor writes of Wright’s attribution: “If the work was indeed his [Florio’s], however, it certainly did not provide him with any financial reward, because in 1619 he was already residing in poverty at Fulham, where, despite his attempts, he was unsuccessful in extracting a pension from the Lord Treasurer” (ODNB Florio entry).

Donatella Montini characterizes the translator’s style as Euphuistic; however, Euphuism flourished during the 1580s, which adds to the evidence that this translation dates to that decade, rather than to the early 17<sup>th</sup> Century. In addition, Oxford was known as the patron of the Euphuistic school, further connecting him with this translation. Indeed, his secretary, John Lyly, initiated the Euphuistic fashion with his 1579 novel, *Euphues: The Anatomy of Wit*, and followed this with his second novel in 1580, *Euphues and His England*, both of which feature an Italianized Englishman. Moreover, Lyly dedicated his second Euphues novel to the 17<sup>th</sup> Earl of Oxford.

C.S. Lewis characterized Euphuism as “antithesis, alliteration, balance, rhyme, and assonance” (312), *all taken to excess*. Here is one example of the translation’s (possibly excessive) alliteration—in VII.ii (the second tale of the seventh day) we see the quadruple alliteration of “f” followed in the same word by “r” in “free from future feare.” Significantly, Montini cites a passage in the anonymous 1589 *Arte of English Poesie* as she examines the translator’s style. Previously, I have attributed the *Arte* to Oxford himself. Montini believes the 1620 translation makes heavy use of what the *Arte* calls “the ‘climbing’ figure of *climax*, a scheme that presents a mounting over a series of words, clauses or sentences” (96; note the alliterative repetition of “clim-”). Montini then concludes, “The structured principle which shapes the whole work [i.e., the 1620 translation] is that of *copia* [abundance], of increase, of crescendo.... In various forms and at different levels, [the translator] develops

a homogeneous, pervasive strategy of addition and expansion" (96). Again, a description of Euphuism—"The translator's style presents the usual arsenal of devices typical of Euphuism" (97).

Equally important is that Shakespeare extensively used hendiadys, a particular kind of verbal doublet, more than any other Elizabethan writer (George Wright, 1981). Here is Montini on its use in the English translation:

[The translation] presents numerous examples of *doublets* which were often used to gain the rhetorical ornament of successive phrases or clauses of approximately equal length. Nouns, adjectives, verbs are *doubled* and piled up in order to heighten the emotional pitch of the situation or event described: they are added as an ornamental device, but also to clarify the subject, provide details and make the content more vivid and effective. Or *doublets* of adjectives and verbs are used as a variation for a single verb in the attempt to avoid repetitions (98, my emphasis).

Montini also links alliteration with such doubling, in many cases, writing of the translator's "love for alliterations...to couple two terms different in meaning and similar in form" (98). Montini illustrates this doubling on the part of the English translator with an example:

Italian: "E dimorando col tenero padre, sì come gran donna, in molte delicatezze..." English: "Continuing thus in Court with the King her father, who loved her beyond all his future hopes; like a Lady of *great and glorious* magnificence, she lived in all *delights and pleasure*."

Note the two added doublings of adjectives, then of nouns, that were not in the Italian.

Guyda Armstrong's comments on the 1620 translation weaken Herbert Wright's attribution of it to John Florio in several ways, opening up the possibility of a different translator. Armstrong observes, "The [1620] edition is unusual among Boccaccio's works in English translation in that there is absolutely no indication of the identity of the translator.... Boccaccio is not named on the title page, or indeed anywhere in this book." There have been no other anonymous works attributed to Florio. The attribution to Florio "remains problematic...it is probably safest to refer to the 'translator,' rather than to Florio..." (219–20). Armstrong also notes the paradox that Florio would have concealed his role in translating this book, when he took credit for his highly regarded 1603 translation of Montaigne's *Essays*.

As we engage in a close reading of the 1620 English translation, we face obstacles in ascertaining what exactly the translator changed from Boccaccio's original Italian version, for it is not clear whether Oxford saw an early, banned Italian edition, or if he knew the work only through the expurgated

Salviati Italian version, as well as through Maçon's French translation. I am on more solid ground, however, in noting parallels with Oxford's other works in word coinages; quirky spellings; and phrases that are also found in works signed by Shakespeare or by Oxford's literary secretaries, especially Anthony Munday and John Lyly.

I am struck by the likelihood that the same anonymous author who used the trope "*his haire stode upright like Porcupines quill*," also, as Shakespeare, had the Ghost in *Hamlet* (I.v) say, "I could a tale unfold whose lightest word/Would harrow up thy soul...*And [make] each particular hair to stand on end/ Like quills upon the fretful porcupine.*" Spurgeon wrote that "Shakespeare's intense interest in the human face has never, I think, been adequately noticed" (58); in particular, she cogently highlighted the many ways that Shakespeare was deeply fascinated with outward expressions of a character's inner emotions. Although Spurgeon seems to have overlooked this example, what a vivid image of fright!

The word "over-plus" meaning "excess libido" first occurs in Shakespeare's Sonnet 135: "Thou hast they Will, and Will to boote, and Will in *over-plus*." And Phillippa, in this translation, uses the word in just the same sense. In addition, the translation of tale III.ix adds details about Bertrand being a royal "ward," who is freed from his "wardship." The translator seems to have emphasized this parallel with Oxford's experience as the first royal ward under Queen Elizabeth.<sup>12</sup>

A major objection to Florio as translator was the heavy use of the Antoine Le Maçon French translation as a primary source (probably its 1578 edition). Florio knew Italian well—probably better than Oxford—so it is difficult to explain why he would have relied on the French translation as a primary source text. Even Herbert Wright, in his 1936 article, writes that "[the translator's] *mastery of Italian was not complete*.... The inaccuracy of the English translator is a serious defect and so is his diffuseness.... Not infrequently tales are given a turn which is entirely foreign to the spirit of Boccaccio" (500, my emphasis). One example of the translator's incomplete knowledge of Italian is the translation of "latino" as "Latin," whereas it meant "Italian" in Boccaccio's day. Florio should have known better—in his day, he was primarily a teacher of Italian, and an author of books for teaching Italian, including a collection of 6,000 Italian proverbs.

"Two tales [of Boccaccio] were entirely removed and substituted" with other stories in the 1620 translation (Montini 93. n.14). These two stories were III.x,<sup>13</sup> about Rustico, a monk, seducing a naive young woman, Alibech; and VI.vi, that "proves" the Baronci are the oldest, most noble family, because God created their ancestors first, before becoming more skillful; the Baronci family were notoriously ugly. Those tales are replaced by more acceptable

alternatives. The Rustico story "is perhaps one of the most notorious of all the tales of *Decameron* and has certainly been subject to the most stringent censorship over the years..." (221). Instead, the 1620 translator substituted a story from François Belleforest's *Histoires tragiques*, about the chaste princess Serictha. We know that Oxford also used Belleforest as a literary source for *Hamlet*.

Oxford loved to coin words, but also to turn nouns into verbs, to noun verbs, and to give old words new meanings. The OED gives this 1620 translation as the source of five newly coined words: heart-aching, low-hanging, monkey-faced, replight, and mocked (an adjective meaning "derided" or "ridiculed"; it also offers an excellent example of Oxford using a word doublet to explain his newly coined word: "Thus the *mocked and derided* Nicostratus" in II.vii; my emphasis). If the translation was written by 1587, it coined many other words, such as "separatist." It seems to have coined "insidiator" and "virgin-man." It also coined "irreciprocally" (VII.vi), which is not in the OED. "Reciprocal" is first listed in EEBO in 1555; it is used twice by Shakespeare.

The translation also coined new meanings for 22 words: country-bred, distastably ("with distaste"), goatherdess, hen pen (again, Oxford explains this in his word doublet: "A coope or Hen pen" in I.v). He also revives "hen-coope" three times in the work (it was used as early as 1423, but Oxford's is the first use in EEBO), house bell, instructed (OED 3.a., based on authoritative instructions), marinal (OED 2, meaning nautical), miscaller, mount (OED 10.a., "to blush with rage or passion"<sup>14</sup>). Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus* is listed as the first example of definition OED 3.b. of "mount": "to rise or soar up to or into." Shakespeare's *Cymbeline* is the first example of OED 9, "of a road, stair, etc.: to go up"; and his *Tempest* for OED 25, "to cause to stand upright or erect"; apparently, Oxford loved to play with the word "mount"), painting-apron, pallet bed, Perugian (OED B., a native of Perugia), pledge (OED 1.d., a thing put in pawn), prevent (OED 14.a., to stop someone from doing something), rapture (OED 1.e., a strong emotional attack; Shakespeare's *Coriolanus* is cited as the first example of OED 1.d., meaning "a state of passion." In addition, Troilus in *Troilus and Cressida* says "Cassandra's mad: her brain-sick raptures..."; later, Cressida repeats the word); and recluse (as an adjective).

Let me highlight additional words and phrases in this 1620 translation that have linguistic parallels with works of Shakespeare; other works by Oxford; and works by his literary secretaries who may have served as collaborators or as allonyms for some of Oxford's own writing. Encountering a phrase here that was also used by Shakespeare may be merely a coincidence. It may suggest that another translator knew Shakespeare's works and borrowed phrases from them, or it may be that Shakespeare saw the circa 1587 manuscript of

this translation by someone else and borrowed from it. I would suggest, however, that the cumulative weight of these numerous parallels of vocabulary; the same fondness for coining words and phrases; similar spelling eccentricities; and a similar interest in religious books add to the other lines of evidence that link this book with Oxford, and that his authorship of the translation is the most parsimonious interpretation of this cumulative evidence.

The 1620 translation speaks of a monk feeling “effeminate temptations” toward a kneeling “wench.” The OED gives meaning 3 of effeminate as “devoted to women.” It states that “unequivocal instances are rare,” and it gives only two such examples: Caxton in 1490 (translating Virgil’s “uxorius”); and the 1589 *Arte of English Poesie*, that I have attributed to Oxford. We might add Henry IV’s description of Prince Hal’s low life in the taverns as “wanton and effeminate”; and Romeo’s complaint that Juliet “hath made me effeminate.”

Another quirky word: “rere-banquet,” meaning “a sumptuous meal taken late at night.” The third example in the OED is from *The Arte of English Poesie*. The fifth is from this translation of *Decameron*. Assuming this translation is the one entered into the Stationers’ Register in 1587, it has the first three uses of “logger-headed” for stupid. Assuming an earlier date of composition of *Love’s Labour’s Lost*, it was coined in that play. It is also used in *The Taming of the Shrew*.

It is one of only three works published in 1620 that use the word “steepy” to mean “steep.” Oxford had used “steepy” as early as 1567 in his translation of Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* (EEBO lists no earlier use). It is also in the phrase “age’s steepy night” in Sonnet 63. And it was used in 1597 by his literary secretary John Lyly in *The Woman in the Moone*, as well as in a 1602 translation by Anthony Munday. One is reminded of the similar “*paly* flames”; “*stilly* sounds”; and “*vasty* fields of France” in *Henry V*, as well as four other times Shakespeare used this comparatively rare spelling of vasty. In writing poetry, the unstressed “y” suffix facilitated iambic meter. Oxford’s reason for using it in prose may have reflected his love of “infinite variety” in spelling.

Story III.ix is well known to be a source for *All’s Well That Ends Well*. In his translation, Oxford emphasizes a parallel with his own life. The Italian version said “morto il conte e lui nelle mani del re lasciato...” (“once the Count [his father] died, he was left in the hands of the king”; Maçon wrote the same in French). But Oxford translates this as “Old Count Isnard dying, yong Bertrand fell as a *Ward* to the King...” (my emphasis). Oxford became the first royal ward in Elizabeth’s new wardship system, after the 16<sup>th</sup> Earl (“Conte” in Italian) died in 1562. Later in the story, the Italian version has the king say to Bertrand, “Beltramo, voi siete omai grande e fornito” [“Beltramo, you are henceforth great and provided”]. Once more, Oxford’s longer



English translation introduces a key autobiographical word—again, it is not in Maçon: “Noble Count, it is not unknowne to us, that you are a Gentleman of great honour, and it is our royall pleasure, to discharge your *wardship*” (emphasis added; only instance of “discharge your wardship” in EEBO). It is likely that Oxford thus drew attention to a pivotal parallel with his life not only because he identified with Bertrand, but because he wished that at least some readers of his manuscript translation would recognize this parallel with his life. It would lead readers to understand, further, that Oxford identified with Bertrand's unwillingness to marry the woman he was ordered to marry. Oxfordians have speculated that one reason he borrowed the “bed trick” from this story for *AWTW* is that his wife Anne played this very trick on him before he left for Italy in 1575. However, we must be cautious in making too much of this since Rebhorn reports that “The bed trick, which is central to Boccaccio's plot, was a widely diffused motif in both Eastern and Western story collections in the Middle Ages” (Rebhorn 889 n.1).

In story V.iii there is the intriguing phrase, “he had a conceit [idea] *hammering in his head*...” The italicized phrase was used in a 1581 work by Henri Estienne. The OED reports that the transitive verb “to hammer,” in definition II.3.b., means “of an idea: to present itself persistently in one's mind as matter of debate; to be in agitation.” The second example it gives is in *Titus Andronicus* II.iii.39, when Aaron says, “Blood and revenge are *hammering in my head*.”

In V.iv we find “There shall we heare the *sweete Birds sing*,” recalling that highlighted phrase in *The Rape of Lucrece* (line 922), as well as “where late the *sweet birds sang*” in Sonnet 73, and “the *sweet birds*, O, how they *sing*!” in *The Winter's Tale* (IV.iii). The only other example of “sweet birds sing” in EEBO before 1620 is in an Ignoto poem in *England's Helicon* (“The unknowne Shepheards complaint”). I agree with Looney that Ignoto was one of Oxford's pen names, further connecting the 1620 work with Oxford.

In V.viii there is the wonderful phrase, “the onely fuell which fed this *furious fire*” (just “son amour” in Maçon). “Kindled a *furious fyre*” occurs in the 1562 poem “Romeus and Juliet,” thought by some Oxfordians to be written by a young Oxford. Thomas Adams, in his 1614 *The devills banket*, also used the phrase “like Porcupines quills” as a trope for shooting “bitter invectives”; but only this translator used the lively trope of “*his haire stoode upright like Porcupines quills*.” *Hamlet* (I.v) includes the phrase, spoken by the Ghost: “I could a tale unfold whose lightest word/ Would harrow up thy soul...*And [make] each particular hair to stand on end/ Like quills upon the fretful porcupine*.” Again, a complex phrase and image in the 1620 work with strong Shakespearean associations.

In Vi.vii Phillippa argues that she never refused to have sex with her husband, but her libido is stronger than his. She asks the judge, “what should I doe with the *over-plus* remaining in mine owne power, and whereof he had no need?” “Over-plus” here means excess libido. The OED gives the first use of this meaning of “over-plus” as “excess” in Shakespeare’s Sonnet 135: “Thou hast they Will, and Will to boote, and Will in *over-plus*.” “Will” here means “carnal appetite”; the OED gives two examples of this definition 2 from Shakespeare.

In Oxford’s private letters, he favored double vowels in words that were seldom spelled that way in his time. This translation also favors such spellings, including “wee,” “hee,” and “shee.” It uses “woorthy,” which is found in only three other works in 1620, whereas “worthy” is used 40 times as often (and “woorthy” was used about 20 times per year between 1582 and 1588).

It has the first EEBO instance of “wedding and bedding,” referring to a couple who marry only hours after their first meeting. So, the phrase does a good job of capturing the fast pace of such a courtship. “Logger-headed” (stupid) is used three times in the 1620 translation, and is also used in *Taming of the Shrew*. “Loggerhead” was probably coined in *Love’s Labour’s Lost*. The translation includes one of the earliest uses of “mountainets” (little mountains, a trope for a woman’s breasts).

Caroline Spurgeon observed that one of Shakespeare’s favorite images was the human body in motion. She wrote, “Indeed, pictures drawn from the body and bodily actions form the largest single sections of Shakespeare’s imagery” (49). “This marked delight in swift nimble bodily movement leads one to surmise...that Shakespeare himself was as agile in body as in mind...” (50). Oxford was indeed highly regarded for both his jousting as well as his dancing skills, winning three tournament jousts and even being asked by Elizabeth to dance for her French guests. Oxford’s *Arte of English Poesie* has an extended passage that compares the long and short syllables of the “feet” in Greek and Latin poetry with different speeds at which runners move in a race. Similarly, the 1620 translation uses the trope of a race: “The field is very large and spacious, wherein all this day we have walked, and there is not any one here, so wearied with running the former races, but nimbly would adventure on many more, so copious are the alterations of Fortune, in sad repetition of her wonderfull changes; and among the infinity of her various courses [meaning “races”—OED def. 3], I must make addition of another...” (loc. 2859).

Spurgeon also noted that Shakespeare is closely attentive to changes in a person’s complexion, as an outward manifestation of their emotional state. “Shakespeare’s intense interest in the human face has never, I believe, been

adequately noticed...above all, the way he continually makes us *see* the emotions of his characters by chasing changes of colors in their cheeks" (58). So it is notable that, in II.ix, the translator renders "nel viso cambiato" (with a changed face) as "by the changing of his *colour*" (emphasis added). This is said of Bernardo, when he falsely believes his wife has been unfaithful to him.

The 1565–67 translation of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, which I have attributed to Oxford (see 2018 *Oxfordian*), transformed the original Latin to a much longer and even more ribald English poem. Similarly, the 1620 translation is also longer and more ribald than Boccaccio's original, and certainly more salacious than Salviati's expurgated Italian edition. We might recall in this context Sidney Lee's description that Oxford's "guardian Cecil found his [Oxford's] sense of humour a source of grave embarrassment" (*DNB*, 1899).

The 1620 translation made many changes from the original Italian. In I.iii the Italian reads "In queste nostre contrade" ("in our district"; similarly, in Maçon, "En cestuy nostre pais"); the translation changes this to, "Not far from Alexandria..." More boldly, the 1620 version invents the racy detail that, every three years, the Sultan had three virgins from a convent sent to him, for purposes that are left to the reader's imagination. Masetto is transformed into "a yong Hebrew" in the translation. Oxford thus adds an interfaith element to Boccaccio's tale, playing off the Christian nuns against the Muslim Sultan and the Jewish gardener who sleeps with the nuns.

The translation adds a complaint from the nun who first proposes having sex with Masetto that "we are barred [from sexual pleasure] by our unkind parents, binding us to perpetuall chastity, which they were never able to observe themselves. A sister of this house once told me, that before her turne came to be sent to the Soldane [Sultan], she fell in frailty, with a man that was both lame and blinde, and discovering the same to her Ghostly Father in confession; he absolved her of that sinne; affirming, that she had not transgressed with a man, because he wanted his rationall and understanding parts." Further, the translator introduces a blasphemous trope in comparing the nuns' sexual liaison with Masetto with confession—"having beene with Masetto at this new former of confession, where enjoyned (by him) such an easie and silent penance, as brought them the oftner to shrift [confession], and made him to prove a perfect Confessour." Anti-papal sentiment in England would have permitted such a mocking of Catholic tradition given the political violence of the Counter-Reformation along with Pope Pius's excommunication of Elizabeth in 1570. Only in the English does Masetto ponder that "he had undertaken a taske belonging to great Hercules, in giving [sexual] contentment to so many." This story also coins the phrase "misse-proud," meaning "perversely proud."

## Connections to Works by Oxford's Secretaries

We do not know with certainty just what Oxford's several literary secretaries did on his behalf. Research for his literary works? Other, more active forms of literary collaboration with Oxford, such as collaborating with him on this translation? Given their reputations as respected writers, it is unlikely that they simply prepared fair copies of his revised manuscripts. Since it is possible that they sometimes offered their names to Oxford as allonyms for some of his anonymous works, I believe it is legitimate to include here several parallels between their works and the 1620 translation.

"Defailance" [failure] (II.vi) is used once in the 1620 book; it is found also in a 1618 publication of Munday. "Lineature" (outline) (II.vi), also used once here, is found only ten other times in EEBO; the first two (1592 and 1595) are written or translated by Munday. "Imbarment" (prohibition or hindrance) occurs twice in this translation and is in seven other EEBO works; the second is Anthony Munday's "*A Brieve Chronicle*," where it is also used twice. "Interparlance" (conference or conversation) (II.viii) occurs three times. It is found in six EEBO works, with its fourth use being Munday.<sup>15</sup>

"His vertues and commendable qualities" (III.v) recalls that Munday's 1611 *Brieve chronicle* has the second EEBO use of "good *vertues, and commendable qualities*." The italicized phrase is used two other times in the 1620 translation. "Griefe and melancholy" are used in this story and in two other works in 1620; they were used by Munday in his 1590 *The first booke of Amadis of Gaule*. "Chinkes and crannies" occurs here, and Munday used the phrase in 1618. Snout speaks of "a crannied hole or chink" in *Midsummer Night's Dream* (V.i).

V.v. has "Overcome with excesse of joy, which made the teares to trickle downe his cheekes...." Tears were said to trickle down a person's cheeks in a 1577 work of Eusebius, translated by one Meredith Hanmer, and published by Vautroullier. Tears next trickled down cheeks in Munday's translation of the 1588 *Palmerin D'Oliva*, where they did so no less than five times, with exactly the same wording we find in the 1620 *Decameron*: "[made] the teares to trickle downe his cheekes." Once again, this would suggest some connection between Oxford and Munday. And we might further note that it was "joy" that caused the tears to trickle in both 1588 and in 1620. Further, the 1620 passage is "Overcome with excesse of *joy* which made *the teares to trickle downe his cheekes*, he proffered to *embrace* and kisse the Maide...." Similarly, in one example from Munday, "With these wordes the King *embraced* him, and meere *joy* caused the *teares to trickle downe his cheekes*" (in chap. 18). Given the number of parallels, it seems worthwhile to dwell on these superabundant similarities that support the possibility that Oxford and Munday collaborated on the translation.

The translation uses the rare word “furtherous” (advantageous) five times. It is also used in two works signed by Munday. Similarly, “Beating and misusing” occurs three times in this translation; it was used in 1590 by Munday and was used only one other time in EEBO.

In 1584, John Southern dedicated a book of poetry titled *Pandora* to Oxford (“Pandora” is a Greek word meaning “all gifts,” and it refers to the mythical first human female, but it was used only in the 1584 book's title, not its contents). Although he may well have written it himself, Southern attributed to Oxford's wife Anne some poetry in memory of her son, who died soon after his birth the previous year. In III.ii Oxford writes, “he sent a woman to me, one of his Pandoraes, as it appeared.” The first four uses of Pandoraes in EEBO all refer to “Pandoraes boxe.” But the next five examples do not; they are all in *The Woman in the Moone*, the 1597 play by John Lyly, one of Oxford's literary secretaries. Departing from “Pandoraes boxe,” Lyly speaks of Pandoraes's thoughts; hart; brest; name; and harmes. So, Oxford and Lyly are unlike other authors at the time in separating Pandora from her box, and possibly alluding to Southern's book, publicly connected with Oxford and his wife.

V.vi has the alliterative phrase “maiden modesty,” that was first used in Shakespeare's *Much Ado about Nothing*. John Lyly may have been the first to use the closely related “maidenly modesty” in 1578. In VIII.x we find “open scorn.” It was used for the fifth time in EEBO by Lyly in 1580; it is an uncommon word doublet. Finally, *Decameron* is the only 1620 work to use the spelling “unkle.” That spelling had only been used in 15 earlier works, according to EEBO; the second was by Angel Day—another of Oxford's literary secretaries.

## Conclusions

What would have attracted Oxford to this particular work? First, it was a classic of Italian literature, and we know that Oxford loved Italy so much that he spent a year traveling there, then set 10 of his subsequent plays in Italy (Roe 3). For another, Boccaccio helped establish Italian as a respectable language for prose works, as Dante and Petrarch had done for poetry. Since Oxford was strongly committed to elevating the status of English as a suitable literary language for poetry and prose, Boccaccio may have served as a role model in this regard. There is another personal connection with *Decameron*: the year after his father died in 1562 and he began living with Sir William Cecil, London experienced an epidemic that killed as much as 25 percent of its inhabitants. Put another way: the death of Oxford's father was shortly followed by the death of a quarter of the population of his new home of London. Once again, in the years 1585–87, England suffered another outbreak of plague,



which may have reminded Oxford of those earlier times. Indeed, in Oxford's day, *Decameron* would have been one of the best-known books about living through a plague.<sup>16</sup>

Just as today, while we try to survive the COVID-19 pandemic, we feel a special kinship with books about plagues and pandemics, Oxford would likely have had similar feelings about Boccaccio's collection of stories. A more speculative connection—we know Oxford suffered from a severe case of jealousy of his wife Anne. After Anne's death in 1588, he seemed to overcome that malady, and even to condemn his own past troubles with pathological marital jealousy in characters such as Othello and Leontes. Possibly, he was attracted to the many stories in *Decameron* about cuckolded wittols who suffered from gullibility (e.g., "Credulano") and a pathological *lack* of jealousy. Such stories may have helped him rationalize and justify his past suspicions that his Anne's first child was not his.

In the translation and its dedication, Oxford comes full circle from his adolescent translation of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. In his commentaries on both works, he defends them from charges of encouraging vice by disingenuous claims that sinful behavior in both works is depicted solely as a warning to avoid it. Here, "every true and upright judgement, in observing the course of these well carried Novels, shall plainly perceive, that there is no spare made of reproofe in any degree whatsoever, where sin is embraced, and grace neglected; but the just deserving shame and punishment thereon inflicted, that others may be warned by their example."

I think this essay makes Oxford's role as translator of this 1620 work a plausible hypothesis. At the very least, I have brought the attribution of it to John Florio into question. Naturally, other explanations for the parallels I have found with Shakespeare's works are possible but not likely, for the anonymous translator would have had to know the works of Shakespeare and of his literary secretaries so well that he could borrow from them with ease.

To date, we have failed to give Oxford credit for the full range of his brilliant literary creativity. In this case, I hope other scholars will further investigate his possible translation of *Decameron*.

### Acknowledgments

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## Endnotes

1. 1620 was relatively late, as the book had already been translated into Spanish, Catalan, and German during the 15<sup>th</sup> Century.
2. In April 2020 I felt moved to read *Decameron* for the first time, partly as a way of coping with the COVID-19 pandemic. Only after I finished it three weeks later did I learn that its first complete English translation was anonymous, and that realization compelled me to investigate further.
3. Walter suggests that Shakespeare found in *Decameron* a variety of strong female voices (think, for example, of Ghismonda, quoted at the beginning of this essay): "Shakespeare's reading of the novella tradition... registers an appreciation of female agency and personhood" (loc. 191). As Oxford was writing plays with Queen Elizabeth as the most salient member of his audience, it is understandable that he highlighted these female voices. Importantly, Walter states that "there is no single conduit for novella plot sources into Shakespeare plays, and indeed, most of Shakespeare's novellesque sources are not found in Painter (i.e., Painter's *Palace of Pleasure*). And only half of the major novella plot sources Shakespeare borrowed for his comedies were available in English translation during his lifetime" (loc. 525).
4. Wright suggests Shakespeare may have known French well enough to read Maçon's translation (H.G. Wright, 1955); he speculates that Shakespeare borrowed the wager theme in *Cymbeline* from Maçon's translation, not from Painter's. Apparently, Wright did not seriously question the assumption that Shakespeare wrote Shakespeare, nor consider the possibility that someone whose knowledge of French and Italian are well documented wrote the works of "Shakespeare," as well as this 1620 translation.
5. In his address "To the Reader," Jaggard refers to receiving "a ragged written Copy" of the translation. In this context, "ragged" is consistent with a manuscript that was, by 1620, some 33 years old.
6. Guyda Armstrong suggests this possible scenario (220). Yet Wright demonstrates convincingly that the 1620 translator did not go as far as Salviati in removing material that was insulting to the Church:  
[T]he translation of 1620 is far from agreeing with Salviati's main object in suppressing all criticism of priests, monks and friars. On

the contrary, it conforms to Boccaccio's intention by exhibiting their greed and hypocrisy, their luxurious living and extravagance in dress, their sensuality and lasciviousness, and the wantonness of nuns is exposed with equal candor." Unlike Salviati, he did not transform monks and friars into judges and physicians. "Again, unlike Salviati, the English translator shows no concern to screen the Pope and the cardinals from the consequences of worldly living, and he makes no attempt to remove all suggestion that Papal authority may not be omnipotent.... Nor does he reveal any anxiety lest ridicule should be cast on Paradise and Purgatory, confession, canonization and holy relics, prayer and worship" (Wright, 1936, 506–7).

7. From his recurrent imagery, Caroline Spurgeon concluded that Shakespeare "loved horses" (204).
8. Spurgeon observed that a large number of Shakespeare's nature images came from the "sea, ships and seafaring" (47).
9. H. Wright wrote of "the ease with which legal metaphors came to the translator's mind" (1953, 17). Many scholars have described Shakespeare's sophisticated legal knowledge; Oxford had formal legal training, having matriculated at Gray's Inn in 1567 when he was 17 years of age.
10. "Still more conspicuous than his knowledge of drama is the translator's delight in music.... Music provides him with numerous metaphors" (H. Wright, 1953, 20–21). Music or musical metaphors occur in every Shakespeare play; Oxford's musical skills were described by Elizabethan composer John Farmer as that of a professional.
11. Munday knew both French and Italian and had traveled throughout France and Italy.
12. Oxford's depiction of inner conflict in the plays is one of the ways he anticipated Freud's discoveries about the mind in conflict. H. Wright perceptively comments on the similar interest of the 1620 translator: "In particular he is fond of employing the word 'halfe' to convey a state of mind or an intensity of emotion. We may mention 'halfe of the mind', 'halfe suspecting', 'halfe perswaded'..." (103).
13. Capital Roman numerals indicate the day of the story, whereas lower case numerals indicate which story of that day.
14. Note Caroline Spurgeon on Shakespeare's frequent use of imagery alluding to facial signs of inner emotions, especially blushing.

15. EEBO changed between May 2020, when I began this research, and late July, when its earlier version disappeared. Unfortunately, searches now seem to deliver a variety of results. Even when one activates the option to search for spelling variants, few such variants are returned with one's search.
16. Does the raciness of the book have anything to do with the Black Death? Perhaps. An April 20, 2020 *New York Times* article by Diana Spechler reported a large increase in "nude selfies" during the 2020 pandemic. It linked this surge with the bawdy tales in Boccaccio during the 1348 pandemic. And, from the May 20, 2020 *New York Times*: "Dutch officials said that if one partner was isolated because of suspected or confirmed coronavirus infection, sex at a distance was still possible, such as by *telling erotic stories*" (my emphasis).

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# *Shakespeare's Tranect and the Traghetto of Lizza Fusina*

by Catherine Hatinguais

Now, Balthazar, as I have ever found thee honest, true,  
So let me find thee still: Take this same letter,  
And use thou all the endeavour of a man,  
In speed to Padua; see thou render this  
Into my cousin's hand, Doctor Bellario;  
And, look, what notes and garments he doth give thee,  
Bring them, I pray thee, with imagin'd speed  
**Unto the Tranect, to the common ferry**  
**Which trades to Venice;** waste no time in words,  
But get thee gone; I shall be there before thee.

*Merchant of Venice*, Act III, scene IV, 45–55

**T***ranect* is a mysterious word, unique to Shakespeare's *Merchant of Venice* and found, capitalized, both in the 1600 “good” Quarto (Q1) and the 1623 First Folio.<sup>1</sup> As such, it has often baffled readers and commentators. That *Tranect* raises echoes of the Italian *traghetto* and that it is somehow connected to a ferry is beyond dispute. But how? By what geographic association or linguistic derivation? What may have come into play in Shakespeare's choice of the word?

With the notable exceptions of Malone, Knight and Elze, past editors have usually not ventured beyond linguistic explanations to investigate the locales

and navigation methods which Shakespeare may be alluding to, however obliquely. Further, over the course of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, editors have increasingly converged on Rowe's 1709 emendation (II, 569) of Tranect to "traject," based on a hypothetical misread of Shakespeare's manuscript by the printers.<sup>2</sup> Disregarding the alternative derivation of the word from *trana* proposed by earlier editors, they no longer bother to explain their choice in any detail:<sup>3</sup> what was earlier a reasoned but tentative solution has somehow hardened into received wisdom. For the latest editions of *The Merchant of Venice*, "traject," it is.

We are going to look anew at the issue by exploring the historical and geographical context which may throw some light on the matter. But first, we need to survey the etymological terrain.

## From *Trajectus* to *Traghetto*

The *Grande Dizionario della Lingua Italiana* (GDLI XXI, 132–3, 135–6) and Pianigiani's *Vocabolario Etimologico della Lingua Italiana* (II, 1452) agree: the late Latin *trajectare*, formed on *trajectum*, supine of the classical Latin *Trajicere* (Trans: beyond + *Jicere*, "to throw over, across or through; to pierce; to transfer or ship across") gave rise to the three Italian words which all express the idea of crossing or conveying from one place to another, of going beyond, more specifically of crossing or conveying across, a river, canal or stretch of sea: (1) *Tragittare* (or the now rarer *Tragettare*); (2) the literary *Traiettare*; and (3) the Venetian *Tragbettare*—which crucially, as we will see, also has the specific meaning to cross a mountain and to haul a boat over land. Besides the simple idea of moving between two spatially distant points, therefore, *tragbettare* involves the concept of conveying someone or something over or across an obstacle: from one shore to the other across a waterway, or from one waterway to another over a strip of land.

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Similarly, the associated Latin noun *trajectus*, a crossing, a passing over or a landing, a passage, a crossing place, a boarding place (Riddle 1288; Lewis & Short 1887) is mirrored by the three Italian nouns which are largely, though not entirely, synonymous (specific or secondary usages need not concern us here). The definitions mostly overlap and can be summarized as follows (GDLI):

- Tragitto* (It.): The act or process of crossing a territory (on foot or vehicle).  
A journey; an itinerary or route; a shortcut; a trajectory.  
The act of crossing a waterway; a river or sea journey.  
A boarding place.
- Traietto* (Lit.): The boarding or crossing place, specifically a river or canal.
- Traghetto* (Ven.): The act of conveying people, animals, vehicles or goods by boat;  
A river or sea crossing.  
The place where a river, canal or stretch of sea is crossed, where a ferry service is available.  
The act of conveying across a territory.
- Barca da traghetto*: ferry boat.

The currently ubiquitous emendation of *Tranect* to *traject*<sup>4</sup> cannot be sustained as a straightforward transcription of the sound of the Venetian *traghetto* (with its hard <g>, it is closer to “tracket”). It can be justified only if we assume that Shakespeare remembered and borrowed the Latin source word of the same meaning, i.e., the noun *trajectus*, and that he then Anglicized it to *traject*.<sup>5</sup> Indeed, it is not unreasonable to think Shakespeare perfectly capable of such multilingual acrobatics, turning into English a Latin root-word to express an Italian reality for his English audience.

## From the Medieval Latin *trana* to Shakespeare’s *Tranect*?

Nevertheless, the possibility of an affinity with *tranare*,<sup>6</sup> as suggested by Malone (V, 101 n8), Steevens (189 n7), Cowden-Clarke and Knight (Furness 177–8 n55), is not so easy to dismiss if we look closer at the navigation techniques and hydraulic works in use in the 16<sup>th</sup> Century. Let us put aside for now the hypothesis of a misprint and look instead at Malone’s idea that *Tranect* is a deliberate creation derived from *trana*.

*Trana* (Medieval Latin), a cognate of *traha* (Classical Latin), has the general meaning of “sledge.” In Italian, *traino* refers to “the act of towing” (GDLI XXI, 139), and to “a hauled vehicle without wheels, such as a sledge” (Pianigiani II, 1453) and *Trainare/tranare* means “to haul.”

If we follow Malone's lead pointing to the entry *Trana* in Du Cange's Glossary of Medieval Latin (VI, 636), we find that *trana* is attested in various quotations, with two distinct though somewhat unsettled meanings:

- 1) a seaside dammed fishing pond or fish-garth (Lat. *piscatoria*, *piscaria*; It. *Peschiera*, *Pescaia*; Fr. *Pescherie*), seemingly derived from a late Greek word, *τράνας*.
- 2) a wheelless vehicle or sledge, derived from the Latin *trahinare*, “to drag, to haul,” and a cognate of the Italian *traino*. This second meaning, of more relevance to our context, is indirectly confirmed by a scattering of sources which define the derivative *tranaticum* as the tax on goods conveyed by sledge (Saint Genis 209; Mercante 607;<sup>7</sup> Milman III, 139) or on anything other than a cart (Migne 2213; Montignot 288), where the suffix *-aticum* indicates payment, tax or due (Jacob ix).

This derivative of *trana*, *tranaticum*, (with its recurring, though erroneous, variant *tranicticum* resulting from an early misread) (Du Cange VI, 636) is a term of medieval commercial law found in many charters of the Carolingian era (8th and 9th Centuries). This was only one of a multitude of tolls (Desmichels 157–8 n3) which merchants were expected to pay to local lords at each river crossing, city gate or river port. It is tempting to see here a possible affinity with Shakespeare's Tranect.<sup>8</sup> It should be noted, however, that the many taxes and duties enumerated in the above-mentioned charters may not have all remained in effect much beyond the early Middle Ages; that they may not have been exacted in all regions of the former Carolingian empire—which included the vast Lombard kingdom—or have been known locally under the same name. For example, Muratori (I, 324) states that most of the peculiar taxes listed in the Frankish charters, including the *tranaticum*, are **not** found in Italian records, where other terms are recorded instead, such as the ubiquitous and enduring *ripaticum* (var. *rivaticum*) (It. *ripatico*), a duty on mooring and unloading or selling goods on river landings or quays (Migne, 1945, 1947) and the more generic *dazi* and *gabelle*.

Italian cities and princes were as assiduous as any in collecting tolls and customs duties on pilgrims and merchants at the city gates, river ports and crossings, but the *tranaticum* does not seem to figure among them. It seems also highly unlikely that *tranaticum* would have left any trace in the spoken language of 16<sup>th</sup> Century Venetian boatmen which could have inspired



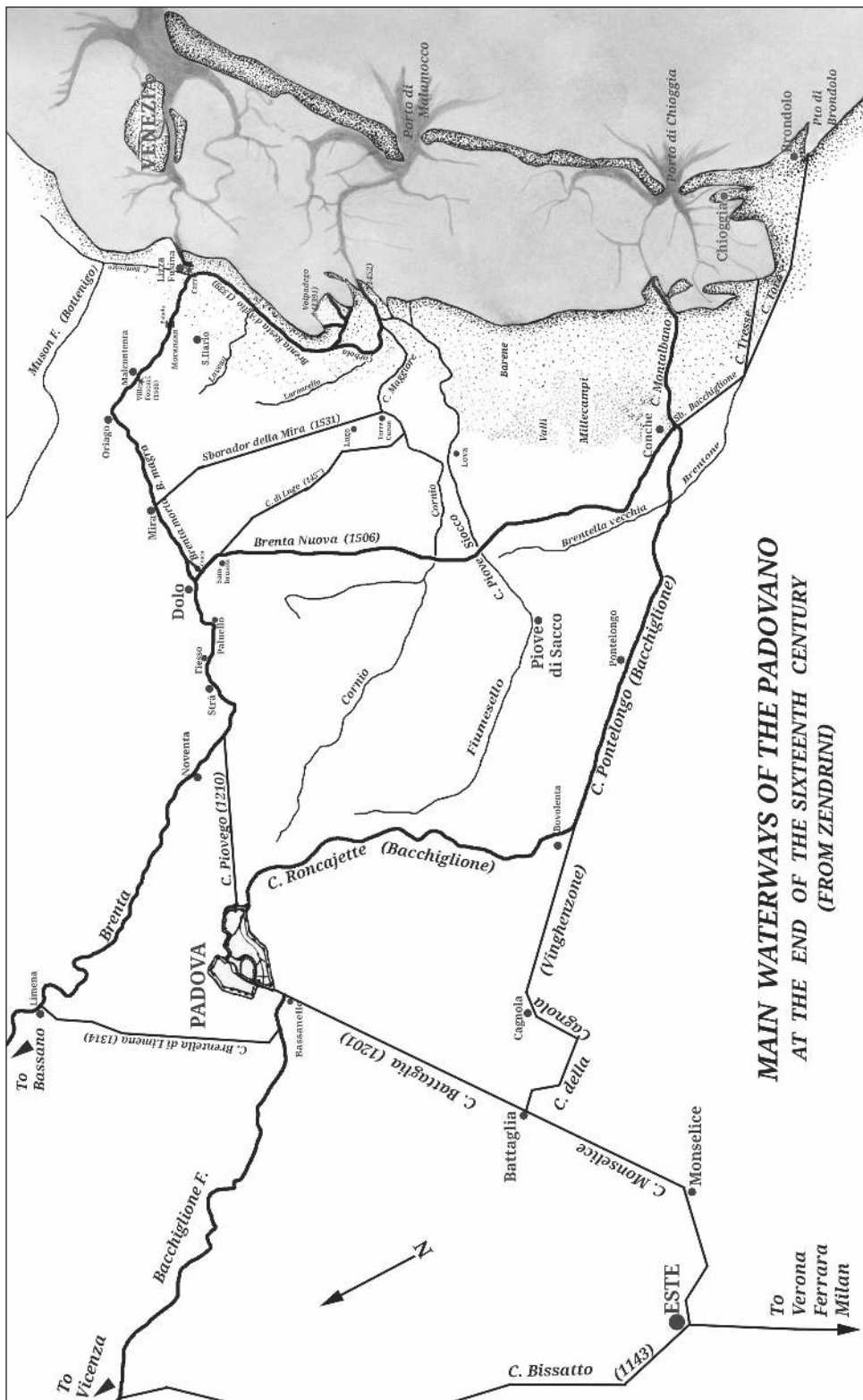
Shakespeare's Tranect, and neither Boerio nor Mutinelli record any word close to it in their dictionaries of the Venetian dialect. But students of Latin during the Renaissance would certainly have known the suffix—*-aticum*. Like Du Cange later in the 17<sup>th</sup> Century, they may even have been aware of the old word *tranaticum* and its meaning.<sup>9</sup> Would law students in 16<sup>th</sup> Century England have had occasion to become familiar with Continental feudal law during their studies? It is impossible to know without further research. So the tantalizing but tenuous hypothesis of a kinship between the rather obscure *tranaticum*/*traniticum* and Tranect, must remain for now just a conjecture.

Not so the more widely used root-word *trana*, with its better-known meaning of “sled.” If Malone is correct in suspecting that *trana* might be at the root of Tranect, what sledge or hauling operation could Shakespeare have been possibly referring to? Whatever his ultimate linguistic source, Shakespeare means a very specific place or thing that is associated with a ferry connecting the mainland to Venice. That place is close to Belmont, itself located somewhere on the road to Padua. It is time for a visit, and a little history.

## The Brenta and Lizza Fusina

The river Brenta<sup>10</sup> is mentioned by all foreign visitors of the early modern era on their way from Padua to Venice, such as Moryson, Coryat, Montaigne, Villamont and others. It later became, in the late 17<sup>th</sup> to 19<sup>th</sup> Century, an obligatory destination for travelers on the Grand Tour. They marveled at the beauty of the rural estates and opulence of the villas built on its banks by Venetian patricians and at the luxury of the burchielli shuttling between those estates, Padua and Venice; and they brought back home Canaletto's and Costa's engravings depicting its delights (Manfrin, “Brenta” 35). But the history of its complex and changing hydrography (figure 1) goes back much further.<sup>11</sup>

In Roman times and until the 10<sup>th</sup> Century the course of the Brenta (then named *Medoacus maior*), coming down from the Alps through Bassano, is thought to have swerved around Padua, then flowed in a roughly southerly direction to join with the Bacchiglione (then called *Medoacus minor*) and entered the Adriatic near the southern tip of the Venetian lagoon (Bonde-san and Furlanetto 187–8, figure 4). By the 11<sup>th</sup> Century, however, several small distributaries had been cut into its left bank, perhaps initially to power watermills. Over time these streams diverted more and more of its waters into the southern half of the lagoon, draining and ultimately deactivating the old river, so that by the 14<sup>th</sup> Century the abandoned ancient riverbed became known as the Brenta secca (Zendrini 15; Poppi 104).



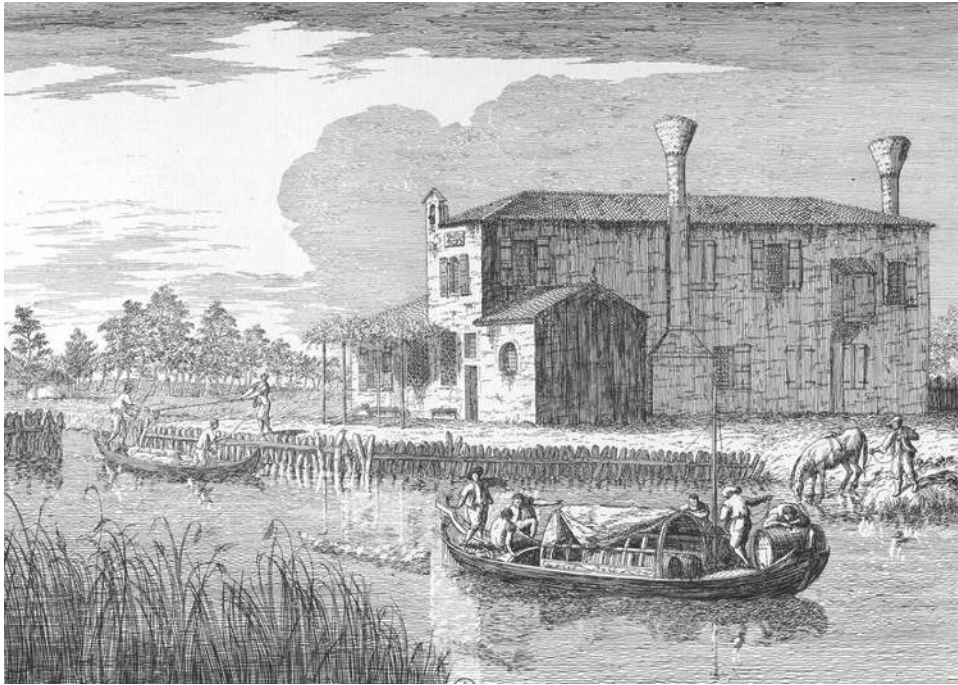
Sometime between 1142 and 1146 the Paduan government either enlarged an existing minor branch of the Brenta or, perhaps taking advantage of a recent breach in its left bank near Noventa or Fiesso (figure 1), created a brand-new channel (Bortolami 225; Corro 113–4) which became what we know today as the Brenta, with its eastward course. The Paduans were aiming to convey water more directly to the lagoon of Venice through the S. Ilario Monastery delta (Bondesan and Furlanetto 189), a marshy area which sat in the vicinity of Fusina, right across the island city of Venice (Mola 447). It is unclear whether they intended to harm Venetian strategic and economic interests or were simply trying to protect their lands from flooding by draining the waters into the lagoon more efficiently (Averone 12; Zendrini I, 17–9). In response to this tampering with the estuary at Fusina, which threatened the lagoon with increased silt inflow, Venice launched (and won) its first land war against Padua (Brown *Sketch*, 94–5). The mid-12<sup>th</sup> Century in fact marked the beginning of over two centuries of tensions and frequent open warfare between Padua and Venice, often involving disputes over land boundaries, land reclamation and water management (Poppi 90–103). The strife would end only when Padua came under Venetian control in 1405.

In 1210 the Paduans, eager to further facilitate river trade with Venice along the newly activated eastward branch of the Brenta, dug the Piovego canal to connect the river, near Strà, directly to Padua and its main port, the Ognisanti or Portello (Orlando 259). From Padua, boat traffic then used an extensive network of canals<sup>12</sup> to carry goods and passengers to Chioggia, Vicenza, Este, Ferrara, Verona, Mantua and beyond.

With the deactivation of the Brondolo branch of the Brenta, the river's flow and its mud were naturally redirected towards Fusina, facilitating both navigation to Venice and the silting up of the lagoon. Along this newly established course, trade flourished and began to transform the small village of Fusina, with its *palada*<sup>13</sup> and toll station (figure 2, page 8) where passing boats had to pay the *pedaggio di transito*, or transit dues (Caniato, "Commerci" 271).

However, by the 1290s the Venetians grew alarmed at the general state of the lagoon: progressive sedimentary infilling resulting from fluvial deposition was reducing the areas of open water, deactivating channels and making the tidal inlets increasingly narrow and shallow (Bondesan and Furlanetto 177). Indeed, by the beginning of the 14<sup>th</sup> Century, the silt deposited by the Brenta had in a single century created a peninsula, the Punta dei Lovi, pointing straight at the heart of Venice and threatening to connect it to the mainland (Costantini 29); the reed-beds, and the insalubrious air they reputedly exhaled, had advanced about two miles closer to the island city (Bortolami 226, 232; Zendrini 68).

◀ *Figure 1: Composite map of the Padovano and the southern part of the Venice lagoon at the end of the 16<sup>th</sup> Century.*



*Figure 2: 18<sup>th</sup> Century illustration (Veduta V) by Gianfrancesco Costa of the pal-lada del Moranzan, showing the tollhouse and the wooden river “gate.” A similar structure existed at Lizza Fusina in the 13<sup>th</sup> Century, before the embankment was created to bar the Brenta from the lagoon.*

Desperate to save the lagoon, its navigation channels and harbors,<sup>14</sup> the Venetians embarked on a centuries long, if halting,<sup>15</sup> effort to close off all the rivers flowing into the lagoon and to redirect their waters away from the city, via a series of canals that ran behind a powerful levee built all along the edge of the mainland.

In 1324, as part of this new hydraulic engineering scheme, the Venetians ordered that a large embankment be built at Fusina<sup>16</sup> to block the Brenta from entering the lagoon (Bortolami 232). Its flow was diverted via the canal Brenta di Restadaglio to a new mouth several miles to the south, in the Volpadeago<sup>17</sup> area (D’Alpaos 21, map). Boat traffic was redirected through the Volpadeago entrance, which inconveniently lengthened the journey (Costantini 30). Initially, to avoid damaging the Fusina levee, it was forbidden to haul boats over it as a shortcut or to use it as a tow path (Zendrini 69–71).

In 1452 the Brenta di Restadaglio was again redirected further south, this time from Volpadeago, via the Corbola and Maggiore canals, to a mouth situated across from Malamocco (Ciriacono, “Ingegneria idraulica” 242) (figure 1).

Predictably, the waters of the Brenta, denied a direct and easy outlet to the lagoon, backed up behind the dam during seasonal floods and damaged the



land reclaimed for agriculture around S. Ilario. In response to the complaints of local landowners, the Venetian authorities opted for an ambitious new approach. They ordered in 1488 that a major diversion of the Brenta be dug farther upstream, west of Mira. This diversion, called the Brenta Nuova, was completed only in 1507. It ran south from Dolo, through Sambruson to Conche, where it met the Bacchiglione (Zendrini 130). For a few decades both rivers were made to flow via the Montalbano canal into the lagoon of Chioggia; in 1577, however, they were finally redirected away from Chioggia further south to Brondolo, i.e., completely outside of the Venetian lagoon (Bondesan and Furlanetto 189).

As a result of this and subsequent upstream dams and diversions<sup>18</sup> towards Brondolo, the flow of water in the remaining eastward branch of the Brenta, from Dolo to Fusina, was greatly reduced, and in fact so slow was the current that the terminal stretches of the river became known as the Brenta morta and Brenta magra (Rampoldi I, 406) and that boats would sometimes have to be towed by horses to speed up travel even while going downstream as Moryson testifies (158–9). By the early 17<sup>th</sup> Century the wild Brenta river had finally been tamed into a placid canal, at times barely deep enough for navigation and no longer carrying enough silt to threaten the lagoon: the Fusina levee could therefore be removed. In 1615 it was finally dismantled and replaced by a pound lock at Moranzano, one mile upstream, and henceforth the salt water of the lagoon moved in up to that lock (Costantini 47).

After the removal, Lizza Fusina still served as a hub connecting the main road to Padua and water transport to Venice (Caniato 272), but otherwise lost much of its economic relevance in favor of towns further upstream, like Moranzano and Dolo. For travelers on the Grand Tour sailing on the river, it was barely noticeable: simply the place where the tow-horses were left behind and rowers took over (Lassels Part II, 221) and where, according to Brown (*Venice* 162) at the end of the nineteenth century, no houses remained of the once prosperous village except “the custom house and one little wine shop.”

This brief overview of the hydrographic evolution of the Brenta cannot do justice to the military conflicts and fitful struggles to “save the lagoon” from the inflows of river mud. For our purposes, suffice it to remember two facts abiding at the end of the 16<sup>th</sup> Century: the vital importance of the Brenta ever since the 13<sup>th</sup> Century as the shortest and most intensely traveled navigable waterway between Venice and the city of Padua (and far beyond); and the existence of an embankment at Fusina which remained in place from 1324 to 1615,<sup>19</sup> and which blocked the Brenta from entering the lagoon and therefore interrupted river traffic. An ingenious contraption, the famous *Carro* was built there to reconcile the need to facilitate trade by shortening the boats’ journey on the one hand, with the need to protect the earthen bank and the lagoon on the other.



## Lizza Fusina<sup>20</sup> and the *Carro* in the 16<sup>th</sup> Century

Malone, who had read carefully the written accounts of 16<sup>th</sup> and early 17<sup>th</sup> Century travelers, seems to have been the first to accurately locate Shakespeare's *Tranect* on the Brenta and to describe it as "a dam": "Twenty miles from Padua on the river Brenta there is a dam or sluice to prevent the water of that river from mixing with that of the marshes of Venice. Here the passage boat is drawn out of the river and lifted over the dam by a crane [Coryat's word]. From hence to Venice this distance is five miles. Perhaps some novel writer of Shakespeare's time might have called this dam by the name of the tranect" (V, 101).

Violet Jeffery, in a remarkable 1932 article, gave a fuller context and a more detailed description of Lizza Fusina (29) and its famous *Carro* (figure 3):

This passage [from *The Merchant of Venice*] gives yet another proof of the remarkably detailed quality of Shakespeare's knowledge of Venice. The traveller approaching Venice from the mainland could take a ferry to cross the lagoon at three points only: at Mestre, a tiny post-house and village of small importance, a ferry used chiefly by travellers to and from Germany; secondly at Chioggia, a much longer distance from Venice and used chiefly for communication with Central and Southern Italy; lastly at Lizza Fusina, a ferry of far greater importance, for it was on the direct route between Padua and Venice. The traveller who came from England, France, or Flanders would normally proceed to Milan, and thence through Verona and Padua to Venice, taking the ferry boat at Lizza Fusina<sup>21</sup>. . . . At this point the stream had been diverted by means of a huge dam, constructed in order to prevent the mixing of salt and fresh water and consequent damage to the low-lying land and to the lagoon itself. Large vessels bound for Venice were prevented by the dam from entering the lagoon at this point and were obliged to follow the course of the stream, entering the canal, Resta d'Algio,<sup>22</sup> and issuing into the lagoon from the unblocked mouth of the Brenta opposite Malamocco. But small vessels, and particularly the *burchiello*, on reaching the dam stopped there and were hauled across it by an ingenious contrivance, and then lowered into the lagoon. Thus, the journey was considerably shortened. This contrivance was known as the *carro*.

Magri (128), Roe (151) and Kreiler followed in Jeffery's footsteps, as indeed we do here.

Renaissance travel writers invariably found this astonishing machine worthy of note, some describing its design and operation in more detail than others. Beyond the often-quoted Moryson (159) and Coryat (I, 195), there were other witnesses in our story and together they give us a fuller picture of the journey along the river, of the dam and the *Carro* (all translations by the author).

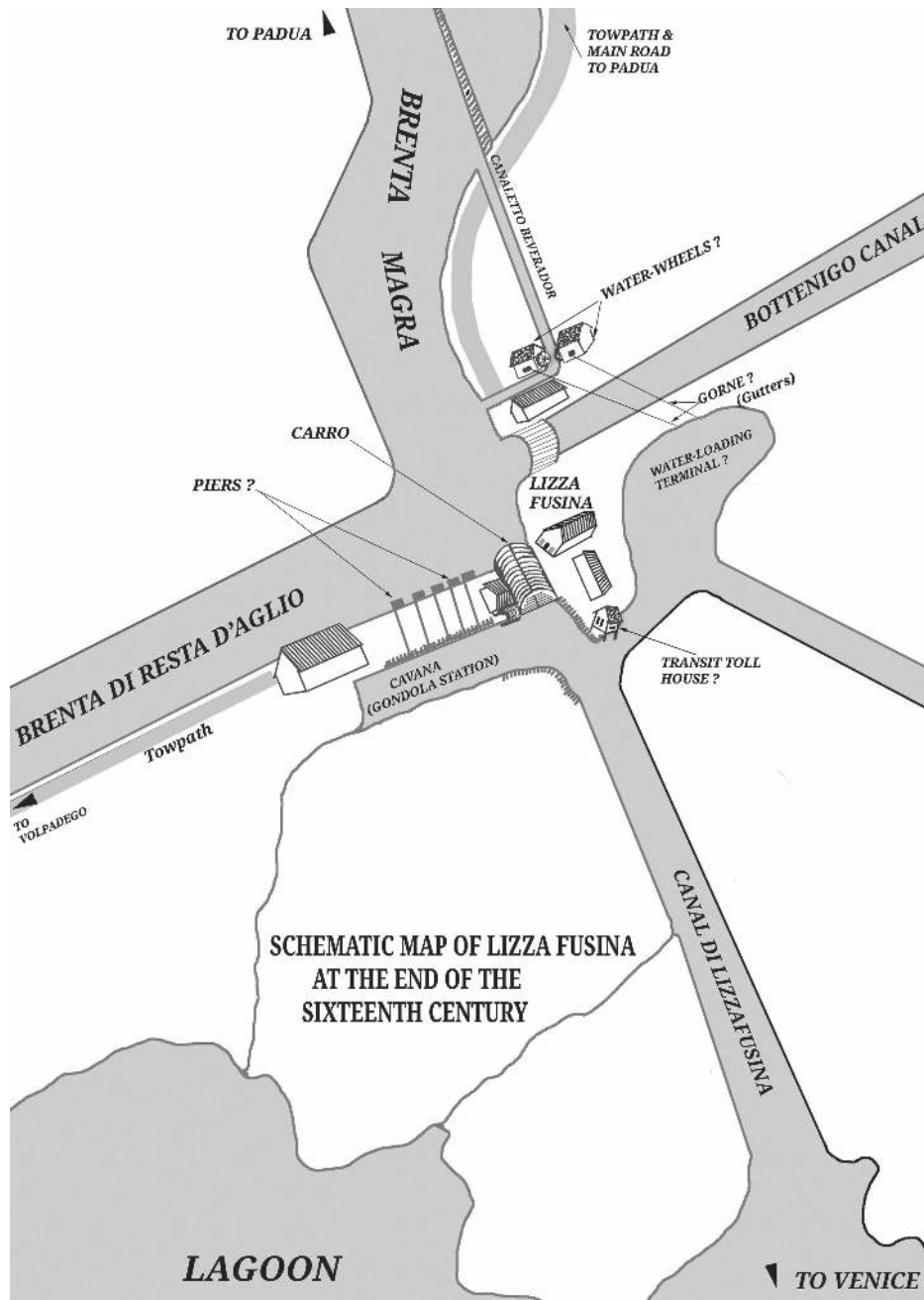


Figure 3: Map of Lizza Fusina at the end of the 16<sup>th</sup> Century. At the bottom, the Canal of Lizza Fusina, a channel in the lagoon connecting directly to the Giudecca canal in Venice. On the lagoon side of the embankment is the Cavana, the basin where the gondolas were waiting for their fares. The location of the gorne and the water-loading basin, and the identification of the five wooden piers and boardwalks, and of the stilt house on the Canal of Lizzafusina as a toll station, are all tentative.

Marin Sanuto, traveling in 1483 (Bruni 32–3), wrote: “we left our illustrious mother and city, Venice, at 11 on the Padua boat in the direction of Fusina, located five miles away, where the mainland begins; there stands a *Carro*, a marvelous machine that hauls the boats over the levee and conveys them into the river; there is another possible itinerary along the Resta di Aglio but it is much longer.”

Montaigne noted in 1580 (166):

We left [Padua, on horseback] early Saturday morning and followed a beautiful causeway along the river Brenta, surrounded by very fertile wheat fields, with rows of trees planted in an orderly fashion, onto which their grapevines climb<sup>23</sup>; and the way is lined with beautiful country estates, among them one of the villas of the Contarini family, which has by the door an inscription stating that the King [Henri III, in 1574] was a guest there on his way back [to France] from Poland. We reached...La Chaffousine, twenty miles [from Padua], where we had lunch. There is only an inn where people take to the water to get to Venice and where all the boats traveling on the river have to dock. Thanks to various gears and pulleys that two horses keep turning as they do with oil-mills, the boats are carried on wheels placed underneath, on a wooden platform, and are launched into the canal which connects to the sea [i.e., the short channel from Lizza Fusina to the open lagoon] where Venice lies. We had lunch there and having boarded a gondola, we traveled five miles to Venice, where we had supper. (figure 3)

Villamont, who visited Italy in 1588, recounts (431):

After crossing the sea [i.e. the lagoon] for five miles, we reached the traquet [Villamont's idiosyncratic transcription of the Italian *traghetto*] of Lizafousina, which is at the junction of the sea and the Brenta river; the said traquet [*traghetto*] is like a very large embankment which separates the sea from the river, but the place where the boats are raised is made of wood, onto which the boats are hoisted from the sea into the river by some machines that a horse keeps turning. The reason this traquet was built was to safeguard the fresh water and prevent it from mixing with salt water, because, from Lizafousina, it [fresh drinking water] is carried by boat to Venice.... From Lizafousina, one can go by coach to Padua if one wishes.

Hentzner in 1599 (217) puts it succinctly: “[Lizza Fusina]<sup>24</sup> where boats loaded with goods, are lifted from the waters by a machine with turning wheels and transferred back and forth across the dyke, from the lagoon to the river and from the river into the lagoon.”

Vinchant, who went through Lizza Fusina in 1609, just a few years before the dam and *Carro* were finally dismantled, also briefly mentions it (164): “The Venetians have blocked its [the Brenta river’s] mouth to the sea, diverting its course away, fearing that this river, carrying vast quantities of sand, would fill in the shallows everywhere and thus create a walkable path to Venice. Sailing on this river we reached Lucitusma [sic], which is where boats are raised and lowered by a machine they call *il carro*.”

The *Carro* was a spectacular example of an otherwise common structure, used since antiquity<sup>25</sup> and known throughout Europe, which was designed to allow boats to pass over an obstacle such as a dam or weir barring a river (and thus get from one reach to the next even when no lock was available<sup>26</sup>), a levee separating two nearby bodies of water or a ridge separating two watersheds. This type of structure is known by the generic term of “inclined plane” or “incline” (figures 4 & 5, pages 14 & 15). At their most primitive, inclines were just wooden slipways or even slopes of wet soil, where small boats could be hauled by hand over the obstacle, as was the case in many remote spots in the *valli*, the patchwork of ponds and marshland around the lagoon proper, where local fishermen built their fish traps. The more elaborate involved wooden rollers, ropes, wheels, and windlasses; in later centuries, inclines included cradles fastened under the boats and running on railway tracks, or caissons filled with water, in which the boats were transported while afloat.<sup>27</sup>

The specific design of the *Carro* of Lizza Fusina changed over the centuries. The invention of a particularly remarkable *Carro*, credited to Antonio Marini, is dated to around 1440 (Mola 450–1); this may have been the machine mentioned by Sanuto in 1483. By 1514 there were two *Carri* of different dimensions in operation: the main and older one, designed to haul large boats for a toll of eight pennies, and a more recent and simpler one alongside it, sufficient to handle smaller boats, with a toll of four pennies (Mola 460). A 1535 map of Fusina by Nicolò dal Cortivo shows two parallel wooden slipways, with machinery to one side, maybe the capstan recorded in a contemporary document as hauling the bigger boats. In 1549, the *Carro* was redesigned and rebuilt to use horsepower, instead of manpower as had been the case so far, and to ferry all sorts of boats. It is mentioned in documents of that time as “the new conveying machine operated with horses” (*il novo edificio di traghettare con il cavallo* or *il caro delle Saffusina dal cavallo*) (Mola 460–1). A 1563 map of Giacomo di Gastaldi shows a layout for Fusina that is basically unchanged from 1535 but depicts a large-roofed structure sheltering the slipways of the *Carro*. In 1591, following complaints from the *barcaioli* that the aging machine was jolting and damaging their boats, the *Carro* was redesigned and rebuilt yet again. It was this latest version, also horse-powered, that is depicted in Zonca’s *Theatro di Machine* (Mola 462).



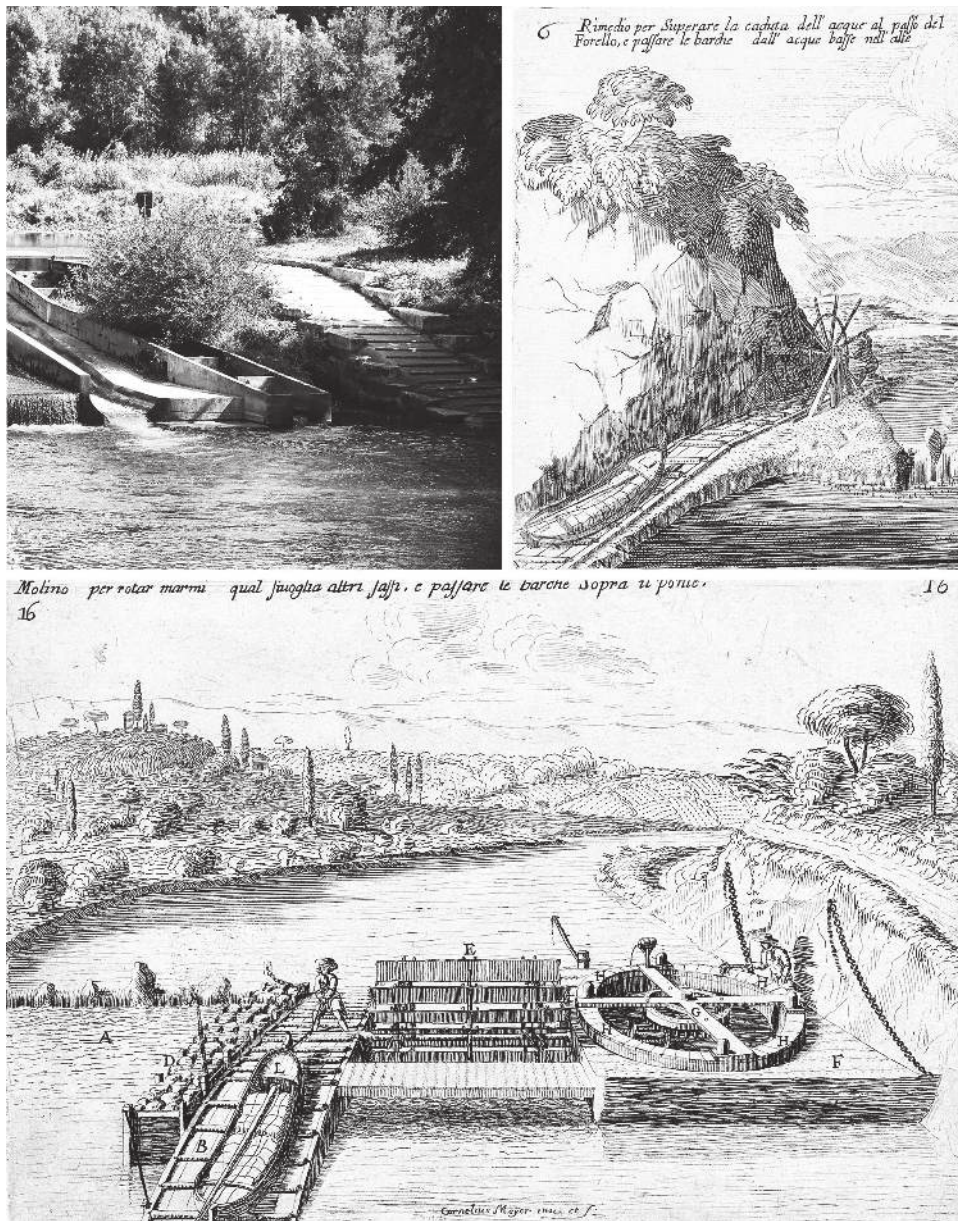
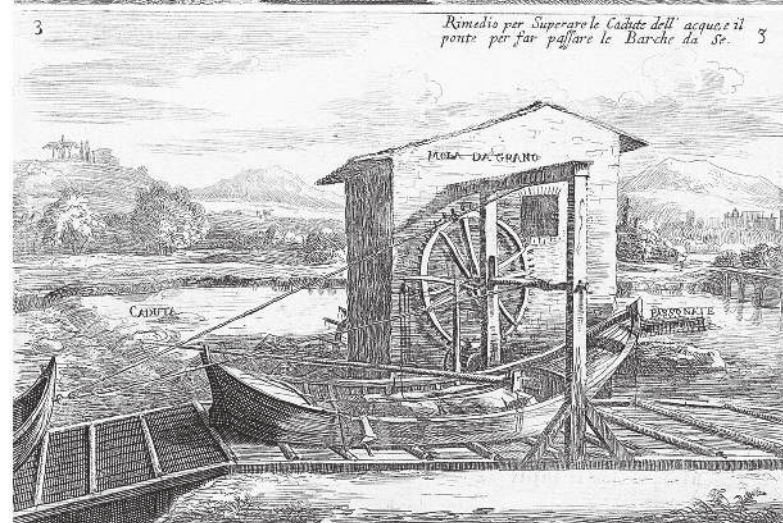
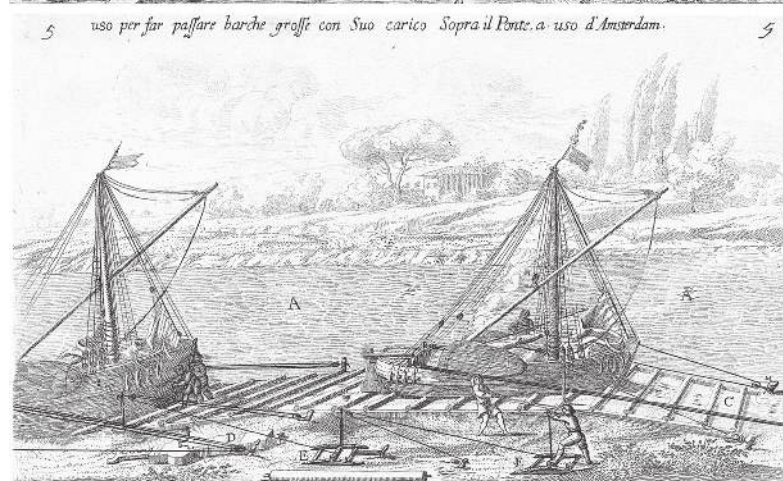
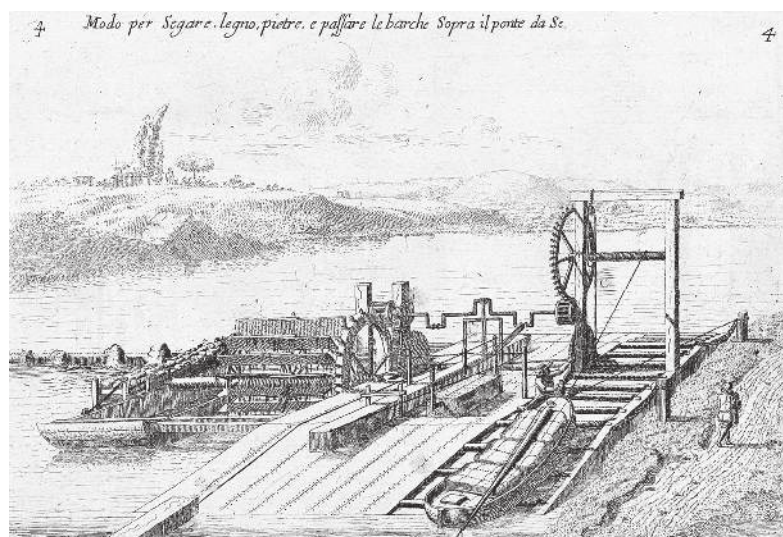


Figure 4 (above): Examples of simple inclines.

Figure 5: Various designs of hauling mechanisms. Top: An incline equipped with a water-powered cogwheel and lantern pinion. It is coupled with a sawmill (Meijer 4). Center: A man-powered incline, equipped with rollers, a series of pulleys and levers to rotate them and thus move the boat up the slope (Meijer 5). Bottom: A water-powered incline, using the energy of the paddle waterwheel of a flour-mill to turn a gear (a cogwheel and lantern pinion) and a windlass ("barrel") to pull a boat up the slope; once on the level section, the boat is moved by rotating the rollers with a lever until it reaches the downslope and is able to slip into the upper reach of the river (Meijer 3).







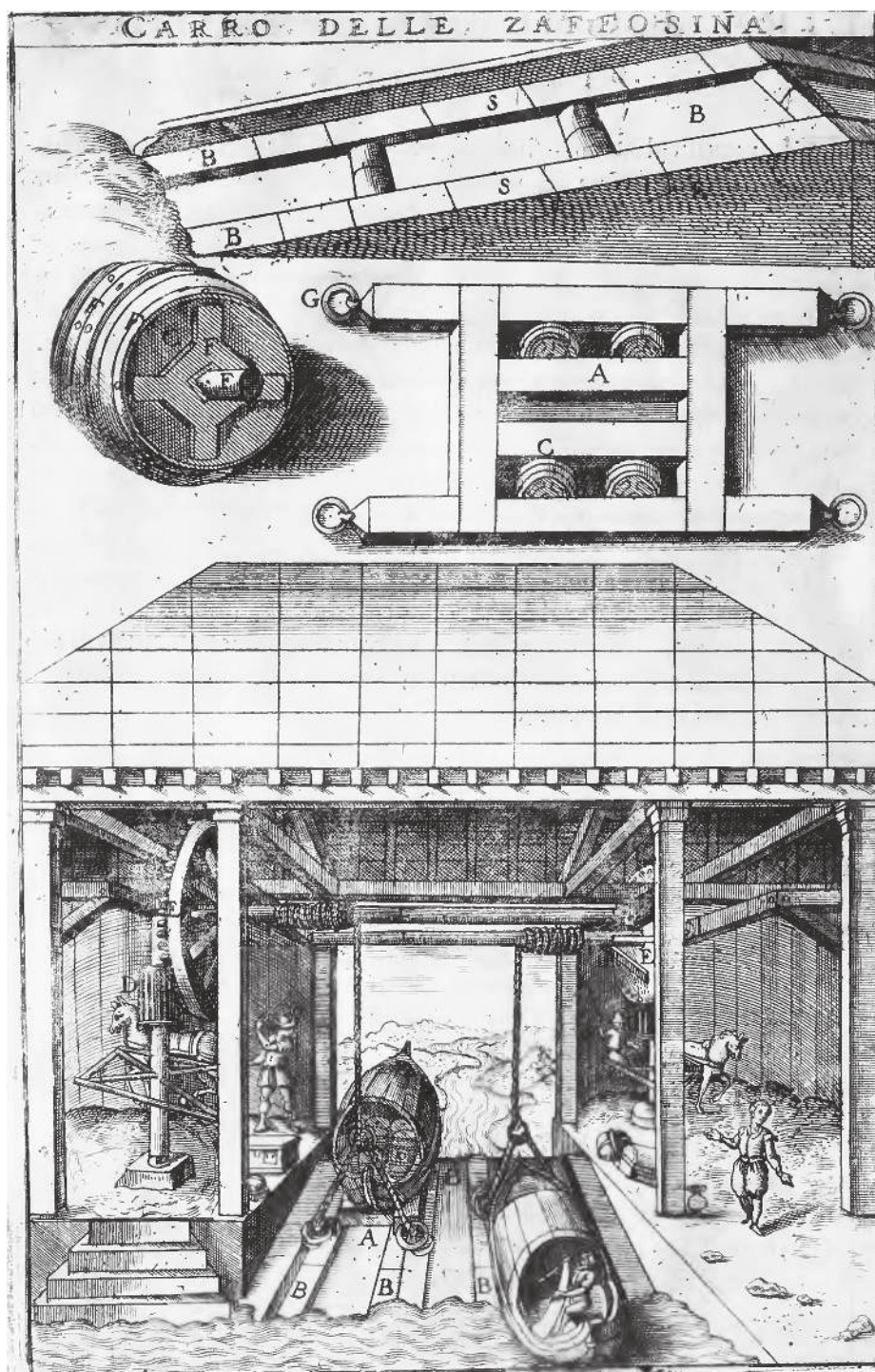


Figure 6: Zonca's depiction of the Carro as it appeared in its last iteration, after 1591. Venice is behind the viewer; ahead, beyond the building, is the Brenta. Above: details of the raised stone tracks and of the wooden sled or cradle.

Zonca's illustration and the accompanying explanations (58–60), published in 1607 and reproduced in part by Coronelli (86) in 1697, are extremely helpful to understand its basic operation (figure 6). Two horses, shown working under a roof, each powered a gear train composed of a cogwheel and lantern pinion,<sup>28</sup> which in turn rotated a horizontal beam (the “barrel”), functioning like a windlass, winding a rope and dragging a kind of sled. This sled, similar in concept to a modern shipyard cradle, carried the boats.<sup>29</sup> It was constituted of a rectangular wooden chassis; it had four small, solid wheels made of oak or walnut with iron axles and rims, which were housed within the frame and positioned below and away from the boat's hull to ensure they could turn freely (Zonca 59)<sup>30</sup>. It ran along the slightly raised stone guides, or tracks, of the slipway. The sled raised the boats from the lagoon and lowered them into the river and vice versa. Jeffery (34), drawing on Coronelli, described it as follows: “two slipways built of wood and stone, two slopes down which sleds made of wood ran on a track into the water. The boat approached the foot of the slope, and the sled was fixed beneath it.... The sled then ran down the corresponding slope on the other side; the boat was unfixed and proceeded on its way. There were two of these sleds, working side by side, one for the boats coming from Venice, one for those coming from Padua, the difference lying in the placing of the beams and consequent adjustment of haulage power.”

The state property of the *Carro* and the rights to collect the toll from its many users (Costantini 31) were auctioned off in 1514<sup>31</sup> and granted in perpetuity to the highest bidder, the “Pesaro family and associates,” who retained the rights<sup>32</sup> until it was dismantled, along with the Fusina levee, in 1615.

But Lizza Fusina wasn't only the location of the *Carro*. There was an inn where passengers stopped for refreshments, as recounted by Montaigne (166) and Moryson (159), which was also bought by the Pesaro family; a post-house for Venice's efficient postal service, with its couriers riding to Padua and to other cities of the Veneto and beyond (Caniato 272; Molmenti Part II, Vol. I, 94)<sup>33</sup>; and a place where travelers could rent, return, stable or sell their horses, or take a coach to Padua. Finally, the basin where gondolas for hire waited to take passengers from the mainland to the city, and the piers where the passengers of the regular boat service between Venice and Padua would disembark while their boat was hauled by the *Carro* before re-embarking on the other side (Moryson 159). Some, like Coryat (I, 195), chose to leave their boat at Fusina to take a privately hired gondola to Venice while others similarly arrived at Lizza Fusina by gondola and there boarded another boat to get to Padua (Montaigne 170). Nearby stood important riverside installations where all the wool fleeces processed in Venice were first cleansed, rinsed and dyed<sup>34</sup> in the water of the Brenta.

Lizza Fusina, located at the edge of the lagoon, the symbolic boundary of Venice, was close to the island Monastery of San Giorgio in Alga where the

Doge and his entourage came with great fanfare on the Bucintoro and a flotilla of gondolas, to welcome or see off important visitors, such as Henri III in 1574, as well as foreign ambassadors (Ratti 118).

Crucially there stood the filling stations for Venice's drinking water. The city's inhabitants relied in part on hundreds of public and private cisterns collecting rainwater, but, as mentioned by Villamont (431) and Moryson (159),<sup>35</sup> to supplement this limited supply those who could afford it bought water brought in from the Brenta on dedicated boats handled by specialized crews, organized in their own guild, the *acquareoli* or *burchieri da acqua*.<sup>36</sup> A 1425 decree dictated that only the Brenta could be used for drinking water and prohibited in particular the use of the neighboring Bottenigo, the water of which was known to be polluted (Costantini 28, 55).<sup>37</sup>

For the drinking water supply, various private consortiums of inventors and investors were granted the rights to build and test hydraulic works of their own—duly patented—design (Costantini 60), at a spot of their choice in Lizza Fusina, along with the rights to collect water dues or loading fees from water-barge operators. The number of such installations operating at Lizza Fusina varied over the decades, as did their designs (Mola 462–6). They seem to have worked generally as follows (figure 3). The water was first withdrawn from the Brenta about one hundred yards upstream of Fusina proper, i.e., before it risked being contaminated by the Bottenigo. It was conveyed closer to the edge of the lagoon by a small canal running roughly parallel to the Brenta, the *canaletto beverador* (Costantini 47, 49, figure 7; 55–62). As witnessed by Montaigne,<sup>38</sup> it was then raised with a scoop wheel (also known as a bucket waterwheel<sup>39</sup>) powered by horses, and poured into the *gorne*, a kind of gutters made of wood or stone (Costantini 65, figure 9) and designed to carry the water to the waiting barges<sup>40</sup> (figure 7). The *gorne* crossed over the Bottenigo, supported by wooden piles (Mola 465 n51); they had to be positioned high enough above the embankment to spout the water directly into the large vats and barrels in the hold of the water-barges which were parked below, on the lagoon side, regardless of the height of the tide (Costantini 64–5, figure 9; Mola 463; Zampieri 123).

It can be seen from all the above that, in the 16<sup>th</sup> Century, Lizza Fusina was for Venice a major center of economic activity involving not only navigation and trade with Padua and the rest of the Veneto, but also water supply and wool processing. Moreover, it functioned for over a century as a kind of technological laboratory and testing ground for new designs of hydraulic machinery, such as the *Carro* and the *gorne* (Mola 470).

With the *Carro* and Lizza Fusina placed in their historical, geographical and technological contexts, we can now return to our initial question: what exactly may Shakespeare have been referring to?



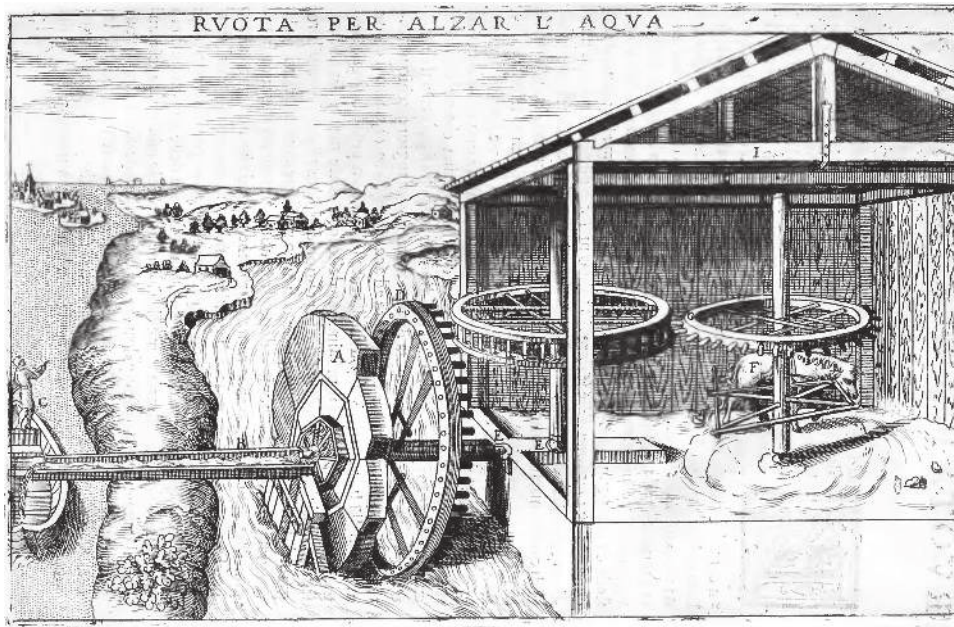


Figure 7: Zonca's illustration of a water-raising wheel (61–3), powered by horses, rotating triangular “buckets.”

## Various Meanings of *Tragheto* in the 16<sup>th</sup> Century

The early Shakespeare editors who first grappled with Tranect obviously did not have access to the most recent Italian scholarship on the history of the Brenta. A few mention Coryat, sometimes Moryson, and are therefore aware of the *traghetti* located on Venice's Grand Canal, but many later editors ignore the published testimonies of other Renaissance travel writers and the works of Italian historians who could have further illuminated the issue. With the striking exception of Malone (V, 101 n8), Knight (Furness 177–8 n55) and Elze (279–81), their approach tended to be strictly philological, yet did not reach much beyond Florio and his translation of *tragheto* as “a ferrie.” As a result of these limitations, the editors who initially proposed the emendation to *traject* generally, and rather hastily, assumed that Shakespeare was referring to a ferry boat with the name of *tragheto*, sailing between Venice and the mainland. But *tragheto* had in fact several distinct, though related, meanings.

## A Gondola Station or Ferry Landing

As noted by many travelers, in Venice itself the word designated one of the 30 or so stations or landings where passengers boarded public gondolas<sup>41</sup> on standby (*traghetti da paràda*) along the Grand Canal and a few other locations,



for a simple and short crossing (figure 8). Gondolas at other fixed stations could be hired (*traghetti da nolo*) by the hour, by the day, for a single trip or for the duration of a visitor's stay in Venice (Misson I, 243; Montaigne 169; Zanelli 28) to go anywhere within the city (*traghetti di dentro*)—be it a church, a marketplace, a palace, a secluded side canal or a courtesan's house. To visit

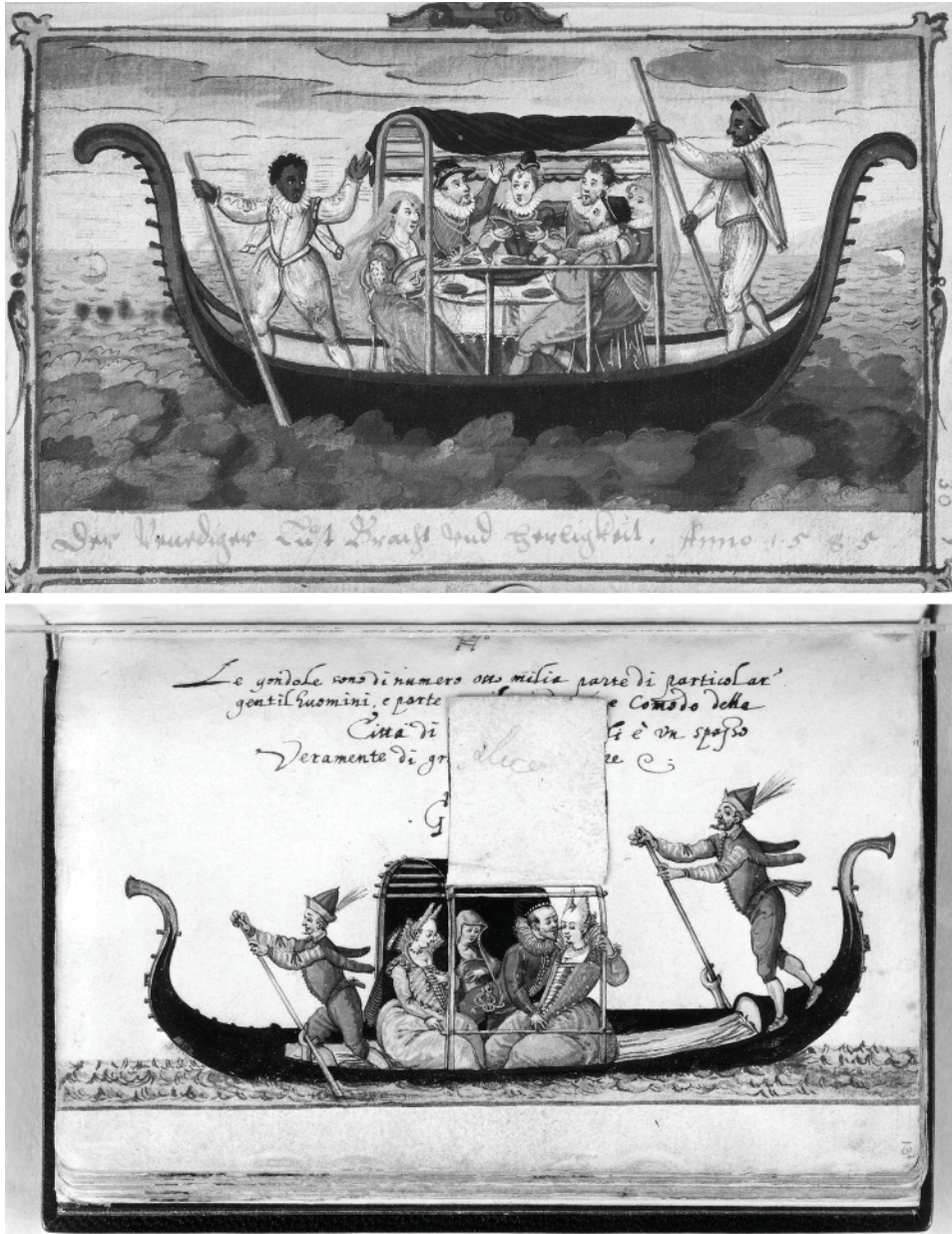


Figure 8: Gondolas in the 1580s. (Top) Two hired black gondoliers and their six passengers: a woman is playing the lute and another is singing from a songbook. (Bottom) The gondola ride, by Niclauss Kippell (ca 1588).

islands in the lagoon around Venice one used the *traghetti di fuori*, often sturdier boats with two to four rowers (Crovato 16, 44), better adapted to handle wind and choppy waters. One could also buy a passage on larger and heavier boats to go to thirty mainland cities, like Padua, Este, Vicenza, Mestre or Treviso (*traghetti di viazi*) and on to Ferrara, Mantua or Verona<sup>42</sup> (Lowe 430, 439; Caniato, “Traghetti” 150; Zanelli 83; Crovato 29).

## A Gondoliers’ Fraternity

In Venice proper, *traghetto* applied, by extension, to the various fraternities of gondoliers in charge of the gondola stations (Lowe 430; Brown, *Lagoons* 85–112). The gondoliers of each *traghetto* formed a corporation, *fraglia*, with a warden, *gastaldo*, at their head (Molmenti Part III, Vol. 1, 132 n2, 137). Despite their long and illustrious history, those fraternities had, by the 1500s, become quite disreputable. Brown (*Lagoons* 93–4, 107–9) describes the progressive disintegration of the *traghetto*’s organization and the difficulties that the guild’s elected officers encountered when trying to maintain discipline among the younger gondoliers, at a time when the nominal owners of the “liberties” (i.e., the licenses to row), a *traghetto*’s original gondoliers, had sold said liberties to unruly outsiders who extorted or mistreated their passengers.<sup>43</sup> This state of affairs goes a long way in explaining the dismal reputation that the gondoliers gained among some travelers in the 16<sup>th</sup> Century and later. For foreign visitors in fact, a gondolier functioned not only as a guide (Moryson 164),<sup>44</sup> but also as what we would call today a “fixer,” occasionally as a procurer (Coryat I, 210–1)<sup>45</sup> and even sometimes as hired assassins (*bravi*) according to Misson (I, 243–5).<sup>46</sup> To remedy this lawlessness the Venetian government finally took over control of the liberties and of the *traghetti* in the 17<sup>th</sup> Century.

## A Boatmen’s Guild and River Route

In the Veneto at large, *traghetto* could apply to the local boatmen’s guilds granted the exclusive right to carry goods along a section of river or a particular route (Orlando 292; Faccioli 113–4; Beggio 509),<sup>47</sup> and to that route itself. As Beggio (509) explains:

The term *traghetto* is sometimes misunderstood by modern authors, who identify it as a boat, or raft, or a platform set on two boats which is still used to convey people, vehicles and goods from one riverbank to the other. Although this is indeed a *traghetto*, in the case of the *burchieri* [boatmen], the “right of *traghetto*” refers to the concession authorizing them to transport merchandises along the river, from one port to another, therefore over long distances. It has nothing to do with crossing from one bank to the other. (translation by the author)

## A Small Pontoon Ferry

Throughout the Veneto, it could designate the *passi a barca*, those platforms set on two pontoon boats, shuttling cattle, horses and carts, travelers and farmers, and found every few miles along the Brenta, including at Malcontenta (Manfrin, “Passi a barca” 78–83), and along other rivers, such as the Adige (Beggio 509) or the Po (Confortini 78–81). Those small pontoon ferries were very much in demand in the absence of bridges, which were few and far between (figure 9). Operated for a fee by local landowners according to concessions granted by the Venetian authorities (Manfrin, “Passi a barca” 82), they were sometimes simply punted from one riverbank to the other or dragged along a rope strung across the river.<sup>48</sup> “[I]n our dialect, along the whole course of the Adige, from Verona downstream, the boat that connects the two banks where there is no bridge, is known as the ‘*barca del passo*’, or simply ‘*passo*’, and the ferryman is called the ‘*passadore*’.” (Beggio 509; translation by the author). Today *traghetto* denotes ferry boats only by extension (Treccani).<sup>49</sup>

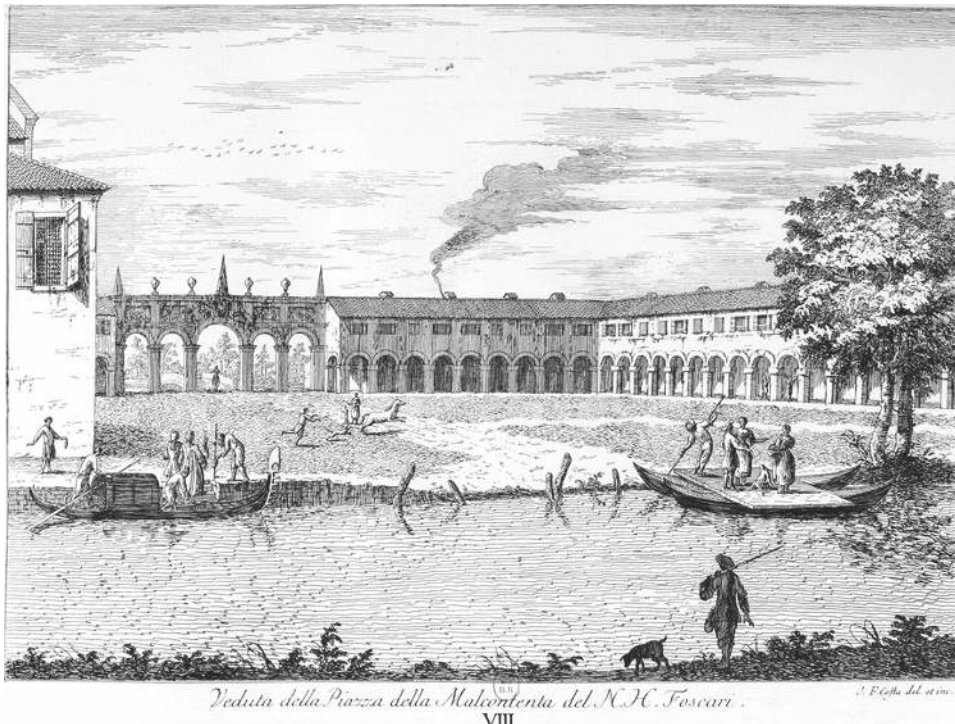


Figure 9: Costa's illustration of the passo-barca (pontoon ferry) at Malcontenta in the 18th Century (Veduta VIII). It connected the Villa Foscari-Malcontenta located on south side of the river to the main road to Padua, on the north side.



## An Incline and a *Carro*

*Traghetto* also designated the many remote and primitive inclines in the marshlands around the lagoon, the *valli*, where fishermen hauled their boats overland to get from one pond to the next (Ferrone 637 n11).

Most important, the word could be used interchangeably with *carro*, whether that of Lizza Fusina or other similar contraptions erected elsewhere in the Veneto and fulfilling the same functions, i.e., conveying boats across a strip of land between waterways. If *carro* tends to connote the physical machinery itself, particularly the wheeled boat-cradle already described, and *traghetto* the overall setup and hauling operation, the two terms are, for all intents and purposes, mostly synonyms.<sup>50</sup>

This usage is well attested. The GDLI gives as one of the main definitions of *Traghetare*: “to haul a boat on land” and quotes Galileo,<sup>51</sup> Shakespeare’s near contemporary. Zonca (60), in his description of the *Carro*’s operation at Lizza Fusina, also uses *traghetare*.<sup>52</sup> As already noted by Jeffery (32), Villamont, who visited Venice in 1588, transcribes *traghetto* into French as “traquet”<sup>53</sup> and applies “traquet” not only to the city’s gondola stations but also to the Fusina dam with its *Carro* (I, 122 and III, 431). Zandrini, writing in the early 19<sup>th</sup> Century, applies *traghetto* to the process and to the machines allowing boats to cross dams and embankments (I, lix, 13, 32, 71, 160) in various places, including one at Marghera. Togliani (582) mentions a *traghetto* built around 1599 on the Nichesola at Mazzanta (near Legnago) as “similar to the one at Fusina” and “constituted of an embankment, a *carro* and a hoisting mechanism.”<sup>54</sup>

The regular boat service (Lassels Part II, 221) between Venice and Padua—sailing up and down the river Brenta and not across it—was ordinarily referred to as the *barca da Padova* (figure 10, page 24) or *barca della Volta*<sup>55</sup> (Forum) and could carry 28 people, for the price of 14 pennies a head (Zanelli 94). This shuttle service operated twice daily from a station on the Grand Canal<sup>56</sup> in Venice to the Portello in Padua, with one departure in the morning and one in the evening (Coronelli 85; Zanelli 81) and was organized so that it would be possible for someone to go to Padua and return to Venice within the space of 24 hours (Coryat I, 195). This boat, by necessity, had to stop at Lizza Fusina and wait its turn at the *Carro*.

There also was a ferry service operating on demand between Fusina and a station located on the Giudecca Canal, between San Basilio and Angelo Raffaele (figure 11, page 26), close to where timber rafts, having floated down the Adige and the Brenta, used to be dismantled. In 1578 this ferry (not a gondola) could be hired to carry eight people for three pennies per person (Zanelli 94). In Fusina, the landings of the public ferries were located close to the *Carro*.

The expression “the common ferry which trades to Venice” of Act III, scene IV of *The Merchant of Venice* could therefore refer either to the public boat shuttle between Venice and Padua or, most likely, to the smaller Fusina ferry. But is the term Tranect also referring to a ferry boat service, as has generally been assumed?



Figure 10: Top: The Barca da Padova in 1591, towed by a horse along the Brenta. Passengers can be seen seated on two benches, facing each other. Bottom: 18th Century engraving depicting (top): The Burchiello, with its wooden cabin and balconies and (bottom): the Barca da Padova, the public ferry.



## Shakespeare's Tranect: the ferry boat or the *Carro*?

As surmised by Elze (280) and others, Shakespeare was simply trying to explain the strange word *Tranect* to his audience, by opposing a descriptive “common ferry,” known to all. But a simple equivalency between ferry and *Tranect* does not require a repetition of “unto” and “to”; it could have been more unequivocally expressed with an apposition such as “unto the *Tranect*, the common ferry.”

With his lines “unto the *Tranect*, to the common ferry,” could Shakespeare be referring instead to two of the remarkable features of *Lizza Fusina*, i.e., the *Carro* on the one hand, and the common ferry that stopped nearby on the other? Jeffery (31) seems to imply as much, although only in passing. The evidence reviewed earlier suggests that *Tranect*, with its plausible, if still unsettled, kinship with *tranare* and *trana*, “to haul” and “sledge,” fits the operation of the sleds used to drag boats overland at *Fusina* better than it does a ferry boat. In fact, the presence of the *Carro* at *Fusina* may itself explain the very toponym *Lizza Fusina*. The GDLI (IX, 172) defines *Lizza*, among other things, as “a vehicle without wheels, in the shape of a sled, designed for the transport of people or goods in steep places” and as “a machine formerly used in Venice to transport boats overland from the canals to the lagoon and vice versa” (translation by the author).<sup>57</sup> *Lizza* would therefore be a synonym for *Carro*.

## The *Traghetto* of *Lizza Fusina*

Let us leave aside the questions of whether Shakespeare truly intended *Tranect* and whether *tranare* and sleds may have been somehow on his mind, two issues impossible to resolve conclusively. Let us even concede that Shakespeare may have simply tried to transcribe the sound of *traghetto*. Even then, the argument that he was thereby referring to the *Carro*, as opposed to a ferry boat service, still holds. As we have seen, the Venetian word *traghetto*, beyond referring to gondola stations and guilds, pontoon ferries and river shipping concessions, commonly applied to the hauling of boats over dams and to the inclines and machinery built for that operation. Villamont's use of “traquet” to refer to the dam and *Carro* of *Lizza Fusina* indicates that it was so known locally at the time of his travels. Most importantly, the name *traghetto di Lizza Fusina*, referring to the *Carro* and its operation, appears in documents of 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> Century Venice.<sup>58</sup> It is still used, with that same meaning, by Italian historians of the area.<sup>59</sup>

So it is highly likely that Shakespeare is not referring to a ferry boat, but rather to the *traghetto di Lizza Fusina*, that is, to the *Carro* and the dramatic transfer of boats overland that it effectuated, which so impressed travelers for 200 years.





In this proposed reading, Shakespeare's line could be understood as denoting a sequence in time: "Unto the *traghetto*, *and then* to the common ferry"—meaning that once arrived at the location of the *traghetto di Lizza Fusina* or *Carro*, Portia would then board a ferry boat to Venice. The playwright would simply have elided the conjunction *and*, and repeated instead the preposition of movement *unto/to*, to better emphasize Portia's haste, the sense of a race against time as she rushes to give her instructions to Balthasar as he prepares to ride to Padua. Alternatively, it could be interpreted as Portia clarifying for Balthasar's benefit which *traghetto* she has in mind (there were many kinds), "Unto the *traghetto*, *I mean the one near* the common ferry." In this alternative reading, whether she plans to board the public ferry in question or, as was commonly done, to hire a private gondola to reach Venice becomes irrelevant.

In conclusion, the emendation of *Tranect* to *traject* can reasonably be defended on purely linguistic grounds as a borrowing from the Latin *trajectus*, root of the Italian *traghetto*. However, a closer look—at the navigation on the Brenta, at the state of the confines of the lagoon in the 16<sup>th</sup> Century and at the celebrated *traghetto* of Lizza Fusina and its *Carro*—argues against equating *Tranect* with the ferry service and against dismissing too rashly a kinship of *Tranect* with *trana*, and the concept of hauling boats overland. There are in fact good reasons to think that, with this unique word, Shakespeare was singling out the dam and the *Carro*.

In providing the historical context of the locale that Shakespeare clearly refers to, and in proposing the readings above, we hope we have dispelled the confusion and uncertainty attendant to the word *Tranect* and helped solve the riddle.

More broadly of course, with Shakespeare's brief, almost casual, reference to the *Tranect*, we are faced with the next question: how did he become familiar with the *traghetto* of Lizza Fusina? The date of composition of *The Merchant of Venice*, placed as early as the late 1570s or in the mid-1590s at the latest (Gilvary 125–32), precludes that any of the travel writings quoted above—all published after 1611—could have been Shakespeare's source. We can safely dismiss the fantasy that he simply made it all up because his references are too specific and accurate. This singular example of "local knowledge," along

◀ *Figure 11: De' Barbari's Veduta prospettica della città, 1500 (Detail), with four stations of ferries to the mainland ("Traghetti di fuori e Dogado") indicated by numbered stars; their locations are derived from Zanelli (78–83). 1.) Ferry to Lizza Fusina, near today's Fondamenta Zattere. 2.) Ferry to Padua on Riva dell'Oglio (today's Fondamenta dell'Olio), on the Grand Canal. 3.) Ferry to Mestre, near the Ghetto Nuovo, on the Canal Regio. 4.) Ferry to Verona, at the Dogana ("Customs House"). 5.) Rialto Market and Bridge. 6.) Piazzetta and Doge's palace.*

with other allusions to peculiar locales of the Veneto, such as Othello's Sagittary, Proteus' busy river port in Verona, or Shylock's penthouse—all unlikely to derive from conversations with foreign merchants in a London tavern—can only mean the author had traveled to Northern Italy and later embedded in his plays the memories of the places he had visited.

More to the point, Shakespeare's biographers can find no evidence of William Shakspeare ever leaving England despite what E.K. Chambers describes as "much research has been devoted to a conjecture that he spent some time in Italy." It is highly probable that someone did travel throughout Italy and incorporated that knowledge into the plays published under the pseudonym William Shakespeare.

### **Acknowledgments**

My deep gratitude to Susan Fischer, without whose help some of the crucial sources used in this research would have remained inaccessible, to Professor Terence Tunberg, Professor of Classics at the University of Kentucky, for dispelling my doubts about a point of Latin usage and manuscript transcription, and to April Robertson, Teaching Assistant in Classics at the University of Kentucky, for helping me with the translation of Du Cange's entry for "trana" from Medieval Latin. Any mistakes are mine alone.

## Sources of the Illustrations

Figure 1: Composite map by the author, based on Zendrini (I, tav. iv, v, vi, ix; II, tav. Xxi), and on Bondesan and Furlanetto (186, figure 3).

Figure 3: Composite map by the author based on a 1535 map by Nicolò dal Cortivo, (ASVE, Archivio Gradenigo di Rio Maria, misc. dis.); a 1563 map of Giacomo di Gastaldi (ASVE, SEA, Brenta, rot. 26, dis. 15); a 1547 map of the Venetian Lagoon by Cristoforo Sabbadino (ASVE, SEA, serie Laguna, dis. 9); and a pre-1610 anonymous map (ASVE, SEA, Brenta, Rot. 47A, dis. 150).

Figures 2, 9 and 12: Costa. *Delle delizie del Fiume Brenta*. Bibliothèque nationale de France at <https://gallica.bnf.fr/>.

Figures 4 & 5: Meijer. *Arte di restituire à Roma la tralasciata navigazione del suo Tevere*. Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam at <https://www.rijksmuseum.nl>. Photo by the author (2009).

Figures 6 and 7: Zonca. *Nuovo Teatro di Machine et Edificii*. Bibliothèque nationale de France at <https://gallica.bnf.fr/>.

Figure 8: “*Der Venediger Lust Bracht und Herligkeit*,” (*The Venetian Love of Display and Magnificence*). *Stammbuch of Anton Weibemayer, 1585*. Germanisches Nationalmuseum, Nuremberg at <http://dlib.gnm.de/item/Hs123725/66>.

Walters Art Museum, Baltimore, MD. at <https://art.thewalters.org/detail/81155/gondola-ride/>.

Figure 10: [http://www.paliodelruzante.org/i\\_tiranti.htm](http://www.paliodelruzante.org/i_tiranti.htm) and <http://www.assoctc.it/burchiello-e-le-ville-del-brenta/>.

Figure 11. De’ Barbari. *Veduta prospettica della città*. 1500. Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam at <https://www.rijksmuseum.nl>.



## Endnotes

1. “*The Merchant of Venice* was first printed in 1600 as a quarto.... The First Folio text is based on an edited copy of the First Quarto of 1600 (Q1). Some scholars think that whoever edited *The Merchant of Venice* for the First Folio must have referred to a manuscript of the play that had been used in the theater, but this theory is not well founded.” Folger Shakespeare Library at <https://shakespeare.folger.edu/shakespeares-works/the-merchant-of-venice/an-introduction-to-this-text/> (last accessed October 11, 2020).
2. It is worth noting here that the supposed misprint of an <n> for Shakespeare's intended <j/i> is not the only possible explanation. The Romans had another word for *crossing* or *carrying* or *conveying across* or *over*, unrelated to *Transjicere*/*trajicere* or *traject*, and found in all Latin dictionaries, be it Bullions (953) or modern online dictionaries: *Transvehere* (perfect passive participle: *Transvectus*), with its well established variant *Travehere*, *Travectus*, which Shakespeare would likely have known. It would be easy to misread the <v> or <u> on a manuscript as an <n>. Professor Terence Tunberg suggested this possibility: “Could ‘*tranectus*’ have originated on palaeographical grounds as a writing error for ‘*travectus*’ or ‘*traenectus*’? For ‘n’ and ‘u’ in the handwriting of medieval manuscripts can look similar—both are drawn with two erect minims.” (private communication, August 2020).
3. See for example: Sidney Lee (1907) dismissed the derivation from *tranare* and countered with a third hypothesis (78 n53), that *tra-nect* may have been modeled after *con-nect* (from *nectere*, to knot, bind, fetter or fasten); Roe (151) and Kreiler (Kindle Locations 882–8) reprised Lee's idea. Yet the Latin verb *nectere* had no association with movement or travel, with waterways or with the ideas of crossing or linking two spatially distant things (Lewis and Short 1196; Gaffiot 1021). Lee further states: “It is doubtful if ‘*tranect*’ can be connected with the Italian ‘*tranare*,’ to draw, and there is no other Italian word with which it can be associated. Rowe preferred to substitute *traject*. This word has been held to be an anglicised form of the Italian ‘*traghetto*’ or ‘*traghetti*’, which, according to the contemporary English travellers Coryat and Moryson was technically applied to the ferries of Venice, where gondolas waited for hire. Florio in his Ital.-Eng. Dict. explains ‘*traghetto*’ as ‘a ferrie’; the Italian word is derived from the Latin ‘*trajectus*.’ The word ‘*traject*’ is not found in Elizabethan literature, and though it has greater philological justification than ‘*tranect*,’ it has less textual authority.”

John Russell Brown (1955) writes (97 n53):

“Tranect” is probably a misreading of “traiect”; this would represent It.

“Traghetto”, a ferry, which is found in Florio’s *World of words* (1598).

Steevens identified “tranect” with It. “tranare,” to draw, pass over, swim, but the sense is strained and the “ect” ending is not explained.

Stanley Wells (1986) in his *Original Spelling Edition* (498) has, at Sc. 16 (3.4), line 1693: “unto the Traiect, to the common Ferrie which trades to Venice,” with no explanation for this surreptitious change to the supposedly “original spelling.” The *Glossary* (1452) has: “traject, ferry,” following Rowe’s lead.

Charles Edelman (2003) states (203–6 n53):

*Traject*. This *emendation* of *tranect*’ is a possible Anglicization of *traghetto* which Florio’s Italian dictionary translates as “ferry.” Common. Public.

Stephen Greenblatt (2008) in the W.W. Norton second edition, based on the Oxford edition, offers in line 53 the marginal notes: “Unto the traject\* (\*ferry), to the common\* ferry (\*public).” No explanation is thought necessary.

Michel Déprats’ recent bilingual edition (2013) gives French readers (V, 1156–7) a simple apposition, asserting identity between Tranect/traghetto and ferry: “au traghetto, ce bac public.”

4. The OED’s entry for “traject” reads: “A way or place of crossing over; esp. a place where boats cross a river, strait, or the like; a ferry. Less commonly, a route for crossing a tract of land. The action or an act of crossing over water, land, a chasm, etc.; passage. The action of carrying or conveying across; transport; transference.” The OED gives the etymology “from the Latin *trajectus*” and a reference to the French *trajet* and *traject*. The only instance of the word predating Shakespeare is found in John Leland’s notebooks for his *Itinerary* (dated to 1552, but unpublished until the 18th Century). Fluent in Latin—as Shakespeare surely was—Leland, like other writers after him, would have found borrowing and anglicizing *trajectus* to *traject* quite natural. But the overall scarcity of attestations seems to indicate that, even in later centuries, the word remained rare.
5. It is worth noting here that, in the passage of *Crudities* quoted by Hunter (Furness 177–8 n55), Coryat does not appose the word “trajects” as his translation of *traghetti* (I, 210): Hunter does. Nevertheless, White seems to assume that Coryat did, and following Hunter blindly, without re-reading Coryat, states: “Traject may be correct on the authority of Coryat”; so follows Parrott in 1903 (see note 3 above), asserting simply: “Traject is

a word used by Coryat as an English form of the Italian traghetto....” Hunter, White and Parrott are wrong: traject is not used by Coryat for traghetto.

6. A frequent misunderstanding (e.g., Russell Brown, note 3 above) should be clarified upfront: Two Italian words, because they are occasional homophones, are often conflated but derive in fact from two different Latin roots, with completely different meanings (though both—confusingly—can be associated with water):
  - (a) The Latin Transnatare, Tranatare, or Transnare, Tranare (Lewis & Short 1893, 1887), “to swim over, across or through,” was retained in Italian as Trasnatare, Tranatare (GDLI XXI, 161) or Tranare (Florio 575, 573). Although Trans-natare has to do with crossing a body of water (by swimming) we should remember that it is not the root of Traghetto, nor is it usually associated with ferry landings or services.
  - (b) The classical Latin Trahere, “to pull, drag or haul”(Riddle 1287–8; Gaffiot 1589–90; Lewis and Short 1885) became Traginare and Trahinare and later, Trainare (Pianigiani II, 1453; Du Cange VI, 635), or Tranare by syncope (Pianigiani II, 1455). The cognate Traha (classical Latin) means “vehicle without wheels, sledge” (Riddle 1287; Lewis and Short 1885) and later, “harrow” (Du Cange VI, 633; Niermeyer 1037; Migne 2212; Jacob 1131). Similarly, in Italian, traino is “the act of pulling; the load being carried; a sledge or cart usually without wheels with which one hauls” (Pianigiani II, 1453), “a kind of harrow” (Florio 572); also, “the act of towing a boat” (Confortini 23; GDLI XXI, 139). This Trainare/tranare, and its cognate traino/traina/trana (Florio 572, 573), is the most likely Italian origin of Tranect, if Tranect is what Shakespeare intended to write: something having to do with hauling, rather than with swimming.
7. “[Tassa] per trasporti nelle slitte (tranaticum),” or tax on transport by sleds. This definition by Francesco Mercante is quoted on p. 607 of *La Civiltà Cattolica*. Anno Trigesimottavo, Vol. VI della Serie Decimaterza. Firenze, 1887.
8. By metathesis of two phonemes, the hard <c> with <t>, a common occurrence.
9. Tranaticum is not found in the Early English Books Online database, but *tranare* (to swim across) is.
10. In Italian, the river's name was feminine to the locals, *la Brenta*, for many centuries. The switch to *il Brenta* is recent and was encouraged by Fascist writers, who felt that rivers had to be masculine (Draghi, “Toponomastica” 175).

11. For a detailed history of the Brenta, see Zendrini (1811), Averone (1911), Appuhn (2006), Bondesan (2003), D'Alpaos (2010).
12. Along the canals of Battaglia and Monselice, Cagnola/Vinghenzone, Bissatto, Roncayette/Bacchiglione (see figure 1).
13. Palada: a wall or dike comprising two lines of wooden piles with the space between them filled with rubble and reeds. (Ciriacono, *Building on water* 268). Here, a kind of wooden stockade built along and across a riverbed to restrict and control boat traffic and collect a toll (Manfrin, "Atlante" 67).
14. Misson (I, 190–1) astutely observes that while the Venetians worked very hard to keep their channels navigable, they were also anxious not to give the lagoon a great and equal depth everywhere since their winding courses, known only to local boatmen, proved suitably treacherous to enemy navies.
15. Appuhn (85) explains: "The Venetians did not develop their management scheme according to a master plan based on a body of deductive knowledge about similar bodies of water. Rather they proceeded in irregular stages.... River mouths that had been closed were sometimes reopened if the effect were not judged to be desirable; levees were built, torn down, and built again, depending on their perceived effects on the lagoon."
16. Fusina, like the area of S. Ilario, had long been recognized as belonging to Venice, in contrast to the disputed surrounding areas (Poppi 91–5).
17. Also appears in documents as Volpatico, Volpago, Volpego. It was located in front of an island named S. Marco in Bocca Lama.
18. Another short-lived diversion, the Sborador della Mira (1531–1540), was created from Mira to the Canal Maggiore and a mouth across from Malamocco (Bondesan 76). Finally in 1610 the *Brenta Nuovissima* (or *Taglio Nuovissimo*) was dug between Mira and Brondolo, thus re-establishing approximately the general southward course of the *Medoacus maior* of Roman times.
19. A breach created by Padua in 1371 and a series of brief experimental reopenings and closings around 1437–8 (Zendrini I, 55, 92–3) need not concern us here.
20. Today the place is called simply Fusina, but many variants are found on old maps and in written documents: Lizza Fusina, Issa Fusina, Za Fusina, Saffusina, Lizzafusina. Coryat (I, 195) transcribes it as Lucie Fesina, Montaigne as La Chaffousine (166, 170, 180).

21. From the edge of the lagoon to Venice, rather than taking a regular public ferry, as Jeffery describes here, several travelers mention hiring a private gondola for this last leg of their journey: it seems that in those cases at least the last stretch was covered aboard a boat operating on demand and not on schedule.
22. Variants: Resta d'Aglio, Resta di Algio, Restadagio.
23. Montaigne describes here the traditional intercropping agriculture, associating wheat fields, rows of trees and grapevines, practiced since Roman times in Lombardy (Desplanques). It is mentioned repeatedly by Moryson (I, 232, 309, 316, 361, 370, 375) "fruitfull fieldes...tilled after the manner of Lombardy, bearing Corne and Wine in the same field, all the Furrowes being planted with Elmes, upon which the Vines grow"... "so that one field gives bread, wine, and wood for to burne)," as well as by Misson (I, 151, 167) See also: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Intercropping>, <https://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Joualle> and <https://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hautain>.
24. Hentzner (217): "Leucae officinam (Luzze Fusina vulgò), ubi navigia mercibus onusta, rotarum volubili machina, ex aquis sublata per aggerem hincinde transferuntur vel è stagnis in fluvij fossam, vel ex fluvio in ipsa stagna." See also Schott (55) and Pighius (197), who use the exact same words (the latter adding in a marginal note the descriptive: "Machina traductrix," the "transferring machine").
25. In Ancient Egypt, China and Greece for example. In the case of the Diolkos of Corinth (diolkos: dia, across, holkos, portage machine), it was over four miles long, included stone tracks, and was in use for 1800 years (See: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Diolkos>). For a brief introduction to the history of inclines, see Uhlemann (7–18).
26. Inclines had the advantage, compared to the pound locks that gradually replaced them, to be much cheaper to build; they also used no water, thus avoiding the habitual conflicts between milling and navigation interests.
27. For more details on canal lifts and inclines of the 19th Century in Europe, see Vernon-Harcourt (II, 389–98). For illustrations of Renaissance contraptions, see Meijer. For modern (and massive) examples of the same principle, see Uhlemann.
28. For a clear illustration of such gears, see: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gear#Cage\\_gear](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gear#Cage_gear).



29. For equivalent modern installations, see: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ship\\_cradle](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ship_cradle) and <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Slipway>.
30. In Uhlemann (16), *Carro* is translated, via German, by “wagon,” originally a four-wheeled farm vehicle, designed to carry heavy loads, with large spoked wheels placed outside the load-carrying bed, a somewhat misleading translation in our context. Jeffery sees it as a sled, which is closer to what it would have looked like: its wheels are so recessed within the frame as to be all but invisible once a boat had been fastened on top of it, and it ran flush with the slipway.
31. It had previously been leased (in 1460) by the Venetian state (for 300 ducats a year) to private operators who were thereby authorized to collect four pennies per boat transferred by the *Carro* (Mola 450–1 n10). The same operators also collected “transit fees” (*dazio di transito* or *soldo del canal*) on all boats, including water-barges, using the approach channel (*Canal di Lizzafusina*) (Mola 454; Costantini 31). Jeffery (34) conflates these “transit dues” and the toll they paid for the use of the *carro*. These were in fact two separate levies.
32. The Pesaro family bid (and paid 11,800 ducats) for the *Carro*, the inn, the right to collect canal transit dues, and the wool dyeing operations at Lizza Fusina (Mola 454–7). Made rich by these various concessions, it successfully lobbied the Venetian authorities to delay for several decades the removal of the Fusina levee and the reopening of the mouth of the Brenta, and then to get compensated when it finally lost these lucrative monopolies (Caniato “Commerci” 271; Costantini 52, 55).
33. Molmenti explains (Part II, Vol. I, 94): “*To encourage and facilitate commerce and correspondence between businessmen, the State arranged an active service of letter carriers, every one of whom was called on the deposit an adequate sum of caution money. The couriers arrived at Fusina on horseback and thence boats were ready to carry the correspondence not only of the government, but letters, packets, money, valises, chests, etc. belonging to private individuals, by whom they were paid. The districts of the Veneto sent their foreign correspondence through Venice.*”
34. These installations were variously called the *caldiere da lavar lane* (Caniato “Commerci” 271), *lavatoio delle lane* and *tintoria* (Costantini 52, 58, figure 8).
35. Villamont (431): “Although there are in Venice an infinite number of wells and cisterns, they serve only the needs of the common people who don’t have the convenience of wells or cisterns in their houses” (translation by

- the author). Moryson (159): "[A]ll the Gentlemen of Venice fetch their fresh water by boats from thence [Fusina], the poorer sort being content with Well water."
36. Members of this guild, established in 1471, had been collecting water on and off at Fusina since 1339, and without interruption since 1391 (Costantini 30 n25). They were responsible for Venice's water supply, including the allocation of a set amount of free water to the municipal authorities and religious institutions, the management of the *gorne* (troughs channeling water into the city's cisterns) and the control of the use of the cisterns (Costantini 38). In 1587, more than 40 water barges (30–32 *burchi* and 10–12 *barche*) were registered as belonging to the *Acquaroli*'s guild. They worked to collect water at all hours, both day and night, making sometimes two or three trips a day between the city and Lizza Fusina.
37. Loading and reselling water from the Bottenigo was always tempting to unscrupulous freelancers (i.e., unconstrained by the guild's rules and duties), since it was not taxed and thus cheaper to collect (Costantini 31).
38. Montaigne (180): "I forgot to mention that the day we left Venice, we crossed paths with several boats, their hold filled with fresh water, which sells for one écu in Venice, and which is used for drinking and dyeing wool cloths. Once in Chafousine [Za' Fusina], we saw how horses, constantly powering a wheel, lift water from a stream and pour it into a channel and how the above mentioned boats then collect it, while positioned under [the channel, or gutter]" (translation by the author).
39. Ciriaco (Building on water 38 and 55 n74): "Although more complicated machinery was developed and proposed by the relevant authorities, the 'bucket' waterwheel could remain widely used along the rivers of the Venetian Republic for years to come...." For illustrations of water-lifting devices, see: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Saqiyah>; [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Scoop\\_wheel](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Scoop_wheel); <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Noria>.
40. Costantini (63): "The need to equip Lizzafusina with specific hydraulic machines was due to the fact that the *canaletto beverador* ["small canal for drinking water"] was not able to ensure a sufficient flow of water from the gutters (*gurne*) to the water-barges," because of the shortness of its course and its lack of gradient (translation by the author). See also Popplow.
41. Hentzner (230) and Grangier (831) give the total number of gondolas as 8,000, Molmenti (Part II, Vol. I, 72) and Coryat (I, 214) as 10,000, possibly

an overcount. Public gondolas, available for hire, may have numbered about 4,000, private gondolas in the service of wealthy households around 6,000 (Coryat I, 214). Boats of both categories were sometimes rowed by black gondoliers (either slaves of patrician families or freemen members of the gondoliers' fraternities). Not all gondoliers were native Venetians (Lowe 412). Gondoliers were known for their showy dress (Molmenti Part III, Vol. 1, 211; Lowe 441).

42. Lowe (430) explains: "According to Marin Sanudo il giovane, in the late fifteenth century there were three types of *traghetti*, which he categorizes according to where one boarded the gondola, and according to what the gondola did. The first type exclusively ferried passengers across the Grand Canal between two fixed points; a second type was available for hire for an hour or a day from set stations (presumably these were Coryat's "mercenary" boatmen); and a third (*traghetti da viazzì*) went outside the city, to Padua or Treviso, for example....) [In the first category] Sanudo lists fifteen of these *traghetti di dentro* or *traghetti da bagatin* (the cost of the trip was a *bagatin*), but in fact there were more, probably around twenty, each consisting of a number of gondoliers organized in an association or corporate brotherhood, rather like a guild." Zanelli (82–3) lists 37 stations for the "*traghetti di dentro*" and 30 for the "*traghetti di fuori*" documented from the 16th to the 18th Centuries.
43. "[The gondoliers] took to selling their liberties to private individuals outside the school [fraternity], and even outside the profession, though the name of the original owner remained on the books, to mislead the Government. And in this way, it came to pass that, in the year 1530, the real holders of liberties, in a large number of cases, were 'foreigners, masons, dyers, bootmakers, priests, gentlemen and women.... It was the days of *bravi*, and these riotous young gondoliers [hired by the new holders] were either *bravi* themselves, or knew how to find *bravi* among their friends, who would see them through their quarrels by the help of sword or dagger" (Brown *Lagoons* 93–4, 107–9).
44. Moryson (164): "And that men may passe speedily [across the Grand Canal], besides this bridge [the Rialto bridge], there be thirteene places called *Traghetti*, where boats attend, called *Gondole*; which being of incredible number give ready passage to all men. The rest of the channels running through lesse streets, are more narrow, and in them many bridges are to be passed under."
45. Coryat (I, 210–4): "There are in Venice thirteen ferries or passages, which they commonly call *Traghetti*, where passengers may be transported in

a Gondola to what place of the City they will. Of which thirteene, one is under this Rialto bridge. But the boatmen that attend at this ferry are the most vicious and licentious varlets about all the city.”

46. Misson (243–5), traveling in 1688, gives us an insightful portrait of the gondoliers—which has echoes in visitors’ accounts of the 16th Century: “[Carnivals and festivals] are wonderful for gondoliers, not only because of the money they make with their gondolas, but because these are times for illicit assignations and a gondolier is a factotum. They know all the byways and detours of the canals.... Pandering is their main business. They offer, unprompted, to make a deposit and to lose the money if the merchandise proves unsatisfactory” (translation by the author).
47. For example, the traghetto Badia-Verona and Badia-Venice on the Adige.
48. The latter were called *traghetto a fune* (GDLI), or rope ferry. Cowden-Clarke (Furness 177–8 n55), agreeing that *trana* was at the root of Tranect but unfamiliar with the specific setting of Fusina, speculated (erroneously) that “the Venetian ferry boat was drawn through the water” by such a rope “strained across the canal for the purpose.” Rope ferries were indeed used in Italy as elsewhere in Europe: Moryson (221) describes crossing the Tiber and Montaigne (177, 178) crossing the Adige, Adigetto and Po on one of those; but the public ferries between Venice and Padua and Venice and Fusina were not among them: they were rowed while in the lagoon and towed by horses once on the Brenta. For illustrations, see: Confortini (78-9), [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cable\\_ferry](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cable_ferry) and [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Reaction\\_ferry](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Reaction_ferry).
49. <http://www.treccani.it/vocabolario/traghetto/>.
50. Not all traghetti involve the use of a *carro* (many are much simpler); but all *carri* transferring boats over land are *traghetti*.
51. “Una di quelle gran ruote, dentro le quali camminando uno o due uomini muovono grandissimi pesi, come la massa delle gran pietre del mangano, o barche cariche, che d’un’acqua in un’altra si traghettano strascinandole per terra.” (Galileo, quoted in the GDLI) “One of those large wheels, inside which one or two men by walking [i.e., a treadwheel] can move very heavy loads, such as the large stones of a trebuchet or the loaded boats that are transported from one body of water to another by hauling them over land” (translation by the author).
52. Zonca (60): “[T]ra il fiume della Brenta, e la laguna, per dove hà da traghettar il carro vi è fabricato una muraglia angolare a modo di tetto

con angolo molto ottuso....” “between the river Brenta and the lagoon, where the carro moves back and forth, a slanted dyke was built in the shape of a pitched roof with a very obtuse angle...” (translation by the author).

53. The word *traquet* is close in sound to the Italian *traghetto*, with its hard <g>. Like *tranect*, it is found only in Villamont’s book and is the only instance quoted in the Base Historique du Vocabulaire Français (<https://www.cnrtl.fr/definition/bhvf/traquet>). It is otherwise unknown to French dictionaries with this or any approximate meaning.
54. “Traghetti simili a quello di Fusine, erano costituiti da un argine, un carro e un mangano” (Togliani 582). Mangano can refer to a calender for finishing textiles, to a kind of siege engine or trebuchet (see also note 51 above), or formerly to a machinery designed to move heavy weights, a capstan (GDLI IX, 649, 4); in our context it designates the contraption of treadwheels or windlasses, ropes, pulleys, etc., similarly used for hauling boats overland.
55. The anonymous *Veniexiana* (1536) already mentions the boat which, on a regular schedule, left Venice at Santa Croce and traveled up the Brenta to Padua (Ferrone 638). By the late 17th century however, it is clear that the Venetian upperclass and wealthy visitors had forsaken the public ferry in favor of privately hired boats, in particular, the more luxurious *Burchielli*, as Coronelli (85) and Lassels (221) testify.
56. Authors differ on its exact location: some place it at Santa Croce, near the present Piazzale Roma, while Zanelli (81) locates it on the Riva dell’Oglio, closer to the Rialto bridge.
57. The word *Lizza* is a dialectal form of *Filza*, from the late Latin *helcia* (a rope used to drag or tow)(GDLI, IX, 172). *Fusina*/*Fucina* (*officina*) is a smithy or more generally a workshop (Migne, 1004; GDLI, VI, 417). Inexplicably, Roe (149) proposes “spindle” as translation for *Fusina* and “place of the spindle” for *Lizza Fusina*. The GDLI however only gives two meanings for *Lizza*: “tiltyard” and “sled” (IX, 172); and the meanings of “forge,” “kiln” or “crucible” and of “workshop” for *Fucina* (VI, 417–418). Roe’s translation is in error.
58. A 1460 document notes that the *traghetto di Lizzafusina* was leased to a certain Benedetto Barozzi (Mola 451 n10).
59. See in particular Luca Mola, *La Repubblica di Venezia tra acque dolci e acque salse*.



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# *Analyzing the Chiljan Portrait*

by Elisabeth Waugaman

One-third of portraits painted during the Tudor era remain unidentified because they do not offer any identifiers, such as name, crest, text, or identifiable location. Even small details, however, can provide important clues for identification. As Chriswell explains in “How to Read a Renaissance Portrait,” there is an art to understanding a Renaissance portrait.<sup>1</sup> We need to consider the patron, background clues, hidden geometries, the iconography, and carefully observe the clothes worn by the sitter because Elizabethans spoke through allegory and symbolism due to severe government repression, as well as adherence to medieval and Neoplatonic philosophy. Thus, visual details in period portraits are important because they reveal stories.

In *The Elizabethan Image*, Roy Strong emphasizes, “The key to the arts in England is ambiguity”<sup>2</sup> (17). Elizabethans looked “with eyes that essentially remained medieval,” (17), which means that everything has multiple levels of meaning, as Dante explains in his *Convivio*. Because of the religious and political schisms of the period, Elizabethans looked to the Middle Ages to create “a new secular iconography” consisting of an infinite variety of symbols from the complexity of “coats of arms, emblems, impressa, mottoes, inscriptions, stretching on to include a flower tucked in a ruff” (17). In short, visual details convey meaning on multiple levels.





Figure 1: *Edward de Vere, 1581, Chiljan portrait.*



Figure 2: *Katherine de Vere, Countess of Warwick, 1567.*

Unlike his half-sister's painting, Edward de Vere's portrait (figure 1) provides no instant identification of the sitter—no inscription, name, or coat of arms. Katherine Chiljan, who purchased the painting believing it to be a portrait of Edward de Vere, 17<sup>th</sup> Earl of Oxford, provides detailed information regarding its provenance. In addition to the striking physical resemblance between Oxford and his half-sister Katherine Vere, Lady Windsor—24 years old when her portrait (figure 2) was executed in 1567—there is the Chiljan painting's history. "The portrait's provenance can be traced to Oxford's granddaughter, Anne Stanley, Countess of Ancram. The estate of her son, the 2<sup>nd</sup> Earl of Ancram, went to his nephew, the first Marquess of Lothian; Lothian's sister married into the Brodie family, and one of her descendants married in the Sinclair family, later the Lords Thurso, from whom the portrait was purchased." Equally important is the fact that a painting of Henry de Vere, 18<sup>th</sup> Earl of Oxford, was also found in the same collection<sup>3</sup> The painting is on wood panel and measures 36 5/8 inches by 28 5/8 inches. Unfortunately, Christie's did not perform dendrochronology, ultraviolet, or X-ray studies on the painting prior to its sale, but described it being in the style of "the English school."

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## Faces and Hats

In this paper, we shall examine Oxford's portrait in detail—the colors, fabrics, jewelry, rapier, pose, and background—and compare it to other contemporary paintings, including other portraits of Oxford.

Chiljan discovered that the hat which Oxford wears matches the description of a hat Queen Elizabeth gave Oxford in 1581, as described in the logbook of *The Wardrobe of Robes* as “black taffeta,” “embroidered with pearl and gold”<sup>4</sup> (Chiljan 2). According to Elizabeth's sumptuary laws, only the nobility could wear gold, pearls, and silk from which taffeta is made. Chiljan observes that the 1581 date fits with Christie's dating of the portrait as circa 1580; and that the portrait may have commemorated the Queen's gift, which occurred shortly after Oxford's release from the Tower of London in June 1581 (Nelson 269). Portraits of Christopher Hatton and Robert Dudley depict them wearing black feathered velvet hats like this, a fashion inspired by the French court (Kelly and Schwabe 64–5). King Henry III of France and François, Duke of Alençon, also wear black bejeweled and feathered velvet caps such as this in their portraits.

Two portraits of Robert Dudley, Earl of Leicester, depict him outfitted in fiery orange-red (figure 3A), which mirrors his coat-of-arms, as does his white attire (figure 3B), which symbolizes his emblem of the white bear. In both portraits he wears a hat similar to Oxford's. The colors Dudley wears make him a personification of his heraldry; that is, his noble identity. Indeed, in *Hamlet*, Polonius tells Laertes, “the apparel oft proclaims the man” (*Hamlet*, I.iii.158). Thus, the sitter's apparel will tell us what it “proclaims.” While



Figure 3: (A) Robert Dudley, 1st Earl of Leicester (red doublet), circa 1575; (B) Robert Dudley, (white doublet), circa 1564.

examining the Chiljan portrait, it is important to remember the colors have been darkened by old varnish except for the face, which has been cleaned. However, cleaning only the face gives the visage a discordant intensity compared to the rest of the painting.

Although the reproduction available on the internet has an overall orange tint not found in the original painting, Oxford's portrait clearly depicts him with reddish brown hair, which suggests red hair in his earlier years. Red hair often darkens to brown, auburn, or even black with age.<sup>5</sup> His fair complexion, ruddy cheeks, and auburn hair would have been dramatic above the large expanse of his bright white collar, now dimmed and yellowed by old varnish.

## The Iconography of Attire

The richness and detailing of the costume in the Chiljan portrait are astonishing. The sitter wears a large collar, which would be brilliant white without the discoloration of the varnish. His collar, then called a French ruff, is unusual not only for its large size but because it is edged with lace. Ruffs, which began modestly, continued to increase in size, thanks to advancements in the production of starch. They reached their maximum size in the 1580s; Lord Burghley even complained of the fad: "is it not a very lamentable thing that we should bestow that upon starch to the setting forth of vanity and pride which would staunch the hunger of many that starve in the streets for want of bread?"<sup>6</sup> In 1583, Phillip Stubbs attacked the wearing of these large ruffs in *The Anatomie of Abuses*. Queen Elizabeth eventually regulated the size of ruffs and the length of rapiers, with officers stationed at London's gates to cut ruffs and break rapiers that exceeded the regulations.

A ruff as large as the one Oxford wears required a *supportasse*, that is, a wire frame, and the ruff had to be frequently washed and re-starched (Bowman 31). Relatively few noblemen are depicted wearing these large ruffs—not even Robert Dudley. French ruffs, also called cartwheel ruffs, had 200 or more figure-eight folds extending six inches beyond the neck, with a diameter of 18 inches, including the neck. This required a minimum of eight yards of lace, which cost a small fortune (Bowman 32). Catherine de' Medici even possessed an especially long spoon so she could drink soup without damaging the ruff.<sup>7</sup> It is with good reason that we do not see more French ruffs in portraits of English noblemen, as they were extremely expensive to buy and maintain. Wearing them with grace and ease was not easily achieved.

Puritans referred to these large ruffs as cartwheel or millstone ruffs because of their size. The English referred to them as "French ruffs," but the French called them "the English horror" (Bowman 33). Imagining de Vere's brilliant white ruff, we can understand why one Frenchman referred to them as "St. John's head on a plate" (Kelly and Schwabe 45). Hence they were



also referred to as “the head on the platter” ruff. As a result, French ruffs required short hair and trimmed facial hair as seen in Oxford’s portrait.

Besides de Vere, who else in the period wore a large French ruff with lace edging? Below, we see that the earliest English portrait depicting a French ruff appears to be of Amias Paulet (figure 4A), the English ambassador to France, painted by Nicholas Hillard in France, according to the 1577–78 dating. Hillard also painted Francis, Duke of Alençon (figure 4B), in miniatures in a large French ruff in 1576 and again in 1582 for Queen Elizabeth’s prayer book; as well as the Queen (1580s, figure 4C). Like Queen Elizabeth, Edmund Spenser (1590s, figure 4D) wears a French ruff tinted blue with indigo to make the face appear whiter, yet another flourish. Oxford appears



Figure 4: (A) Sir Amias Paulet, c. 1578; (B) François Hercule Duc d'Anjou and Alençon; (C) Elizabeth I, c. 1585–90; (D) Edmund Spenser, c. 1590.

among the court's elites with his French ruff at the very start of the craze in England. Considering the dating, Oxford may have introduced it to the English court. Understandably, the French ruff was a relatively short-lived fad and was replaced by smaller ruffs by the 1590s.<sup>8</sup>

After Oxford's French ruff, the viewer's eye is drawn to his doublet (jacket), which is a brilliant white and green underneath the old varnish. Peascod doublets padded with "bombast" (stuffing) were a popular fashion of Spanish origin that mirrored the shape of armor. Mariah Hale, costume designer for the Folger Shakespeare Library, identified the white fabric of the doublet as "a braid called *passementerie*" from the French.<sup>9</sup> *Passementerie* was an active industry in England at the time. Made by "silk women" who wound fine threads around something sturdier to create a cord, then braided into a decorative trim, it was probably all one piece. "The loops on the edges were both decorative and indicative of the manner of manufacture—i.e., the loops are where the pins were placed to hold the braid still while working. The brocade may have been made of silk mixed with metallic threads, possibly silver metallic trim. The buttons appear to be made by the same silk woman out of the same materials, which was not uncommon."<sup>10</sup> Creating *passementerie* required enormous skill and a long apprenticeship.

The white of Oxford's attire echoes the white mullet (star, figure 5) of his coat of arms, which symbolizes the apparition of a star reflected on Aubrey de Vere's banner at the siege of Antioch during the First Crusade.<sup>11</sup> (On 14 June 1098, a star—that is, a meteorite—appeared to fall on the Muslim camp, which was seen as a sign of divine intervention.)

De Vere, whose French origins date back to the Norman Conquest of England in 1066, wears a fabric with French origins and a French name yet made in England—a mirror of his own heritage. The herringbone design of Oxford's *passementerie* is significant because it is an ancient pattern associated with Rome and its brick roads, laid in a herringbone pattern so that they could shift without





becoming unaligned. The design regained popularity during the Renaissance, especially in Italy, which helped make it popular again throughout Europe, not only in architectural design but in attire.<sup>12</sup> The *passementerie* and its herringbone design allude not only to French origins but also to a love of the ancient world.

Under the *passementerie* is a green fabric. Spoken in French, the name “Vere” sounds like “vert,” the French word for green. Hale identified the green fabric as either “figured, cut, or embroidered velvet, which was made of silk at this time and was therefore a very expensive fabric.”<sup>13</sup> The green fabric, Oxford’s nature as symbolized by his name, lies beneath the braid—the outward show—of his identity. From a distance the green velvet appears deceptively simple (figure 6, for full color, see the cover). However, a close look reveals that it has a complex design of dots and lines set at an angle, which creates the illusion of an upward and outward movement, as if the green strips are organic, providing a totally contrasting sensation to the staid parallels of the braid. Viewing the parallel braids and the slantwise velvet thus creates a sensation of dramatic tension.



Figure 6: Oxford’s white-and-green doublet.

Close examination of the green velvet strips reveals they are placed at an angle which forms a series of “V’s.” Vespasiano Gonzaga, the founder of Sabbioneta, is portrayed wearing a vest designed with “V” strips exactly like Oxford’s<sup>14</sup>—and likewise, Cosimo de’ Medici. The style is Italian in origin. By itself this is a strong indication that the sitter was knowledgeable about Italian style and had input into the design of his costume. From a distance, the viewer would only see parallel bands of white-and-green in the jacket. The doublet would appear deceptively simple: the “V” design, a symbol of de Vere’s identity, is almost totally hidden by the white *passementerie* braid. White, by the way, was also one of the Queen’s colors.

Oxford’s doublet—with its white horizontal stripes and underlying green “V” pattern—is very unusual. Noblemen are portrayed wearing one or the other design, but not both simultaneously. English noblemen’s doublets are

usually depicted with vertical stripes or horizontal stripes, all one color or with more subtle horizontal pairings of beige and white, silver and brown, etc., as we see in portraits of Robert Dudley in horizontal white stripes and Christopher Hatton in horizontal tan and vertical white stripes (figure 7).<sup>15</sup> Oxford's brightly colored stripes, dimmed by the discolored varnish, accompanied by orange tawny sleeves, create vivid color contrasts which are more typical of tournament attire, livery, and Fool's attire.

In *To Clothe a Fool: A Study of the Apparel Appropriate for the European Court Fool 1300–1700*, Virginia Lee Fletcher provides examples of Fools attired with bi-color horizontal lines (Fletcher 24, 64). Brighella, one of the Commedia dell'Arte characters, could be identified by his white costume with green stripes, a cap, and sword. Brighella is known for his

intelligence, quick temper, scheming, and mistrust of women (figure 8). He is witty, fond of wordplay, and a musician<sup>16</sup>—all traits that describe the Earl of Oxford. Moreover, Oxford travelled throughout northern Italy for nine months during 1575–76, where he had the opportunity to experience Commedia dell'Arte performances first-hand. It also happens that Commedia dell'Arte influences are incorporated throughout Shakespeare's plays, such as *Love's Labor's Lost*, *Taming of the Shrew*, *Twelfth Night* and *Merchant of Venice*. In all, ten of Shakespeare's plays are set in Italy.

Brighella has been described as “The Slave of the Master (Mistress) and the Master of the Slaves”—a description suitable to Oxford, who publicly declared himself at a tournament to be the Queen's servant as “the Knight of the Sunne” and was the master (patron) of numerous writers and two theater troupes. Fletcher also includes an illustration



Figure 7: Christopher Hatton, c. 1589.



of an Elizabethan Fool attired with a cap from which a bell dances mid-fore-head (79, figure 133), recalling Oxford's mid-forehead lock of hair.

The bottom of Oxford's doublet has a green trim that emphasizes the green bands across his chest and highlights the  $\nabla$  shape at the base of the doublet. A contrasting trim at the edge of a doublet is unusual. To me, this green trim is suggestive of leaves because leaf imagery is introduced right below it with a repetitive pattern of overlapping lace leaves. These lace leaves appear to extend below Oxford's hand and indicate that they were not merely a border, but decorated his trunk-hose (breeches), thus emphasizing the importance of the leaf design. As Plomer notes in *English Printing Ornaments*, the leaf was "used by "architects...lace workers...and printers...and it became a stock ornament in every printing office" (6). "It was only during the reign of Queen Elizabeth that printing ornaments like this (leafy designs) developed, compared to the paucity of English book ornamentation previously, especially when compared to books printed on the continent" (Plomer 18). Due to the continental influence this ornate style of book ornamentation became highly popular in England in the 1570s and 1580s (Plomer 83). Thus, we see another link in the design of Oxford's clothing to continental and classical influences—here to printing and books, to literature and learning, themes important to "the Knight of the Sunne."

Comparing this photograph of *Laural nobilis* (figure 9) and the leaves at the bottom of Oxford's doublet, one immediately sees that the shape of the lace leaves exactly reflects the shape of the laurel leaves in the photograph. The Greeks and Romans used *Laural nobilis* leaves to make crowns for winners of sports and literary competitions since the tree is an evergreen, it is common in Mediterranean countries, and the leaves dry out but retain their shape and stiffness.<sup>17</sup>



In ancient mythology, Daphne is turned into a laurel bay tree so that she can escape Apollo's advances. The laurel/bay tree is, therefore, the perfect mage for the "virgin" Queen Elizabeth. Apollo claimed the tree as his own just as Oxford does as "the Knight of the Sunne"—the sun being a symbol for Apollo. For those who know the story of the laurel, Apollo and Daphne, Oxford is comparing himself here to Apollo. A reference to the laurel tree refers not only to Oxford's literary talents but also to his literary patronage—his employment of John Lyly, Anthony Munday, and Thomas Churchyard—because laurel crowns made from Apollo's tree were awarded to the winners of literary competitions.

Turning to the sleeve worn by the sitter, Hale believes it “could well be silk taffeta, what is now called iridescent taffeta, which used to be called shot taffeta. The slashings on the sleeve would have then been cut and left raw.”<sup>18</sup> Despite the darkened colors, a visual description of the fabric as a “golden color,”<sup>19</sup> suggests that Oxford’s shirt and the color of his feather (described as “citrine”)<sup>20</sup> mirror his heraldic color, just as we see in the portraits of Dudley.

The golden-orange color of Oxford’s sleeve and the fabric on the viewer’s left side suggest “the orange-tawny” color associated with the de Vere livery for centuries. John de Vere’s livery colors are described as orange or orange tawny.<sup>21</sup> “Tawny” derives from the French “tanné,” referring to tanned leather, which takes on a golden hue.<sup>22</sup> According to *A Display of Heraldry* (1724), tawny was originally associated with the French (III, 10). Another interesting association of orange-tawny is with the theater: “Orange-Tawny—1522: [is] often worn in plays,” which is not surprising given the Oxford family’s multi-generational patronage of players.<sup>23</sup> Moreover, in one of Oxford’s signed poems, “Forsaken Man,” he associates his livery color of “tawny” with loss and mourning.<sup>24</sup> Oxford was thus aware of the broad spectrum of tawny from subdued to bright—a complex color with a broad spectrum—and used it to convey his emotions.

Dorothea Dickerman sees correlations between the Chiljan portrait and “The Knight of the Sunne,” the identity that Oxford assumed for the joust at Whitehall Palace Tiltyard on January 21, 1581. Dickerman notes that the golden orange taffeta of Oxford’s sleeves calls to mind Oxford’s “orange tawny tent;” that the silver trim of his brocade recalls the silver trim on the tent, and that the leaves at the bottom of his doublet mirror the image of “The Knight of the Tree of the Sunne.” Dickerman also notes that the shape of the lace leaves matches the shape of the “*Laural nobilis*.”<sup>25</sup> The bay tree is, indeed, *laura nobilis*.

What of the cloak draped around the sitter? According to Hale, the cloak “could be wool or velvet with braided trim possibly gold or silver.”<sup>26</sup> By law, velvet could only be worn by the nobility. In terms of political symbolism, the color black was associated with nobility, power, and authority. Portraits of the French Valois kings, Henry II, Francis II, and Charles IX wearing black cloaks with similar trim suggest a French influence in the style of Oxford’s



Figure 10: Savoldo portrait, showing the drape of a cloak similar to Oxford’s.



cloak. Another artistic parallel is “The Portrait of a Knight” (1525, figure 10) by Giovanni Girolamo Savoldo, in which we see the knight seated and wrapped in a golden cloth—a symbol of his wealth and power.

Underneath Oxford’s arm, we see a gilded Italianate rapier encrusted with black gemstones, which were thought to protect the wielder of the sword. Typically, rapiers from the period are made of steel, sometimes ornamented with gilt. Oxford’s gilded rapier encrusted with gems is thus highly unusual—a stunningly beautiful piece of art.

## What Do the Rings Convey?

Examining the sitter’s hand, we can clearly see that he possesses long fingers. Charles W. Barrell comments on Oxford’s long fingers and his long thumb in the Gheeraerts (white attire) and Ashbourne (black attire, book, and skull) portraits, using their unusual length as one of the criteria for identifying the Ashbourne portrait as the 17<sup>th</sup> Earl of Oxford (6). In the Chiljan portrait, we see the same elegant hand, long fingers, and thumb highlighted by the stark contrast with the black cape. We also see de Vere is wearing three rings—two on the little finger and one on the middle phalange of the index finger. The two rings on the little finger are possibly gimmel rings, from the Latin *gemellus* (twin). Gimmel rings were popular in the 16th Century and consisted of hoops linked together to form one ring. These rings were “most often associated with love and marriage.”<sup>27</sup> Another possibility is that one of the rings is a “guard ring”—a ring usually worn to safeguard a larger ring.

It is also possible that one or both are signet rings. Signet rings were used to seal and authenticate documents (Awais-Dean 225). Chiljan has identified the ring at the bottom of his little finger as a signet ring (Chiljan 1997, 18). The second ring also appears to have a stamped design.

In the Gheeraerts portrait (figure 11), Oxford is depicted again with a ring on the middle phalange. This ring, actually two upon close examination, may be the same double ring portrayed on his little finger in the Chiljan portrait.<sup>28</sup> Wearing two rings on the little finger and one on a middle phalange is unusual for an



Figure 11: Edward de Vere, 1590, the Gheeraerts portrait.



Elizabethan nobleman. If we review full-length iconic portraits of Henry VIII, we see that he is wearing two rings on each little finger and one on his index finger—but on both hands. In her coronation portrait, Queen Elizabeth wears what appears to be two rings on both index fingers and one little finger.

Surprisingly, Elizabethan lords were not often depicted wearing rings in their formal portraits, perhaps because the Italian ambassador Sebastian Giustinian observed that Henry VIII covered his fingers with rings, a practice the Italians considered to be in bad taste. This may help explain why Henry VIII and Queen Elizabeth, who were both fond of wearing many rings, do not do so in their formal portraits. Henry limits himself to four (two on the thumb and two on the index) on each hand. Except for an early portrait, Queen Elizabeth has one or two, but often not even one. By not wearing rings, Queen Elizabeth is following formal Tudor male rather than female ring-wearing custom. In formal portraits, her noblemen often do not wear any. Occasionally we see a ring on the little finger or a signet ring on the index finger.

A painting of Lord Burghley, Sir Francis Walsingham, Sir Walter Raleigh, and Lord Hunsdon playing cards in an informal setting depicts all of them wearing rings on their index and little fingers.<sup>29</sup> In their formal portraits, however, all of them wear either no rings or a single ring on the little finger. In the Gheeraerts portrait, Oxford is once again portrayed wearing a ring on the middle phalange.

Because Oxford has himself portrayed twice with a ring on his middle phalange, the placement must have import. Chiljan observes that Henry VII wore rings on his middle phalange (1997, 18, figure 12). If we go back further in history, we find a portrait of Henry V wearing a ring on the middle phalange.<sup>30</sup> There are two portraits of Henry VI wearing a ring on the middle phalange.<sup>31</sup> Henry VII is portrayed wearing two rings on one finger with one worn on the middle phalange.<sup>32</sup> Another portrait shows him, again, wearing a ring on the middle phalange.<sup>33</sup> In these portraits, Henry VII holds a red rose just as, in his later portrait, Oxford holds a wild boar, his heraldic symbol. By wearing a ring on



*Figure 12: Henry VII, showing rings on fingers.*

his middle phalange like the Lancastrian kings Henry V, Henry VI and Henry VII in a manner not seen in any other Elizabethan lord's portrait, Oxford reveals his family's role in establishing the Tudor lineage to anyone who knew this history. John de Vere, 13th Earl of Oxford, helped secure the throne for Henry VII. To honor that service with a highly symbolic gesture, Henry selected John de Vere to crown him King. The rose which Oxford wears behind his ear also reflects the red Lancastrian rose.

The Lancastrian kings and Henry VIII, as a youth (figure 13), were all depicted wearing rings on the middle phalange, as does Oxford. I have found no other images of Tudor noblemen from this period wearing rings in this manner.



*Figure 13: Henry VIII as a youth, c. 1509.*

## Fabrics and Curtains

A full fabric background behind an Elizabethan nobleman is unusual. Occasionally one finds a curtain in one segment of a portrait or a partially opened curtain in a room. Fabric backgrounds were usually placed behind kings, popes and ministers such as Thomas Cromwell. As Hollander explains, basic backgrounds in portraits were flat with no wrinkles or folds until the 16th Century (Hollander 43).

Hans Holbein the Younger painted luminous green curtains, neatly folded behind his subjects in his portraits of Ambassadors Thomas More, Erasmus, and Sir Henry Guilford. In all these portraits, the curtains hang in resplendent, elegant folds. Green was symbolic of “la langue verte,” “la langue des oiseaux”—“mystical, perfect, divine language,”<sup>34</sup> based on sound, puns, and an esoteric wisdom centered on the symbolism of individual letters, which provided multiple levels of meaning depending on one's knowledge. Hence, “la langue verte” symbolized complete understanding attainable only by a few—the well-educated. Because of the stratified society of the Renaissance, the educated class consisted mostly of the nobility and the wealthy who could afford advanced education as well as the wherewithal to buy books.

Since curtains were not often depicted in the portraits of Tudor noblemen, an examination of when they do appear is of value. In the portrait of Dudley above, commissioned for the Queen's progression in 1575, we see him resplendently dressed in orange-red and gold, colors reserved for the nobility by the Queen's sumptuary laws. He is represented as the apogee of a Tudor aristocrat with his colors, crest, gold chain, Order of the Garter, and rapier. On the right side, we see a green velvet curtain with a gold trim which symbolizes a different aspect of this powerful Earl—his interest in knowledge confirmed by his serving as Chancellor of Oxford University, symbolized by "*la langue verte*." The gold trim, restricted to nobility, also suggests courtly knowledge. Lord Burghley's 1570 portrait depicts him with a similar green curtain, with a gold trim on the right and a column on the left. Burghley served as Queen Elizabeth's Secretary of State and, later, Lord High Treasurer, hence the green curtain, and her political support, represented by the column. Burghley's name and motto are included to identify him. It is worth noting that Burghley's rapier resembles that of Oxford with its black and gold, though its design is not as light and refined as Oxford's. There is also a portrait of Sir Walter Raleigh and his son with a red curtain pulled back to reveal a red script identifying him.<sup>35</sup> Here we have three portraits of noblemen with a partial, curtained background and identities revealed in various ways with crests, mottos, names, and dates.

Examining the Chiljan portrait, the obscure background is quite different from the paintings with curtains discussed above. Even considering portraits of women which frequently contain curtains, the Chiljan portrait stands apart for the obscurity of its background. On the right side the fabric, which appears to be a curtain, is pulled back. One can follow the lighter edge of the curtain at a slight right angle from his shoulder to the top of the painting. However, whatever is beyond the curtain remains a mystery because the space is painted the same dark color as the curtain. The lack of color contrast here is odd because it muddles the viewer's sense of perspective. The curtain appears to be pulled back, but nothing is revealed—not even a sense of depth beyond the curtain. In the other portraits with curtains, Dudley's identity is made clear with his crest, Burghley's with his motto, Raleigh's with the long text at the top of his portrait. In Oxford's portrait there is no crest, and nothing is written in the same space where the curtain appears to be pulled back. Why pull the curtain back to reveal nothing at all—not even a background that can be differentiated from the curtain?

As opposed to the primarily vertical folds of the fabric on the right side of the portrait, the fabric folds on the left side of the painting are very erratic with "V" shaped patterns—a possible mirroring of "V" for "Vere." Kathryn Sharpe notes an Italian influence in the painting of the drapes, which mirrors the cascading, sometimes abstract, drapery of Italian painters like Titian<sup>36</sup> as opposed to the neat, realistic folds of English and Dutch artists. There is a

strange shape behind the top half of the left collar and halfway up the left side of Oxford's head. This oddly shaped void suggests a strange opening that has no clear explanation. How was the curtain gathered to create an opening like this? What is its purpose? The dark color mirrors the void on the other side of Oxford where the curtain also appears to be pulled back, only to reveal nothing. Close inspection using a computer shows overpainting with black paint to the left of Oxford's head. Could there have been something pulling the curtain back or was something revealed under the curtain pulled back there? The strange disorder of the fabric background is disconcerting with no discernible explanation.

What function do Tudor curtains serve? They were used for decoration (the beautiful fabrics behind noblemen, ministers, and popes), for warmth by covering cold stone walls, to cover windows for privacy, and in the theater. Hans Holbein the Younger painted Sir Henry Guilford, the Comptroller of the Household, who provided court entertainments for Henry VIII, with a curtain behind him. Likewise, we have a curtain behind the sitter of the Chiljan portrait. Because of Holbein's renown as a master painter for Henry VIII, his paintings were well known at court, and because curtains appear infrequently in male portraits of the time, when they do appear, they bring up associations with other curtained portraits. If we think about curtains in the theater, they are often pulled back when an actor enters or exits the stage. Is that what the curtain in disarray suggests? Facing the painting, one sees the black void on the left highlights de Vere's face—his identity.

A professional conservator with an ultraviolet light could determine if there is overpainting anywhere else in the painting—either in the dark spaces of the drapery or even around the oddly portrayed wisp of hair on the sitter's forehead (Chiljan 1998, 2). A conservator could thus determine if there was overpainting that hides the sitter's identity.

Clearly, the background of the Chiljan portrait is intentionally obscure and unbalanced. Why paint a curtain pulled back, not once but twice, only to reveal nothing? Why are the folds of the left side of the curtain in such disarray as opposed to the long folds on the right, which depict the long, orderly folds one expects to see when a curtain is pulled back? The folds of the left and right sides of the curtain are at odds and create a sense of imbalance, tension, and disorder, which are not impressions Renaissance subjects desired to create in their portraits. On the contrary, portraits of Renaissance noblemen seek to impress with clarity and a sense of control. Why is the background of Oxford's portrait so dark and chaotic? Why does the disordered background contrast so sharply with the serene depiction of the sitter? This disheveled background with two unexplained voids, revealing nothing—not even depth of perspective—appears to be unique in portraits of Elizabethan noblemen.

The asymmetry is reinforced with Oxford's apparel, for he is draped in his black cloak only over his right shoulder, while it is tucked under his left arm—an unnatural placement. Although there are portraits of English lords wearing their cloaks draped over one shoulder, I have not found another in which the cloak is so carefully and unnaturally pulled back across the body, resting on, but not covering, the bejeweled sword—a very carefully orchestrated arrangement. Having the cloak tucked under his left hand required a conscious arrangement that accentuates his cloak—a piece of clothing that covers the identity beneath. As opposed to other English noblemen's portraits which depict them most often as standing straight and proud, Oxford appears to be slouching. Once again, we see Oxford ignoring the standard portrait protocol of the era. So many details in this portrait reveal an individual who defied the norms of his day.

Another question involves the color of the curtain, described as “brown.”<sup>37</sup> Old varnish turns green to brown. Using a computer to enlarge the photograph of the portrait reveals many green highlights in the curtain. Seeing the darkened white and green of the doublet, with the green streaked with brown by the varnish, there is no doubt that the background was originally lighter and greener. It is possible the drapery is a *nacr  velour* with green and brown highlights, depending on how the light hits the fabric. What then does the color brown symbolize for an educated Renaissance viewer?

Brown has been associated with the common man since the Roman era, when the word “plebeian” meant “those dressed in brown.” Poor Englishmen were required to wear brown by a 1363 statutory law. Brown is the color of “Everyman” and the earth, from which brown colors were made. Brown was also associated with the Franciscans and the humility they espoused. Unlike so many portraits of noblemen which proudly display their names and coats of arms, Oxford does not reveal his identity except in the most subtle manner, with his red rose, his rings and his attire as “the Knight of the Sunne.” Only those familiar with the intricacies of royal history and court activities would have understood the subtleties of this portrait. The combination of green and brown provides a paradox, with brown as the color of everyman and humility and green as symbolic of secret knowledge and a closed coterie.

Oxford's figure—with the bright white collar, *passem terie*, and lace leaves, the vibrant green bands, the golden orange taffeta of the sleeves and the lining of the cloak—provides a sharp contrast with the green/brown curtain pulled back not once but twice to reveal nothing but darkness. This contrast between light and dark is reminiscent of *chiaroscuro*—yet another visual association to Italy.



Finally, what of the sitter's facial expression? Renaissance portraits are remarkable in that they manage to convey so little emotion. Smiles lack gravitas. Because of political repression during the Counter-Reformation, as well as literary and philosophical traditions, secrecy was a key element of Elizabethan society and culture. In consequence, rarely is there direct eye contact in portraits of the period. Thus, formal Renaissance portraits are enigmatic and this portrait is no exception. Like his peers, the sitter seems to stare past us, existing beyond the common view.

## Conclusions

Quite simply, the Chiljan portrait is a remarkable picture from the period, painted in England yet with strong influences from both France and Italy. It reveals a young man dressed in the latest fashion, from his feathered, bejeweled hat to his French ruff, his padded peascod doublet, and his trimmed black cloak. His gilded, bejeweled rapier sets him apart even among the nobility. The fabrics of his clothes tell a complex story for the elite group who could get close enough to see what fabrics the clothes were made of and knew the meaning behind the fabrics. The red rose above his ear and his rings are links to English history, but only for those who know that history intimately.

Likewise, his attire suggests that of “the Knight of the Sunne,” recognizable to those present for that royal tournament in January of 1581. For those unaware of this complex, courtly history, we simply see a handsome young man dressed in the latest fashion, who appears somewhat eccentric for the theatrical placement of a rose behind his ear and the unusual placement of rings on his fingers. His slouched stance sets him apart with nonchalance and even defiance. The most striking anomaly of the painting lies in its background, with the depiction of a curtain pulled back that reveals a dark space on both sides of the sitter. The two halves of the curtain fall in two different ways. This background is at odds with portraits of English noblemen of the period.

Based on the evidence provided here, it is highly likely that this is a portrait of Edward de Vere, 17<sup>th</sup> Earl of Oxford.

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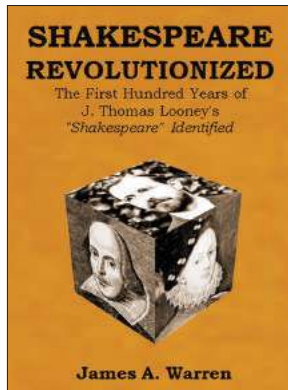
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# *Book & Movie Reviews*





## Shakespeare Revolutionized

The First Hundred Years of J. Thomas Looney's  
"Shakespeare" Identified

By JAMES A. WARREN

That "William Shakespeare" was the author of *Hamlet*, *Romeo and Juliet* and many other much-loved plays is the greatest deception in literary history. **Shakespeare Revolutionized** tells the fascinating story of the discovery one hundred years ago of the real author—Edward de Vere, the highest-ranking earl in Queen Elizabeth I's court—and explains why it matters: knowing Shakespeare's real identity revolutionizes understanding of Shakespeare's plays and

poems and the conditions in which they were created, and shows the real author's critical role in launching what became known as the English Renaissance.

The book explains why the deception was perpetrated and why it lasted more than 300 years, and chronicles the influence of the Oxfordian idea on public opinion, on academia and on the development of an Oxfordian movement over the past century. It shows why many Shakespeare scholars today resist examining the Oxfordian claim even as the idea becomes the unacknowledged nucleus around which much of their work revolves.

This book will revolutionize the understanding of all readers willing to approach the Shakespeare authorship question with an open mind.

Published by Veritas Publications ✦ Pap., 7 x 10 in., 784 pages ✦ Amazon.com, \$40

## Shakespeare Investigated

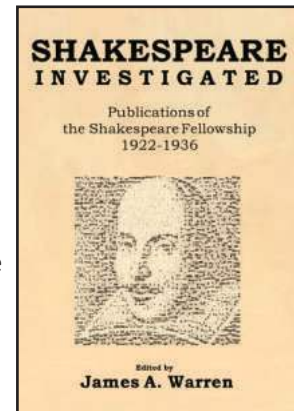
Publications of the Shakespeare Fellowship  
1922-1936

Edited by JAMES A. WARREN

J. Thomas Looney's announcement in 1920 that Edward de Vere, 17th Earl of Oxford, was the pen behind the pseudonym "William Shakespeare" launched a new wave of interest in the issue of Shakespearean authorship. Scholars inspired by Mr. Looney's pioneering work made one startling discovery after another regarding the topicality of the plays and the conditions in which they had been written.

These discoveries were reported in more than 300 articles published by the Shakespeare Fellowship, an organization founded in 1922 by Col. Bernard R. Ward to promote research into the authorship question. Yet these pieces were almost lost to history; very few have ever been reprinted—until now. **Shakespeare Investigated** includes the full text of 335 pieces originally published from 1922 to 1936. Readily available to scholars for the first time, they not only report on scholarly findings as they were announced, but also tell the story of the investigations that resulted in them. By showing how broad and varied researchers' lines of investigation were, and by documenting how scholars changed their beliefs and interpretations as new information came to light, this collection fills an important gap in our understanding of scholarly work on the issue of Shakespearean authorship.

Published by Veritas Publications ✦ Pap., 7 x 10 in., 642 pages ✦ Amazon.com, \$25



# Shakespeare Revolutionized

Reviewed by Gary Goldstein

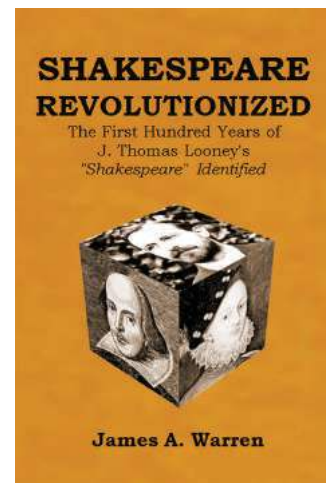
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SHAKESPEARE REVOLUTIONIZED: The First Hundred Years of J. Thomas Looney's "Shakespeare" Identified. By James Warren. Cary, NC: Veritas Publications, July 2021, 784 pages (paperback \$40).

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The latest book by James Warren is unique, being the first history of the Oxfordian movement on a global scale from its inception in 1920 with publication of J. Thomas Looney's *'Shakespeare' Identified in Edward de Vere, 17<sup>th</sup> Earl of Oxford*. The author, a retired member of the US diplomatic service, invested six years into its research and composition and the results of that commitment just became available this summer in print and Kindle editions via Amazon. What merits this kind of investment is the nature of the dispute, one that precludes compromise, according to Warren:

Shakespearean authorship is winner take all. The shift from Shakspere to Oxford is similar to the shift from the Ptolemaic geo-centric system to that of the Copernican heliocentric system. Both cannot be right.



That understanding permeates the entire book, which makes Warren's analysis of the situation and his detailed recommendations invaluable.

Another part of its value lies in its design: the book is organized chronologically based on select time periods in the US, Great Britain and other

countries, highlighting the scholarly achievements from each era—along with critical responses from the news media, academia, even popular culture. It therefore provides readers with a fully rounded perspective of the post-Stratfordian movement as it centers on the Oxfordian hypothesis, its various societies, and its efforts to engage scholars, librarians, and journalists.

Given its scope, the book also serves as an excellent reference source for Shakespeareans since it describes the complete cycle of public engagement, employing relevant excerpts from interviews, book publications, television and film reviews, and more. Its presentation is supported by extensive footnotes and appendices: a complete listing of Looney's Oxfordian writings, a comparison of the five editions of *'Shakespeare' Identified*, a calendar of Shakespeare Fellowship officers and events from 1922–1946 in Great Britain, a comprehensive bibliography as well as an index.

The main body of the book is structured in six clusters: Chapters 1-5 summarize the intellectual environment in Great Britain which led J. Thomas Looney to launch his investigation into the authorship, describes his methodology, delineates the book's publication by Cecil Palmer and responses to it in the public square, then lays out why it was so difficult for many people to accept the Oxfordian thesis at the time.

Chapters 6–10 examine the rise of the Oxfordian movement under the umbrella of the Shakespeare Fellowship and trace its activities from 1922 to 1936. Chapters 11–13 report how academia and traditional Shakespeare scholars first responded to the Oxfordian challenge globally. Chapters 14–18 then examine the activities of the Oxfordian movement in Britain through 1945 and in North America through 1948.

Moving into the modern era are Chapters 19–24, which assess the state of the Oxfordian case today internationally, while Chapters 25–26 provide an analysis of why the authorship matters both intellectually and socially—while the concluding chapter provides an action plan for completing the Oxfordian revolution initiated by J. Thomas Looney 100 years ago.

A major discovery made by Warren was locating a large cache of new materials regarding Looney's research and letters through his grandson in Scotland. At the same time, Warren resuscitates the scholarly reputations of early Oxfordian researchers such as Eva Turner Clark and Hugh Holland, as well as Percy Allen, Charles Wisner Barrell, Colonel B.R. Ward and his son, Captain B.M. Ward.

A vital contribution of Warren's work is his assessment as to why the Oxfordian hypothesis was not able to gain greater acceptance by scholars and the general public in the past. In the chapter "The Dozen Mental Revolutions"

he lays out the social psychology that has impeded such acceptance, labeling them Human Resistance, Cognitive Resistance, and Institutional Resistance.

The first hurdle is the “natural human resistance to changing any long-held belief.... Most people accept as true the ideas prevalent in the society around them. Very few have the time or inclination to think things through for themselves.” The second challenge:

arises from the need to change the specific beliefs involved in the subject of Shakespearean authorship. There are two parts.... One arises from the complexities of the Oxfordian claim itself, the other from the consequences that flow from it. The weight of the two is so heavy that it is hard for the human mind to process it all.... Accepting the Oxfordian thesis required abandoning not mere isolated beliefs, but a tapestry of tightly woven beliefs.

Lastly, there is the ongoing issue of institutional resistance in academia, where professors in English, History and Theatre must otherwise explain how they could be incorrect regarding Shakespeare’s true identity for 400 years—with the possibility of losing professional standing before their colleagues and students as scholars. Their effective censorship of the subject continues to act as a bulwark against authorship research and free debate.

He further breaks down these three categories into 12 distinct areas that need to be addressed successfully before Edward de Vere can be accepted as the dramatist William Shakespeare. They are: change in the identity of the author, internal and external aspects of the Shakespeare plays, chains of influence on Shakespeare, Shakespeare’s knowledge, the Elizabethan Era and the development of Elizabethan drama, the nature of genius, nature of literary creativity, inner emotional life of Shakespeare, Edward de Vere, Earl of Oxford, and William Shakspeare.

In one area, however, Warren appears to have overlooked significant progress recently made with academic institutions. He writes that “The Oxfordian movement has made little progress in overcoming Institutional Resistance.”

In classrooms, conference halls and peer reviewed journals, that continues to be the case. On the other hand, this journal—*The Oxfordian*—has its contents indexed by the three leading bibliographies in the humanities: the World Shakespeare Bibliography (the Folger Library); the Modern Language Association International Bibliography; and the Annual Bibliography of English Language and Literature on ProQuest.

Further, Oxfordian books are now found in many university libraries, according to the World Catalog of Libraries ([worldcat.org](http://worldcat.org)). Looking at several titles,



*The Mysterious William Shakespeare* by Charlton Ogburn Jr. is in 625 libraries, *Alias Shakespeare* by Joseph Sobran is in 575 libraries, *Shakespeare: Who Was He?* by Richard Whalen is in 515 libraries; *“Shakespeare” by Another Name* by Mark Anderson is in 450 libraries, and J. Thomas Looney’s *‘Shakespeare’ Identified* is in 400 libraries.

Intriguingly, Warren agrees with J. Thomas Looney on identifying the final authority in deciding the Shakespeare controversy, writing that “Ultimately, the general public, not Oxfordian or Stratfordian scholars, will determine the fate of the Oxfordian claim.”

To that end, Warren offers a multilayered strategic plan which Oxfordian organizations in the US, Great Britain and Germany can execute. Rather than synopsise it here, I recommend readers review the plan in detail to judge its applicability and support its implementation.

The extraordinary achievement of *Shakespeare Revolutionized* represents a milestone in the history of the Oxfordian movement. Not only can its sophisticated action plan help advance the movement worldwide, the book can help educate a new generation of scholars, theatre professionals and Shakespeare aficionados on the most compelling issue currently facing the humanities.

# *The English Petrarch*

Reviewed by Warren Hope

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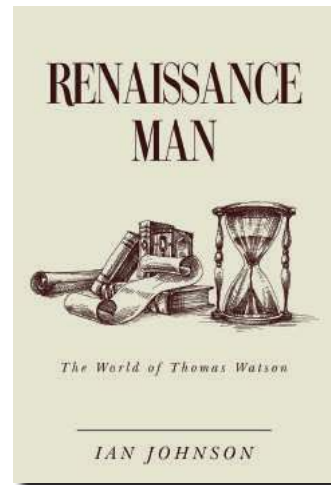
*Renaissance Man: The World of Thomas Watson. By Ian Johnson.  
New Generation Publishing, 2020, 350 pages (paperback \$16.99).*

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Ian Johnson has produced what is likely to be the most complete and accurate life of Thomas Watson, the Elizabethan poet, that we will ever have. The book seems to be the result of fortuitous circumstances—the right author coming to the right subject at the right time. What makes the author the right one is Johnson’s method—his combination of open-mindedness and skepticism, his willingness to scour all sources for facts on Watson’s life and writings and, when appropriate, engage in thoughtful and reasonable speculation.

The subject is the right one because Watson is central to the literary life of the Elizabethan period while remaining something of an anomaly. Although he was a secretary to the 17<sup>th</sup> Earl of Oxford, a collaborator with William Byrd on the production of madrigals, and a friend of Christopher Marlowe, he remains relatively obscure. The time is right because Johnson gratefully benefits from and makes the most of some relatively recent scholarship that has thrown new light on Watson. The result is a work that should interest all students of the Elizabethan period.

Johnson opens the book in a fascinating way. Instead of beginning with a chronological narrative of Watson’s life, he sets the stage by examining in



some detail the two dominant groups of literary courtiers of the Elizabethan period—those writers who gathered around Sir Philip Sidney and his sister the Countess of Pembroke, and those writers who gathered around Edward de Vere, the 17th Earl of Oxford. Johnson takes this approach because he is very aware of the importance of associations in the age of Elizabeth—family connections, cultural interests, religious leanings, and political stances often combined to all but define a person’s “place” in society. He realizes that the wealthy and powerful to a large extent used such things as literature, plays, music, and dancing in ways that increased their influence or even openly served propagandistic purposes. The examination of the Sidney and Oxford circles is important because although they are often thought to have been antagonistic, they also at times overlapped and Watson, in fact, had connections with both groups.

The first two books Watson published served to establish his reputation among his contemporaries. His *Antigone*, a translation into Latin of the Greek tragedy by Sophocles, appeared in 1581, displaying his love of drama and testifying to his learning and skill as a Latinist. In the next year, 1582, he published his *The Hekatompathia or Passionate Century of Love*, a book of 100 love sonnets in both English and Latin. While this was among the first sonnet sequences of the Elizabethan period, Watson’s sonnets were 18 lines long (rather than the traditional 14 lines) and were accompanied by annotations that drew attention to the poet’s sources and learning. Some of these poems were translations or adaptations of Petrarch’s sonnets, hence the justification for his reputation as “the English Petrarch.”

The dedications of the two books help to define Watson’s “place” in London society of the 1580s. The first was dedicated to Philip Howard, 1st Earl of Arundel, who has been made a saint by the Roman Catholic Church, but took part in jousts and at least one rather scandalous love affair. The second book was dedicated to the Earl of Oxford, thanking him for “perusing” the work in manuscript and giving it his blessing. It was prefaced with poems by other writers who gathered around Oxford—John Lyly, for instance, and Sir George Buc. While there is no indication that Arundel responded to the dedication with patronage or affection, Oxford seems to have played a role in much of Watson’s life. Watson worked with other writers in Oxford’s service at the mansion known as Fisher’s Folly as a kind of secretary, work that

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**Warren Hope, Ph.D.**, is the co-author with Kim Holston of *The Shakespeare Controversy* (MacFarland, 1992 and 2009). He is also the editor of *A. Bronson Feldman’s Early Shakespeare* (Langwitz Verlag, 2019) and of a forthcoming collection of *A. Bronson Feldman’s articles on Tudor topics entitled Shakespeare, Marlowe and other Elizabethans to be published by Langwitz Verlag*. This volume will include Feldman’s essay on Thomas Watson.

might well have included writing plays for the public theaters. As Ian Johnson points out, Francis Meres praised Watson as one of “our best for tragedie” and William Cornwallis wrote Watson “could devise twenty fictions and knaveries in a play which was his daily practyse and his living.” The lack of any plays in English bearing Watson’s name is one of the puzzles he presents students of the period.

What those dedications seem to indicate is that Thomas Watson was probably a Catholic or at least had a Catholic background. Born in 1555 to what is now recognized as a wealthy and prominent family—Watson was with justice referred to as a “gentleman” in contemporary documents—he was orphaned at the age of four and raised by an uncle. Johnson presents some evidence that this uncle, Thomas Lee, was close to some Catholics and suggests that this sympathy displayed itself in Watson’s education. He was sent to Winchester College at about the age of 12, a school known for the high quality of its education but also described as “Catholic haunted.” Watson also entered New College, Oxford, another institution known at the time for its Catholic sympathies and leanings. He did not take a degree from New College, but rather went to the Continent, completing his education in Italy, Flanders, and France. Johnson makes the attractive suggestion that Watson attended the University of Padua, and Watson certainly attended the English University of Douai in Flanders, where he studied civil and canon law. Watson, who seems to have been born with a scholarly soul, at times laments that his education had been disrupted by war. In short, Watson acquired as good an education as his age could provide—one made especially rich by his linguistic abilities and his love of both the Classics and the poetry of the continent.

Johnson makes it clear that Watson had other associates, especially when he was in Paris in the early 1580s. Perhaps the most important of these associates was Thomas Walsingham, the cousin of Sir Francis Walsingham, known as the chief of the Elizabethan intelligence network under William Cecil, Lord Burghley. Because of this connection, Johnson concludes “the evidence is sufficient for us to be certain that Watson was in Paris in the early 1580s, at the same time as Thomas Walsingham, and in the pay of Sir Francis Walsingham.” It seems clear that Watson worked as a courier for Walsingham, and was probably, as Johnson points out, the Watson who delivered a message to the court from Paris in August 1581. These associations link Watson with Sir Philip Sidney, who was related to Mr. Secretary Walsingham by marriage and thus connect him with both dominant literary circles at the court of Elizabeth.

Johnson is very good at providing the illuminating context for Watson’s life and writings. His earliest book publications and work as a courier coincide with a period of trauma and turmoil for English Catholics. Pope Pius V’s excommunication of Elizabeth in 1570 as a heretic, and the pronouncement by Pope Gregory XIII in 1580, outraged at the deaths of Catholic missionaries, that

encouraged Elizabeth's murder resulted in the demand that those studying abroad return home—and led to a period of plots, spying, and the work of agents provocateurs. Watson was probably caught up in these changed circumstances and agreed to serve the Crown, perhaps making him what some then considered a “counterfeit Catholic.” It should be remembered that this was also the period (late 1580) when Oxford exposed his former friends—Lord Henry Howard, Charles Arundel, and Francis Southwell—as secret Catholics. In addition, Oxford incurred the wrath of the Queen and was placed in the Tower of London in March 1581 for three months because he fathered a boy by Anne Vavasour, the boy who would become Sir Edward Vere, a soldier and a scholar. Upon his release, Oxford was exiled from court until June 1583. As Johnson makes clear, “Watson's dedication of his book to the Earl of Oxford was a loyal and courageous act at a time when de Vere was disgraced at court.”

Watson married in September 1585 to Ann Swift, who originally came from Norfolk, at St. Antholin's Church. Johnson speculates, based on Watson's poems, that he likely suffered from an earlier lost love that had healed sufficiently by the time of his marriage. Watson and his wife lived first in St. Helen's, Bishopsgate, and later moved to Norton Folgate. Hugh Swift, Watson's new brother-in-law, played a prominent role throughout the rest of Watson's life.

In 1588, William Cornwallis bought Fisher's Folly, the mansion and gardens Oxford had used to house writers and musicians and established his household there. Watson, who had worked there as a secretary or servant of Oxford's, continued to be employed there by the Cornwallis family as a tutor. In this capacity he seems to have inspired a daughter of the family to keep a manuscript collection of poems known as “Anne Cornwaleys her Booke,” now owned by the Folger Shakespeare Library. It was possibly at this time too that Watson began to work with William Byrd, often considered the best English composer of the age. The result of Byrd's collaboration was a set of madrigals with English lyrics by Watson, not translations from the Italian so much as new lyrics, in the main. Here again, while Watson tends to remain obscure, he is associated with one of the most brilliant lights of the English Renaissance. In the same vein, Byrd's collaboration with Oxford included the composition “The Earl of Oxford's March,” as well as music for two poems attributed to Oxford—“If Women Could Be Fair” and “My Mind to Me a Kingdom Is.”

*The First Set of Italian Madrigals Englished* did not come from the press of Thomas East until 1590, after Watson's release from Newgate Prison. Probably the best-known event in Watson's life is his killing of William Bradley in a fencing match in Hog Lane. The trouble between them initially arose



through Watson's brother-in-law, Hugh Swift, serving as a solicitor to John Allen, no doubt the older brother of the actor Edward Allen, and a manager of the Admiral's Men headquartered at The Curtain. Allen lent 14 pounds to William Bradley and Hugh Swift attempted to collect repayment of the loan. Bradley appears to have been, as Johnson states, "a thug," notorious for quarreling and brawling, and took against Watson and his friend Christopher Marlowe, apparently because Watson went with Swift and Allen to try to collect on the loan. On the afternoon of September 18, 1589, Watson came upon Bradley and Marlowe dueling with swords in Hog Lane, near where all of them then lived. Watson intervened, Marlowe withdrew, and Bradley reportedly said to Watson, "Art thou now come? Then I will have a bout with thee." Bradley attacked Watson and wounded him with a sword and a dagger. Watson reportedly tried to escape but was pursued and again attacked until he managed to thrust his own sword into the right side of Bradley's chest, killing him immediately. Wounded and imprisoned, Watson spent about five months waiting to be granted the Queen's pardon. Although Marlowe was originally imprisoned too, he was soon released on bail, no doubt because, as Johnson demonstrates, Marlowe knew people "in high places."

Soon after Watson's release from prison, Sir Francis Walsingham died. Watson wrote a Latin eulogy for him entitled *Meliboëus sive Ecloga*, published in 1590 and dedicated to Thomas Walsingham. He published an English version of the poem in the same year and dedicated it to Lady Frances Sidney.

Watson's own life by then was tending toward its end. One work he seems likely to have been associated with, and potentially involved the Earl of Oxford, was the entertainment for the Queen at Elvetham in Hampshire, an entertainment technically presented by the Earl of Hertford.

While it is impossible to be certain about the roles played by Watson and Oxford in the preparation of this entertainment, Johnson is willing to speculate and draw inferences in a sober, reasonable way. In doing so, he is careful to follow the findings of other scholars. Albert Chatterley, for instance, convinces Johnson "that the opening Latin speech and blank-verse sections should be attributed to Watson." On the other hand, it has been argued that Watson and Nicholas Breton wrote parts of the entertainment under the guidance of George Buc.

Johnson points out that all three of these writers were part of Oxford's circle and that makes it at least possible that Oxford himself was the guiding spirit behind the entertainment. It is hard not to share Ian Johnson's pleasure in "the attractive suggestion that when the Queen entered the park on her first day at Elvetham and found herself confronted with a poet dressed in green and wearing a laurel-wreath, a poet who fell to his knees and declaimed to her in Latin, that poet was none other than Thomas Watson."

Both Thomas Watson and his brother-in-law Hugh Swift were probably carried off by one of London's periodic plagues in September and October 1592, respectively. Watson was then 37 years old. Some of his work was issued by the press soon after his death. His *Amintae Gaudia* appeared in November with a dedication to Mary Herbert, Countess of Pembroke, in Latin and signed C.M., no doubt Christopher Marlowe. A year later a book entitled *Tears of Fancy or Love Disdained* appeared. It consisted of sixty 14-line sonnets and signed at the end with "Finis T.W." The last sonnet in the book is a slightly different version from one produced by the Earl of Oxford in the 1570s. Scholars continue to debate whether this collection is in fact Watson's work, with the consensus tending to agree it represents early work the poet himself chose not to publish. It seems unlikely at this date that any more conclusive decision will ever be reached on Watson's connection with the book's contents.

As mentioned earlier, the lack of any plays in English known to have been by Watson is something of a puzzle because he seems to have been widely known as a playwright. Ian Johnson gives a hearing to one attempt by an Oxfordian scholar, Dr. Bronson Feldman, to contribute a solution to this puzzle by proposing that Thomas Watson wrote *The Spanish Tragedy*, a play traditionally attributed to Thomas Kyd. Johnson reprints Feldman's argument from *The Bard*, a former publication of the Shakespeare Authorship Society in England and edited by the historian Francis Edwards, S.J., as an Appendix to his book. This is perhaps the clearest example of Johnson's combination of open-mindedness and skepticism. Unlike most academic students of the Elizabethan period, Johnson realizes that there is no closed circle of specialists who have a monopoly on the knowledge of the period. He is open to and frequently uses findings presented by Oxfordians, Marlovians, and others in addition to traditional academic scholars. His skepticism causes him to make clear that Feldman's theory remains unproved, remains a theory, but he nonetheless finds it valuable enough to reprint and he even contributes findings—parallel passages between *The Spanish Tragedy* and Watson's recognized work that Feldman missed, forgot, or ignored—thus strengthening Feldman's case. Johnson's sentences on Feldman's theory demonstrate the generosity of spirit that makes him the ideal biographer for Thomas Watson: "Tempting as the theory at first seems, lack of proof renders it no more than that—a theory. Nevertheless, for daring to make such a radical suggestion and for taking on the academic establishment of the 1950s, Bronson Feldman deserves our admiration."

# *North by Shakespeare: A Rogue Scholar's Quest for the Truth Behind the Bard's Work*

Reviewed by Michael Hyde

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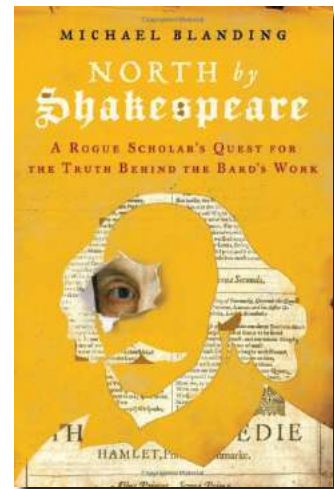
*North by Shakespeare: A Rogue Scholar's Quest for the Truth Behind the Bard's Work.* By Michael Blanding. Hachette Books, March 30, 2021, 498 pages (hardcover \$24.49, Kindle \$14.99).

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Every researcher hopes to discover lost unpublished manuscripts about William Shakespeare, of whom we have precisely zero literary evidence in his own hand—only six signatures on legal documents.

Michael Blanding and Dennis McCarthy have the admirable fortune of one such find apiece—papers not lost but hidden in the British Library. Blanding located the original manuscript of Sir Thomas North's 1555 travel journal in the summer of 2019, where he found a loose page at the end, with the title written in North's hand (350; unless otherwise noted, all cites to page numbers are to Blanding's book). McCarthy shocked the Shakespeare establishment in 2018 when he located the manuscript of George North's *Discourse on Rebellion and Rebels* in the Duke of Portland's collection, also housed but oddly catalogued in the British Library.

Blanding is a veteran journalist; McCarthy is a college dropout and self-educated researcher. Both have previously written books on other subjects: McCarthy explored the field of biogeography in *Here Be Dragons: How the Study of Animal and Plant Distributions Revolutionized Our Views of Life on Earth* (2009), while Blanding's *The Map Thief* (2014) explored the nefarious



practice of stealing old maps from libraries. Blanding first wrote about McCarthy's discovery of the George North manuscript in *The New York Times* in February 2018.

In 2011 McCarthy published his own book on Thomas North, *North of Shakespeare: The True Story of the Secret Genius Who Wrote the World's Greatest Body of Literature*. That book is no longer available. In 2018 McCarthy teamed up with June Schlueter, a professor of English at Lafayette College, to produce a contemporary edition of George North's *A Brief Discourse of Rebellion and Rebels*. Earlier this year McCarthy and Schlueter collaborated on a second book, *Thomas North's 1555 Travel Journal: From Italy to Shakespeare*.

A Google search led McCarthy to a 1927 auction catalogue that listed the George North manuscript. His skillful use of WCopyfind, a plagiarism detection program, and other tools facilitated examining images of the actual documents. This resulted in McCarthy's discovering numerous verbal parallels between the George North manuscript and the works of Shakespeare, and between Thomas North's translation of Plutarch's *Parallel Lives* (1580) and the Shakespeare canon. Thomas North (born 1535) and George North (fl 1561–1581) are assumed to be kinsmen, though the exact relationship between the two men has not been established.

The book's main title, *North by Shakespeare*, should perhaps be reversed, as its argument is that the works of Shakespeare were written *by* North, the lost author. McCarthy has long maintained that William of Stratford did not truly write the canon, rather he purchased and adapted for the stage a cache of manuscripts of plays by Thomas North. McCarthy believes that North wrote these original versions in the 1560s and 1570s. Ten years ago, in his earlier book, *North of Shakespeare*, McCarthy stated flatly: "Shakespeare was not the original author of the masterpieces. He merely adapted them for the stage." The echoes ring as I read aloud the full titles of the two books —*North, Shakespeare, True/Truth, Secret Genius* and *Rogue Scholar*. North is the unsuspected secret genius, Shakespeare the playbroker and adapter, and McCarthy the rogue scholar who finally uncovers the Truth.

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**Michael Hyde** has taught in the English departments at several Boston area colleges and universities. He has a BA from Harvard granted magna cum laude and an MA and PhD from Tufts University. His doctoral thesis, "The Poet's Creative Word," was a study of the poetry of Percy Bysshe Shelley. Under the tutelage of Walter Houghton, he worked on the five-volume bibliographical project known as the Wellesley Index to Victorian Periodicals. His work focused on attribution of authorship in Victorian literary magazines, and involved identifying anonymous or pseudonymous authors using both external evidence and internal evidence based on known writings of each author.

McCarthy began his quest with the aim of identifying “Ur-Hamlet,” the pre-Shakespeare version of *Hamlet* that scholars assume must have existed, based on the “Seneca by candlelight” allusion in Thomas Nashe’s 1589 preface to Greene’s *Menaphon* (107). McCarthy finds an early English translator of Seneca, Jasper Heywood. Using Heywood’s preface to *Thyestes* (1560) as his crux, in which Heywood urges more Seneca translating from the young scholars at the Inns of Court, McCarthy selects Thomas North as the best candidate because North’s name is at the top of Heywood’s list: “There you shall find that self same North whose works his wit displays and Dial of Princes paint” (109). Following this slender thread, we learn that North was by 1562 “singled out by Heywood as the writer most likely to pen a Senecan tragedy.”

This is the internal and external evidence that McCarthy and Blanding have fermented into a theory proposing that Thomas North, the famous prose translator of Plutarch, was the true author of the lost *Hamlet* and the works of Shakespeare. Nashe mentions Hamlet and Seneca in 1589; translator Heywood mentions Thomas North at the Inns of Court in 1560; North therefore composed the earliest versions of the Shakespeare masterpieces while generating his prose translations in the 1560s and 1570s. McCarthy says of Thomas North, “He is Hamlet as much as J. D. Salinger is Holden Caulfield” (287).

All this speculation ignores the basic procedures outlined in Samuel Schoenbaum’s *Internal Evidence and Elizabethan Dramatic Authorship* (1966). Nevertheless, the result is that parallel passages from George North’s *Discourse on Rebels* are being hailed, if not closely examined, as the earliest vestiges of Shakespeare’s dramatic poetry.

Returning to the search for “Ur-Hamlet,” it should be noted that translating Seneca was a literary hobby between 1560 and 1589 for Elizabethans. The Stationers’ Register for 1581 lists “Seneca’s ninth tragedy, the Octavia . . . translated by Thomas Nuce, whose name appears in the 1581 collection titled ‘Seneca His Ten Tragedies’” (154). Note the initials—TN. It is possible that no “Ur-Hamlet,” no “Ur-Shakespeare,” and no “Ur-Seneca” ever existed unless we are willing to treat the conjecture of lost plays by North as fact. Thomas North’s name is not in the table of contents of the 1581 collection of Seneca’s ten tragedies. We can only solve the puzzle by theorizing that his other lost poetic works (not prose translations) account for Shakespearean parallel passages in the manuscript of George North’s *Discourse on Rebels and Rebellion* written in 1576, but undiscovered until 2018, though “hidden” in the British Library.

All this is necessary to understand what was really happening in 2018 when McCarthy and Professor Schlueter made their find. But why in 1576 did



George North write the *Discourse*? Yes, he was seeking patronage and later obtained the ambassadorship to Sweden and had a diplomatic career under Elizabeth. But his actual sentences sound like this, “Rebels therefore the worst of all subjects are most ready to rebellion.” The *Discourse* is addressed to his patron, Second Baron Roger North, whose father had been imprisoned in 1524 for plotting rebellion against Henry VIII (51–53). Edward North was in the Tower a full year, and luckily released without further punishment. The anonymous tract *Homily Against Disobedience and Willful Rebellion* (1571) provides further context. Mark Anderson, in “*Shakespeare*” *By Another Name* (2005), describes its “state sanctioned propaganda” (Anderson 43), with English vicars being required to read every Sunday from the Anglican book of twelve homilies. The “Willful Rebellion” homily was also a direct response to the Northern Uprising of 1570–1571, and, as Anderson says, “its influence on Shakespeare has been widely chronicled.”

The very next year (1572) the Duke of Norfolk was executed for conspiring in the Catholic plot to bring Mary Queen of Scots to England. George North was reminding his patron that their family’s safety and prosperity depended on constantly affirming loyalty to the Crown. The Second Baron Roger North (a new creation by Mary in 1555, the last Catholic Queen of England) must have been keenly aware of his family’s suspect Catholic history. Cousin George wrote his manifesto in Kirtling Hall to finally absolve the North family of any stain lingering from the memory of Edward’s youthful rebellion against Henry VIII. Thenceforth the Norths were never rebels and remained the “best of all subjects,” ever loyal and obedient. Blanding’s find of Thomas North’s original 1555 journal further reminds us that the family was regarded by Mary as devout Catholics. Thomas was part of the group of English ambassadors sent to Rome to effect the return of England to the true Church.

Interestingly, there is an Oxfordian provenance to the discovery of the Thomas North manuscript. It is now the earliest known manuscript of the journal, donated as part of the Harleian Collection in 1759. Robert Harley, 1<sup>st</sup> Earl of Oxford (second creation), purchased it in 1704 as one of 600 manuscripts from the D’Ewes estate. It passed to the 2<sup>nd</sup> Earl, his son Edward, and was sold to the Library by his widow, hence its listing in the Collection. In 1759 it was attributed as “written by one of the Bishop of Ely’s servants” i.e., Thomas North. There are further confirmatory attributions to North in 1872 and 1937.

Blanding’s strongest and most Oxfordian section is his chapter, “Wonders of the World Abroad,” on Italian travels. Yet it is also the most internally conflicted. First, he admits that “one of the reasons scholarly opinion has turned against the idea of an Italian jaunt for the Bard is that it has become a favorite argument of anti-Stratfordians, who use it to prove that the Earl of

Oxford was the true author of the plays.” Next, he notes the “geographical howlers” in *The Two Gentleman of Verona*, where “the biggest gaffe is the fact that Valentine and Proteus travel from Verona to Milan by boat, despite both cities being landlocked.” He adds that “critics have thrown cold water on the idea that there was network of canals connecting the major cities of Northern Italy.” But then he reverses track, noting that Richard Paul Roe, “lawyer and Oxfordian, set out to prove critics wrong by travelling to Italy in search of the locations in the plays in his *Shakespeare Guide to Italy*,” and found “old maps showing a canal connecting the Adige River in Verona and the Po River near Milan, making such a trip by boat possible in the time of Shakespeare. Roe even found vestiges of the old waterways.”

Luckily for Blanding and McCarthy, Roe “was careful throughout his book never to speculate on the identity of the author—referring to him simply as ‘the playwright.’” This justifies attesting their Stratfordian bona fides once again: “Of course, that playwright, McCarthy thinks, wasn’t Oxford or Shakespeare, but North” (161). Of course, Roe is heavily relied on by Blanding and McCarthy for the rest of their Italian trip. “We take Roe’s book with us now as we head across the hilly country of Northeastern Italy to one of the most popular destinations for English travelers in the sixteenth century, Padua.”

The issue of Thomas North’s trip (or trips) to Italy is ambiguous in Blanding’s telling. Yes, North was in the English entourage to Rome in 1555 as part of the Marian embassy. However, McCarthy speculates without evidence that North made a second trip around 1570 that may have been a catalyst for his playwriting. Oxfordians will compare this imaginary trip with Edward de Vere’s thoroughly documented lengthy stay in Italy in 1575–76.

Let us unravel the paragraphs above: Roe is correct about Shakespeare’s Italy, the critics are incorrect, the waterways near Verona are still visible, and regardless of “scholarly opinion,” Blanding and McCarthy use Roe as their guide because it contains no overtly stated anti-Stratfordian heresies. McCarthy and Blanding are nevertheless often dismissive of other studies of Shakespeare that fail to endorse McCarthy’s all-encompassing thesis that the Shakespeare canon is a 1590s revision of the lost plays of Thomas North. Discussing *Julius Caesar*, McCarthy gets aggressive: “passage after passage and image after image is taken for the play [from North]...[P]eople don’t realize how many quotes are taken directly from [North’s *Plutarch*]” (196).

This is wrong. I still possess the paperback edition of North’s *Plutarch* from my Humanities 6 course at Harvard University. We were shown the passages in *Antony and Cleopatra* that were sourced and lifted verbatim by Shakespeare from North. We compared, line by line, what was authorial invention with what was pure North. An Oxfordian example is an extract from North’s *Coriolanus* translation that is lifted entirely (J. Thomas Looney, “*Shakespeare*”

*Identified*, Centenary Edition [2018], 350). Coriolanus's address to Aufidius in Act IV, Scene V, is word for word from North, but then varies. It seems that the traditional classroom teaching of the Roman plays having their origins in North's *Plutarch* was on the mark, even at Harvard.

It remains for McCarthy to prove as clearly with his lengthy lists of parallel passages gleaned from software that the rest of the canon is pure North and that North was indeed the "Ur-Shakespeare" of the 1560s and 1570s. In the Folger Shakespeare Library's podcast interview with McCarthy, "Shakespeare Unlimited Episode 93," Barbara Bogaev tries to concentrate on the "one-in-a-billion" "word collocations" gleaned from his accumulation of parallel passages in George North and Shakespeare—all derived from running his plagiarism software: "But is there any danger in analyzing literature this way that you might fall into confirmation bias?" McCarthy offers an ambiguous defense: "Well, yes and no. In terms of source study, rather than authorship study, you have to cherry-pick in terms of resemblances between two passages." So this means "Yes" on source study and "No" on authorship?

Stating that one must cherry-pick reveals a classic problem in attribution studies. I will gladly defend McCarthy, as I find that his long lists of parallel passages from North and Shakespeare (see Blanding's Appendix B) do contain some accurate correspondences. Nevertheless, I urge McCarthy and readers to examine Schoenbaum's warning of the perils of parallel passages in authorship, if not in source studies (*Internal Evidence and Elizabethan Dramatic Authorship* [1966], esp. pp. 189–193). In Section III, "Avoiding Disaster," he quotes E. K. Chambers: "There is nothing more dangerous than the attempt to determine authorship by the citation of parallels" (Schoenbaum 189). The five-page section cited above is especially cautionary and conservative on using internal evidence and counting up verbal parallels for attribution. The sad outcome was for Schoenbaum's contemporaries, at their worst, to passionately "claim every play in sight for an author on whom they have obsessively fixed" (Schoenbaum 192).

He lists M. St. Clare Byne's five "Golden Rules" on using verbal parallels: 1) there are always multiple explanations; 2) insist on quality in parallels; 3) avoid "mere accumulation"; 4) logically proceed from known works to anonymous ones; 5) apply "negative checks" to ensure that the same parallels are not found in other authors. Schoenbaum adds another: "To these rules I would venture to add a sixth, parallels from plays of uncertain or contested authorship prove nothing" (*ibid.*). His suggestion that many Elizabethan plays, including those attributed to Shakespeare, remain of "uncertain" or "contested" authorship should make each of us more humble as we pursue elusive rabbits and identifications into their rabbit holes.

I wonder if Schoenbaum would have accepted McCarthy's ideas, buttressed as they are by many supporting parallel passages. A follow-up question is

whether verbal parallels are subjective or objective in the minds of readers, like notes in music. Are they valid for source study, as McCarthy insists, but not for authorship, as Schoenbaum warns? Many Oxfordians are devoted to the practice of attribution via such parallels, yet I have my doubts. Hence my reaction to the cornucopia of parallels in Blanding's Appendix B is mixed. The renowned *Cleopatra* passage (373) from North's *Plutarch* is as vivid today as it was when I first read it in my Humanities class. But I believe that Hamlet's "to be or not to be" speech, its existential questions, are from multiple sources, the chief being Thomas Bedingfield's 1573 English translation of *Cardanus Comfort*, which Edward de Vere patronized and welcomed in a beautifully written prefatory letter. The Cade passages from George North (374) I find generally convincing in their verbal suggestiveness for the Cade scene in *2 Henry VI*.

My strongest negative reaction is to the imputed verbal collocations or echoes in the paired passages on Richard Crouchback's deformities (375). Nothing in the George North passage suggests to me that Shakespeare's Richard III learned here to "descant on mine own deformity" as he chooses to "prove a villain." Other readers may see more parallels here, and elsewhere, than I do.

The questions of attributing either sources or authorship on the basis of verbal parallels are inescapable. Discussing Dennis McCarthy and June Schlueter's 2018 edition of George North's *A Brief Discourse of Rebellion & Rebels*, Bill Boyle bows to the issue with a telltale "perhaps": "This deeper layer of matches makes this discovery different, and perhaps as compelling as the headlines have said" ("New Source for Shakespeare Leads to the Same Old Problems," *SO Newsletter*, Spring 2018, 18). Everyone needs to search Early English Books Online (EEBO) as they accumulate parallels, to avoid the blunder of claiming uniqueness or rarity for any particular passage.

A second review of the McCarthy-Schlueter book in the Spring 2019 *SO Newsletter* by the late Ron Hess was not so charitable. Hess saw the entire field of stylometrics, computer-assisted techniques, and plagiarism software as a moat now protecting the besieged Castle of Stratfordianism. He concluded, "Put these...movements together and you have a perfect marriage of ignorance meeting bliss" (Hess 21). He trenchantly observed that no computer search could locate the "common source" that tied together George North and Shakespeare because it was very likely private—at Court or in personal intercourse between families. Finally, he wondered if the British Library might have financed the McCarthy/Schlueter project because it protects and defends the traditional authorship case (Hess 23).

Blanding's Appendix A presents McCarthy's revision of the timeline of composition for the Shakespeare plays, with Thomas North on the left margin versus the orthodox chronology on the right. This is probably his most devastating, if unintentional, takedown of Will Shakspeare as the "monoauthor"

of the canonical plays. McCarthy's timeline begins with *Henry VIII* or *All is True* in 1555, nine years before the birth of William in Stratford-upon-Avon, and ends with *Troilus and Cressida* and *The Tempest* in 1602–03.

I have doubts about assigning *Henry VIII* to Thomas North at all, especially in 1555. North spent much of that year traveling to and from Rome on the Marian embassy to return England to Catholicism. One would expect that anything written by a devout Catholic on a diplomatic mission at that time to have a pro-Catholic, anti-Henry slant. Blanding dismisses *Henry VIII* ("simply put, a terrible play," 94–95) and suggests that its first known performance in 1613 was a "later adaptation."

Let us also recall the strident anti-Catholicism of Shakespeare's canonical *King John* ("No Italian priest/ Shall ever tithe or toil in these dominions!").

Blanding acknowledges in his first chapter that orthodox chronology shoe horns composition and performance dates for the plays into Shakespeare's years as an actor from 1589–90 to 1604. Shoehorning is as popular as ever in Appendix A. McCarthy fits the dates of composition of Thomas North's lost plays to his lifespan and career—his first produced at age 20 (1555), and his last at age 68 (1603). Coincidentally, both Thomas North and Edward de Vere died in 1604. Does this leave an opening for Stratfordians to slam the door closed on McCarthy's claim for plays that they think postdate 1604?

*Arden of Faversham* is included in the timeline, dated to 1557. Although it was not published until 1592, it is assumed to be identical to *A Cruel Murder Done in Kent* (1577). Oxfordians have their own case for *Arden* as presumably written by Edward de Vere and performed at Whitehall in March 1579 as *The History of Murderous Michael*. I found the McCarthy case for *Arden* to be convincing and persuasive for Thomas North as the author because of the play's connections to the North family. Coincidentally, the substitution of a "fictional Lord Clifford" in the play (23) in place of 1<sup>st</sup> Baron Sir Edward North reminds me of the omission of the 9<sup>th</sup> Earl of Oxford, the alleged homosexual favorite of the monarch, from Shakespeare's *Richard II*. Noble families also have their secrets and their cover-ups.

The latest Oxford University edition of *Arden* (2017) rejects Thomas Kyd and Christopher Marlowe as authors and attributes it to Shakespeare. This helps McCarthy's case if he is proven right about Thomas North. But again, there is no contemporary evidence that Thomas North was a playwright. Nor is there evidence that he had any connection with the new playhouses built in the 1570s. Edward de Vere, who lived nearby at Fisher's Folly in the 1580s, had just such connections (Anderson 156–157). The best Blanding can do is to suppose that a poverty-stricken Thomas North, after his patron, the Earl of Leicester, died in 1588, "drifted down to London, where he might have met Shakespeare" (299). Luckily again for McCarthy, we have to suppose an



additional lost North play or two being written and sold to Will Shakspeare, thus avoiding invidious comparisons and possible contradictions of his theories. Blanding later quotes Professor Gary Taylor, who pinpoints the difficulty: “The danger is that the invisibility of the lost texts means that it is very easy to speculate about them” (355).

Blanding writes that Taylor had earlier rejected McCarthy’s original *Arden* paper (348). He notes that McCarthy in a “wild moment” had wanted to purchase the original of Thomas North’s 1555 travel journal from the Lambeth Palace Library (which had obtained it for the prohibitive sum of \$43,750), and he imagines owning what he believes will become one of the most valuable documents in the world—an original North/Shakespeare in North’s own hand. Though he later confesses that “I made ridiculous and wild claims” (353), it is impossible not to see monomania in these melodramatic moments. McCarthy also worries that he will be accused of advocating a “conspiracy theory” by orthodox scholars for his belief in North’s lost plays. He gives Blanding more of his theories: *Merry Wives* and *The Two Noble Kinsmen* “have little or no North at all”; the more literary plays are North’s original plays; Heminges and Condell “may have thought they were truly publishing Shakespeare” in 1623. Suddenly he panics at the thought: “that speculation, however, comes dangerously close to the anti-Stratfordian claim that ‘Shakespeare didn’t write Shakespeare.’ ”

Blanding’s 16-page bibliography is largely a compendium of orthodox Shakespeare biographies, historical backgrounders, Italian travels, standard reference works, Elizabethan contemporary authors, and theater studies. Only four Oxfordian scholars are included—J.T. Looney, Richard Roe, Charlton Ogburn and Joseph Sobran, while Diana Price is included as an independent researcher. To demonstrate his fairness, Blanding does allow Mark Twain’s doubts about the authorship (135–136) from *Is Shakespeare Dead?* and summarizes de Vere’s candidacy (136–138).

His one-page summary of Delia Bacon’s espousal of Francis Bacon as the true author (134) ends before she could reveal her cipher for Bacon, “who was known to write in code.” Cryptography was launched in Shakespeare studies in 1888 via “Minnesota lawyer Ignatius Donnelly” (139) and so the bibliography dutifully includes William F. and Elizebeth S. Friedman’s 1957 work, *The Shakespeare Cipher Examined*. That book’s subtitle betrays its intention: *Analysis of Cryptographic Systems Used as Evidence that Some Author Other Than William Shakespeare Wrote the Plays Commonly Attributed to Him*.

The case for Thomas North sometimes overlaps with arguments for Edward de Vere, with the signal difference that de Vere was involved in theater his entire life as both dramatist and patron, but North was never mentioned by contemporaries as a playwright. Blanding displays considerable animus at times toward authorship doubters, labeling all of them, especially Oxfordians,

as conspiracy theorists while proclaiming his belief that William of Stratford “wrote every word attributed to him during his lifetime” (4). This ignores, among other issues, the strong evidence of both collaboration and later revisions in the Shakespeare texts, a topic that is mostly pursued by Stratfordians themselves.

Who is the best Oxfordian scholar to compare against McCarthy? Ramon Jiménez book, *Shakespeare’s Apprenticeship: Identifying the Real Playwright’s Earliest Works* (McFarland & Co., 2018) explores the same field and identifies true “Ur-Shakespeare” texts. Both are independent investigators; both present cases for Elizabethan courtiers, and both recount how nonchalantly Elizabethan writers echoed each other as they flagrantly lifted from their sources. As Jiménez observes, “moreover, all the Tudor chroniclers copied extensively from previous writers; Holinshed himself cited more than 190 sources” (Jiménez 113).

Jiménez methodically develops his case for de Vere as the teenage author in 1562 who wrote his first versions of dramas such as *The True Tragedy of Richard the Third*, later acquired and performed by the Queen’s Men as an anonymous work in the late 1580s. Jiménez offers three possible theories about the relationship between *True Tragedy* and the canonical *Richard III*. 1) Both are by Edward de Vere; 2) the 1562 play is by de Vere and the canonical version is a masterly revision by a new author; 3) as Dover Wilson proposed, both plays stem from a lost play by an unknown author. Jiménez chooses the first theory, as there is strong evidence to support it. Theory two leads us into a labyrinth of many possible authors. Theory three is similar to McCarthy’s claim for Thomas North as the “lost” author of the canon.

As I read Blanding’s book, I kept wondering why no evidence was presented for McCarthy’s hypothesis. Despite this, McCarthy is unflinching, repeating three times “I have all the goods” (348)—but they are never displayed. This occurs shortly before their meeting with Gary Taylor and Terri Bourus in March 2018 at Florida State University (351). The two academics are polite, attentive, but vague and noncommittal. Taylor concludes the meeting, “clearly the journal [of Thomas North] is important and clearly Shakespeare is interested in North” (352). I was even more bewildered by McCarthy defending himself to Blanding afterward as “being disingenuous by hiding [from Taylor and Bourus] the full extent of [my] theories about Thomas North and the source plays.” McCarthy is adamant: “I have to downplay it... [I]f I say exactly what I think, I can’t get in the door” (353).

Blanding eventually acknowledges that, after five years of traveling with McCarthy to Kirtling, Faversham, Mantua, and Rome, he has reached a difficult conclusion: “Not once, in all that time, have I found anything to disprove the notion that Thomas North wrote source plays for all of the

plays in the Shakespeare canon. Nor, however, have I found anything that definitively proves it. Despite the First Folio, there are no surviving plays with Thomas North's name on them, or even hard evidence that North was a playwright. There are no references to his dramatic works in letters, theater registers, or revels records. There are no surviving documents that place him in Italy in 1570 or Kenilworth in 1576. In short, it's entirely possible McCarthy has devoted a decade and a half of his life to a fantasy—an imaginative and plausible one, to be sure, but a pipe dream, which may prove no less true than the notion that the Earl of Oxford or Sir Francis Bacon secretly penned all of the Shakespeare plays" (355).

This is a devastating confession. The need for hard evidence is undeniable. It appears the "lost play" gambit is over, unless a new document emerges—not just "coincidence," as Blanding tries to argue. It is "no less true" that Thomas North or Edward de Vere, or Francis Bacon, or Mary Sidney could have "secretly penned" the Shakespeare masterpieces, lost or found, in the 1623 First Folio.

Could Oxford have seen the George North manuscript? I believe it highly probable. First, we know that noble families during the Elizabethan Era shared private manuscripts as part of the literary culture, with just 150 to 200 books printed annually throughout Elizabeth's reign. With few books available, literate people were eager to read anything they could get their hands on. Second, North wrote his *Discourse* at Kirtling Hall, probably in 1576. In August 1578, Oxford joined the Queen's party at Audley End. Early in September the assemblage next went to Kirtling Hall, about five miles from Audley End and 20 miles from Oxford's residence at Hedingham Castle. (See Alan Nelson, *Monstrous Adversary* (2003) at 180–182.)

As for the connections between Oxford and Thomas North, we know that in 1569–70 Oxford purchased a copy of Amyot's French translation of Plutarch, the same work that North used for his English translation of Plutarch a decade later.



# *Adapting Shakespeare to the Screen*

Reviewed by Charles Boyle

I have been deeply involved with Shakespeare most of my life, active in the authorship movement, and even managed a small theatre company in Boston that produced several of the plays. As a result, I have some strongly held views about reading and performing Shakespeare on stage and film.

First, just what is meant by “adapting” a play to the screen?

Consulting Wikipedia I found there have been more than 400 adaptations over the past century, running the gamut through Hollywood, international cinema, television, and now the Internet and streaming. This includes full-text versions, filmed stage plays, various shifts of time and place, hybrids of Shakespeare and popular culture, cartoons, etc. Then, as an Oxfordian, we can add to this whether knowing something about the author really matters in interpreting and adapting the plays. One can see that there are myriad possibilities in what can be done and has been done.

## **A Cornucopia of Lists**

After perusing the list, I searched for “Top XXX lists.” I found many, even lists of some far-fetched adaptations (Romeo as a zombie), and lists based on user polls—for example, *Romeo and Juliet* finished both first (Zeffirelli’s 1968 version) and second (Luhrmann’s 1996 version) in one poll.

For me, though, a good adaptation should always be aware of the inherent humor in all of Shakespeare’s plays, even the tragedies. Moreover, the acting should be as natural as possible, the lines delivered “trippingly on the



tongue.” Dialogue that is little more than reciting great lines from the great poet kills both the immediacy and the intimacy of the moment.

When I was managing my Ever Theater in the early 1990s, these were the key elements I sought to achieve, along with an awareness of any authorship (i.e., Oxfordian) moments that might be present. The two plays we focused on were *As You Like It* and *Twelfth Night*. Both these popular plays were undoubtedly first written as court comedies, and both are full of interpretive possibilities that are far from Stratford.

So, let’s review some of the screen adaptations that I have seen over the years.

## The Films of Laurence Olivier and Orson Welles

The first film is Laurence Olivier’s *Henry V* (1944). It’s an interesting film because it was made during the Second World War and it’s also about the war. Unfortunately, the play has many flaws, the most annoying being the sing-songy nature of the verse. After a while it dominated everything, and thus made everything second rate. Another criticism I have of Olivier is that in all these films he basically is filming the stage play, not being cinematic. Therefore, all the shots are composed too far away from the action, especially in scenes where close-ups are needed.

This was confirmed by his next project, his version of *Hamlet* (1948). The one overwhelming flaw in its production is that there is no humor. Where are Rosencrantz and Guildenstern? This from the funniest character in all of Shakespeare—Hamlet. It’s as though Olivier didn’t understand the subtext of the play. He never left Stratford.

The next Shakespeare play he filmed was *Richard III* (1955). This play at least displayed some humor and to that extent became a more interesting production. It was still flawed but for the first time Olivier had some idea that his character was not only evil, but funny as well.

Now contrast this with the three Shakespeare films by Orson Welles. *Macbeth* (1948) is the least interesting of the three. It was shot in 23 days on sets that weren’t his, using borrowed costumes, all compounded by having too little money and too little humor. Still, Welles is Welles and the experience

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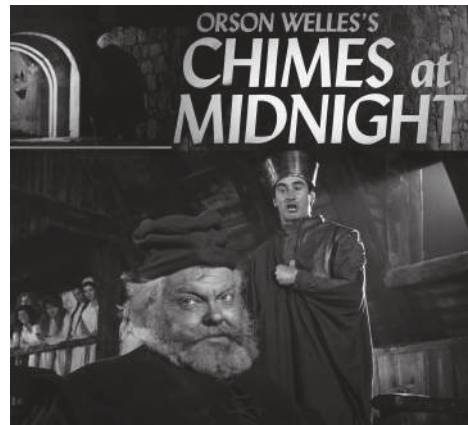
of seeing him play the doomed murdering monarch can be riveting. While the entire film was shot on sets, there are several scenes (the Daggers Scene, and the entire England Scene) that run nearly 10 minutes, all shot in a single take from a crane, made possible by expert blocking and camera movements. These two sequences rival some of Welles' best work, such as *Touch of Evil*.

I should also note here another strange moment in *Macbeth*. The entire scene following Duncan's murder is presented in bright light on a barren set, revealing the studio-bound nature of the film, with Welles wearing the most ridiculous crown I've ever seen, and accompanied by tuba music. It's as though we've been suddenly immersed in a cartoon. Was this meant to be humorous? It reminded me of the notorious Old Vic production in 1980 in which Peter O'Toole plays the role over the top, with the audience often howling with laughter. Critics and purists were both appalled. My thoughts on this are simply that the comedy of it all is ready to be played if one wishes—even in *Macbeth*.

His next film, *Othello* (1951), is one of the best Shakespeare films ever made. Here Welles has transformed the play into a real film. The scenes in the bathhouse are beautiful to watch, as is the amazing traveling shot on the battlements of the castle by the seashore, with Othello and Iago talking, and Iago scheming with every step. In both films Welles' adaptations of the dialogue are more natural than Olivier's and there is a well-balanced mixture of long shots and close-ups.

This brings us to *Chimes at Midnight* (1965), possibly the best movie that Welles ever made. Indeed, Welles said in a 1982 interview in *BBC Arena* that, "If I wanted to get into heaven on the basis of one movie, that's the one I would offer up." As I perused Top Ten Lists in recent months, I noticed that *Chimes* was listed number one in several.

Little known is the fact that Welles had originally started on this version of the Falstaff story in New York City in 1939 with "Five Kings," drawn from several plays, where he himself—at age 24—played Falstaff. By the time he made the movie version of this concept, he fully understood his Falstaff, since he himself had literally grown into the role. When Welles plays Falstaff as an aging, fat man whose best days are long gone, he is in some ways playing himself—and he knows it. Recent critics of the film, which became widely available only in the last five years with the release of a print with decent audio, have all noted this



similarity, which is a key to appreciating the “auteur” nature of what Welles did in the mid-1960s.

*Chimes* is exhilarating in the interplay between Welles and the rest of the cast, from Justice Shallow to Doll Tearsheet, and of course, with the prince who will soon be king, Harry. The final, memorable scene with Harry (“I know ye not, old man”) rings true in a way that is stunning. The look on Falstaff’s face could well be the look on Welles’ face as he considered what he had become in his own troubled life.

Another amazing feature of this film is the Battle of Shrewsbury sequence, which is composed of hundreds of shots and edits, all with no dialogue. Pauline Kael, reviewing the film in 1967 for the *New Yorker*, called it one of the best battle scenes ever filmed, and compared it favorably with D. W. Griffith, John Ford, Sergei Eisenstein and Akira Kurosawa.

I should also note that Welles at least for a while dallied with the authorship question, and perhaps his approach to adapting the plays may have owed something to that perspective. He is quoted in a 1955 book (Kenneth Tynan’s *Persona Grata*) as stating that, “I think Oxford wrote Shakespeare. If you don’t there are some awfully funny coincidences to explain away.” But decades later, in the 1980s interviews he had with filmmaker Henry Jaglom (published in 2013 as *My Lunches with Orson*), he is quoted several times stating clearly that William Shakspeare in the author. So something had changed in the intervening years.

While there have been many other Shakespeare films over the decades, few directors have tried to specialize in the subject. I have focused on Olivier and Welles, but there is someone else who should be mentioned. Franco Zeffirelli did two Shakespeare films in 1967–1968 (*Taming of the Shrew* and *Romeo and Juliet*), then filmed the Verdi opera *Otello* in 1986, and finally did *Hamlet* with Mel Gibson and Glenn Close in 1990. These are all good, interesting adaptations, but one stands out as a classic.

*Romeo and Juliet* is significant and belongs on anyone’s list of top Shakespeare film adaptations because 1) the lead characters are actual teenagers (Juliet is 14, after all), 2) great visuals continually set the scene, making up for cutting more



than half the text, 3) a great song and theme music by Nino Rota, 4) humor is present (despite four dead bodies), and 5) the dialogue flows naturally from everyone.

After the 1960s, as television became more widespread, there were more television productions than real films. This culminated in the efforts of the BBC in the late 1970s and 1980s to record productions of all the plays on video and broadcast them on TV. Actual films from major directors were few and far between until 1989, when Kenneth Branagh came out with *Henry V*. It was so successful that it began a new era of Shakespeare adapted to film.

## Enter Branagh and a New Era

Just what did Branagh do that caused this? Just compare his *Henry V* with Olivier's. Branagh's film has prose for its dialogue, not recited poetry. His film is cinematic in every sense of the word: one never feels they are watching the filming of a stage play. For example, the entire sequence of Henry walking through the battlefield conveys visually that war is hell. This reflects the two vastly different eras in which they were produced. Olivier's *Henry V* is a war hero, but Branagh's might just be a war criminal. Yet Branagh still manages to end the film on a humorous note with the scene of Henry courting the French princess into the marriage alliance that will seal the peace.

Branagh's next Shakespeare film (1993) was *Much Ado About Nothing*, which I think is the next best of all his adaptations. First of all, this film, like *Henry V*, is cinematic. And the dialogue flows naturally from the actors' lips. Most of all, it has humor and energy from start to finish. Clearly some of this flows from the fact that Branagh and Emma Thompson were married at the time, and in love. Also, in a 1993 interview Branagh made a telling remark about his casting choices: "I wanted to have American actors in this film because I wanted to take away from Shakespeare the kind of tight-assed British thing. You know, being the only sort of way you can do it" (*Detour Magazine*, May 1993).



Another interesting fact about this breakthrough film is that the Oxfordian view of the Shakespeare authorship may have been discussed during filming. Keanu Reeves (who played Don John) revealed in a 1995 interview (*Attitude*, September 1995) that he was an Oxfordian, remarking that he would love to

do the life story of Edward de Vere and to illuminate Elizabethan life and drama. Around this time he played Hamlet for the Manitoba Theatre Centre. One critic (Roger Lewis) wrote, “He is one of the top three Hamlets I have seen, for a simple reason: he *is* Hamlet.” So I wonder just when did Reeves first realize that the Oxfordian thesis is—in a nutshell—that Hamlet is Shakespeare. And was any of this being talked about on the set of *Much Ado*?

We might ask that about Branagh himself, since his next Shakespeare film was *Hamlet* (1996), and not just any *Hamlet*, but a full text version that runs nearly four hours. And one may ask, how could anyone produce a full text production of *Hamlet* and still think the self-taught grain dealer wrote this for lucre to entertain illiterate groundlings at the Globe? The film has its moments, but it could have had more with a little more editing, and frankly, a little more humor. Let’s acknowledge that *Hamlet* at full text is a marathon, demanding and exhausting. It is, as British theatre director Gordon Craig noted decades ago, no longer a play but a dramatic novel.

One final note: in 1995 Branagh played Iago in Oliver Parker’s *Othello* with Laurence Fishburne in the lead role. I greatly admired this film. It was different from Welles’ *film noir* epic, yet true and clear. And Branagh’s Iago is remarkable, played with a curious mixture of cunning and humor. He often looks right at the audience with a slight smile, playing Iago as an imp who seems very aware of just how absurd his villainy is.

After *Hamlet* Branagh did two more film adaptations: *Love’s Labour’s Lost* (2000) and *As You Like It* (2006). Neither is particularly distinguished. *LLL* is fun because of the Busby Berkeley/show tune (Porter, Gershwin, Berlin) setting, but has little connection with Shakespeare. An *AYLI* set in 19<sup>th</sup> Century Japan is also problematic, with an overdose of Samurai warrior ambience and suffering, primarily, from a lack of humor, including Touchstone and Jaques. But I will give him credit for retaining almost all of Jaques’ lines (which some productions cut). Jaques is certainly meant as a counterpoint to Touchstone, and both are, in the Oxfordian view, the author Oxford riffing on himself.

I should add that Branagh was not yet through with Shakespeare. In 2009 he was in the news adamantly denying that he had ever said anything in an interview (*Sunday Express*, May 3, 2009, by Sandro Monetti) to suggest that he questioned the Stratford story or gave credence to the Oxfordian claim. Doth the director protest too much? In any event, the paper withdrew the story within a week. And perhaps this bizarre episode in the authorship debate may indicate that Branagh, like Welles a generation earlier, was indeed aware of the debate and the Oxfordian thesis, but—in the public square at least—wanted no part of it.



Then, in 2018 he produced, directed and starred in *All is True*, a so-called biopic about Shakspeare himself. The script was by Ben Elton, who had played Dogberry's partner Verges (the one with the glasses) in the 1993 *Much Ado*. I watched these and was underwhelmed. *All is True* is utterly humorless, and in many ways preposterous. I can only think that he made it to secure some mainstream *bona fides*, which may also be why Elton did *Upstart Crow*, little more than a slapstick rendition of Shakspeare that seems more dedicated to reducing him to nothing than honoring him.

## Among the Rest

Just who is out there still making film adaptations? There have been some significant movies, ranging from several more *Hamlets* (Zeffirelli's with Mel Gibson in 1990, Ethan Hawke's in 2000, Adrian Lester's TV movie in 2002) to the excellent 2004 *Merchant of Venice* (starring Al Pacino as Shylock), and to such recent loose adaptations (which are not to my liking) as *Lion King* (derived from *Hamlet*), *O* (*Othello*), *10 Things I Hate About You* (*Taming of the Shrew*), and so on.

For me the two most notable of these recent films were Julie Taymor's *Titus* (2011) and Ralph Fiennes' *Coriolanus* (2013). Neither of these plays had ever been filmed outside of the BBC TV productions in the 1980s. They are both interesting and engaging to watch, featuring what I value most: a cinematic look and feel, and a natural flow to the dialogue. The adjustments in the time and place for *Titus* worked for me, while *Coriolanus*' true setting of ancient Rome also worked fine. Furthermore, I learned a few things about each play in watching them (always a good sign). It is interesting in this new era to see these adaptations, because in my view a case can be made that each also has an authorial (i.e., the true author, Oxford) angle, centered in *Titus* around succession and sacrificing children, or in the case of *Coriolanus*, succession and motherhood (Volumnia).



## Much Ado Redux

Finally, mention must be made of a recent adaptation that has received rave reviews from nearly every critic, and has actually been commercially successful, and even compelled some people who would never watch Shakespeare to view this film. I am speaking of Joss Whedon's 2013 *Much Ado About Nothing*.

I don't mind that it was set in a suburban house in a contemporary setting, but if we can't understand the author's original point of view the play becomes meaningless. Given that the plot revolves around Hero's virginity, the updated setting in southern California seems out of place, at the very least, if not plain ludicrous. Even sometime before World War II would have worked, but after the 1960s? No. And the military backstory is lost since everyone is wearing a suit, and all the young men in their suits looked eerily alike. Finally, the hero, Benedick, has no sense of humor. His exchanges with Beatrice all fell flat from beginning to end.

After watching it I checked the reviews to see what I had missed. Some of the reviews were as disappointing as the film. *The New York Times* reviewer A.O. Scott made a point to say how much he loved this film, and went on to compare it, unfavorably, with Branagh's (*NYT*, June 6, 2013). So I watched Branagh's again the very next day, which only reaffirmed what I've said earlier—that Branagh's is the superior version and clearly one of the best of *all* the Shakespeare adaptations in the era of film.

In my view the best adaptations must keep focused, regardless of how much text may be cut, on the comedic point of view that is always present in the plays. Remember that the universal symbol of theatre is the intertwined masks of comedy and tragedy, with comedy on top. That is a fact that should never be forgotten. In my opinion, without humor who cares who Shakespeare was? Humor is the key to his view of himself and of the world, and to his genius.