

The Grand Deception of the First Folio

by Katherine Chiljan

Next year will be the 400th year anniversary of the First Folio, the very first collection of plays written by William Shakespeare. Registered for publication in November 1623, and released soon afterward, the Folio has over 900 large-sized pages, termed “folios”; the Second, Third and Fourth editions followed, all published in the 17th Century.

Among the 36 plays it contained, 20 were previously unprinted—they suddenly came into existence with the First Folio.¹ It was the greatest event in English literature at that time and perhaps in history. Without the Folio the world may never have read, or known about, *The Tempest*, *Macbeth*, *Taming of the Shrew*, *Julius Caesar*, *Anthony and Cleopatra* and 15 other Shakespeare plays. The Folio also contained the first ever known image of Shakespeare.

William Shakespeare: who was he?

Shakespeare was the most celebrated and prolific poet and playwright of the 16th and 17th Centuries, creating works of great wit and learning, philosophy, love, tragedy and history, filled with the most beautiful, majestic, and musical lines in literature. Moreover, Shakespeare invented over 1,900 words in English (Price 235), and whether we know it or not, we continually speak his famous phrases in our daily idiom, from “to be or not to be,” “brave new world, and “laughing stock,” to “off with his head,” “foregone conclusion,” and “into thin air,” etc.

The Grand Deception of the First Folio

In his own time, Shakespeare's works were praised by and influenced his contemporaries; indeed, his impact on artists thereafter has been so great it cannot be fully measured. Shakespeare displays in his plays and poems an incredible breadth of knowledge with a 17,000 unique word vocabulary (Hart 242), at least twice that of his contemporaries.

Seventeenth century luminaries thought that Shakespeare's Folio was essential reading. King Charles I kept a copy of the Second Folio near his bed and made notes in it,² and Sir John Suckling (d. 1641), a poet-playwright himself, posed with the Folio in his portrait by Anthony Van Dyck (Frick Collection, New York, NY); the page is open to *Hamlet* (Waugh, *Sir Anthony Van Dyck & Sir John Suckling Knew*). Over 230 copies of the First Folio survive today, also attesting to its importance, yet mysteriously, very little commentary followed its release.

At first glance, this magnificent book would inspire the 17th Century reader's awe, as well as excitement, to learn something personal about the great author. Unfortunately, the prefatory pages provided no biography, were ambiguous about where he lived, and confused the reader further with mendacity and contradictory information. This paper will analyze the Folio's opening pages, the messages it tried to convey, and how it is the genesis of the Shakespeare authorship controversy.

The Preface: Title Page Engraving

The first indication that something was amiss with the First Folio was on the title page, which showed a large, and strange, engraving of a man purporting to be the great author. His head is oversized, even deformed, the face gritty or unshaven. The verse opposite, written by poet-playwright Ben Jonson, tells the reader not to look at it: "Reader, look /Not on his Picture, but his Book." Why then was it included? No other portrait made by the engraver, Martin Droeshout, depicted a human being so contrary to nature. It was not from a lack of skill—Droeshout engraved a "natural" portrait of James, 2nd Marquis of Hamilton (National Portrait Gallery, London), the same year as the Shakespeare engraving. Furthermore, Droeshout's engraving provided nothing to

Katherine Chiljan *is an independent scholar. Her book, Shakespeare Suppressed (2011, 2016), earned her an award for distinguished scholarship at Concordia University. She was a contributor to Contested Year (2016), and edited Letters and Poems of Edward, Earl of Oxford (1998). She has written articles in The Oxfordian and the Shakespeare Oxford Newsletter, and served as the latter's editor for two years. In addition, Chiljan has debated the authorship with English professors at the Smithsonian Institution and at the Mechanics' Institute Library in San Francisco. She is currently on the Shakespeare Authorship Coalition's board of directors.*

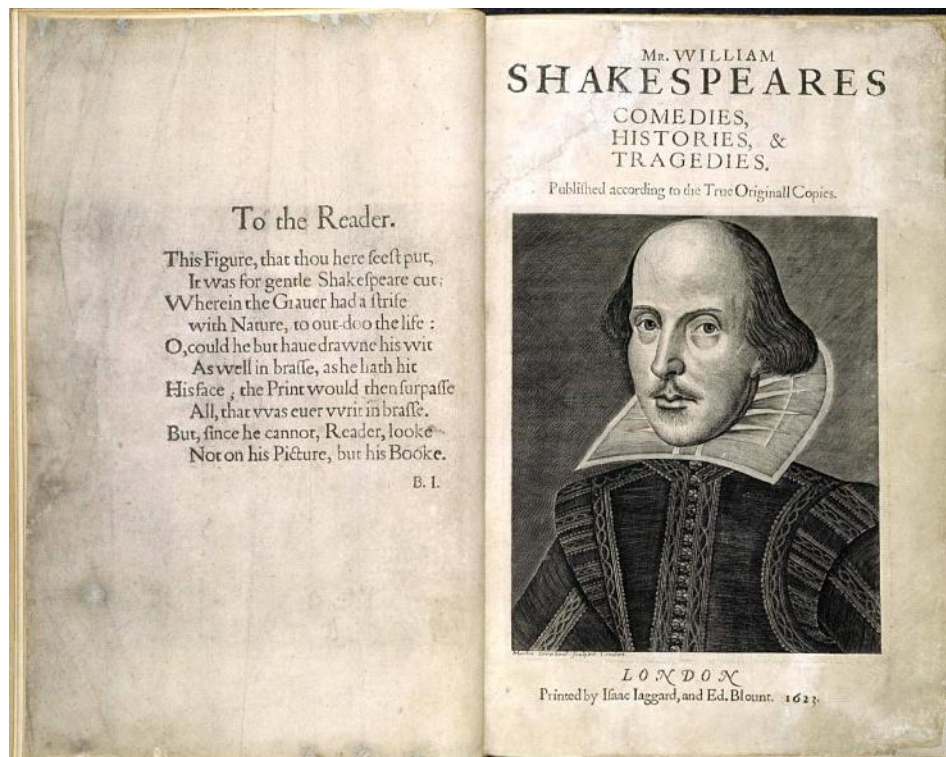


Figure 1: Opening pages of *the First Folio* (1623), from the *Huntington Library, San Marino, CA* (RB56420).

indicate that the man was a poet or playwright, like laurel leaves (symbol of poetic victory), books, pens, inkpots, etc. Ben Jonson was portrayed with laurel leaves and books. George Chapman's portrait is surrounded by clouds and Latin mottoes, one saying, "Here is the glory of Phoebus," referring to the Greek god of arts and poetry. Samuel Daniel was portrayed next to two Greek gods. Yet the most celebrated dramatist in his time has none of this, just a man in gentleman's dress, what I call, "a gentleman monster."

The Folio and the Authorship Controversy

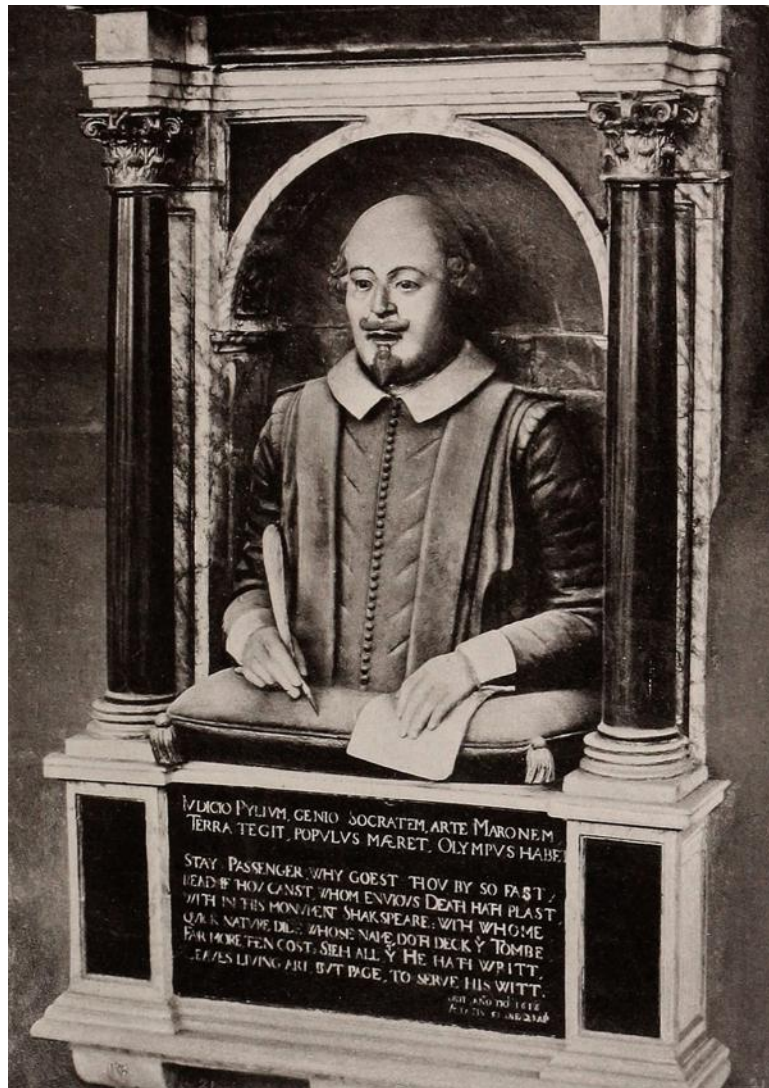
The Folio's title page is followed by 14 pages containing Shakespeare tributes, a dedication letter, a letter to the reader, and lists of Shakespeare plays and actors. In his Folio elegy, Ben Jonson calls Shakespeare, "Sweet Swan of Avon!"; a few pages after that is Leonard Digges's tribute mentioning Shakespeare's "Stratford Monument." Together, one could deduce that the great author came from the small Warwickshire town of Stratford-upon-Avon. And indeed, there was a Shakespeare monument in its church. This, in total, is Shakespeare orthodoxy's main proof that William Shakspere, who was christened there in 1564 and who died there in 1616, was the great author, William Shakespeare.



Figure 2: Sir William Dugdale's sketch of the Shakespeare monument in Stratford-upon-Avon, circa 1634, picture courtesy of Sir William Dugdale. Photo by Alexander Waugh, reproduced by his kind permission.

But there are problems with this conclusion. Those who went to Stratford-upon-Avon to see the Shakespeare monument—and they did so within two years of the Folio's release³—did not see a writer's monument but rather a monument to a wool dealer. We know this from Sir William Dugdale's circa 1634 sketch, seen by many for the first time in Diana Price's *Shakespeare's Unorthodox Biography* (2001), which showed an effigy of a man holding a woolsack, not today's effigy which holds pen and paper on a cushion. The effigy's face was fully bearded with a drooping mustache in Dugdale's sketch, whereas today's effigy sports a goatee and upturned mustache, a style not in fashion in England until the 1620s, years after William Shakspeare's death. Moreover, neither face resembled Droeshout's Folio portrait.

Figure 3: The “Shakspeare” Monument in Holy Trinity Church, Stratford-upon-Avon, photographed by Thrupp, as appeared in The Portraits of Shakspeare by J. Parker Norris, Philadelphia, PA, 1885, 37.



Another important difference is that Dugdale’s sketch (later engraved by Wenceslaus Hollar) showed leopard heads—Stratford-upon-Avon’s symbol—upon the columns flanking the effigy, which are not in today’s monument. This feature, among others, led Richard Kennedy to conclude that the monument was originally that of John Shakspeare, William’s father, who had dealt in wool. John Shakspeare served in various town offices, so leopard heads would have been appropriate in a monument to him, but inappropriate for his son, William, who held no town office.

Dugdale’s sketch is documentary proof that the monument changed after circa 1634, and obviously, it was changed to depict a writer, which my research indicates took place circa 1649-50. This means that, at the time of the Folio’s

printing, there was no monument *to a writer* Shakespeare in Stratford-upon-Avon. Digges' "Stratford Monument" may have meant something, or somewhere, else. In context, Digges wrote that Shakespeare's works will outlive his tomb, adding:

...when that stone is rent,
And Time dissolves thy *Stratford* Monument,
Here we alive shall view thee still.

"Dissolve" means to vanish, but also "To do away with as false or erroneous; to refute, confute" (*OED* 11a). Perhaps Digges' underlying message was that, in time, the fraud in Stratford-upon-Avon will be refuted, and those "alive" will see the true author; a similar message about time uncovering something appeared on the original monument, in which angels or boys held an hourglass and spade (they now hold an hourglass and an inverted torch). Whatever Digges meant, this piece of Folio "evidence" pointing to Shakspeare of Stratford-upon-Avon as the great author was false.

Jonson's address to Shakespeare in his Folio elegy, "Thou art a Monument, without a tombe," may also have had an underlying meaning. Monument could be defined as "a written document or record" (*OED* 3a), so perhaps Jonson was disclosing that "Shakespeare" is a body of writing, not a real person—a tomb, therefore, would be unnecessary.

"Thou art a Monument, without a tomb" was also Jonson's reply to William Basse's poem, circulating in manuscript, which fancifully called upon famous dead poets buried in Westminster Abbey to make room for Shakespeare, where he should be buried. Oddly, Jonson said no to the idea. His rebuke, in my opinion, was to prevent the reburial of the wrong man—William Shakspeare—in the Abbey. The fact that William Shakspeare's gravestone has no name on it—only a curse—supports this idea.

The monument's inscription also does not identify the deceased as an author. The bewildering line, "Sieh all that He hath writ, / leaves living art but page, to serve his wit," does not indicate a poet-playwright. The inscription included, however, the Latin phrase, "arte Maronem"—the art of Maro. Maro was the cognomen of the classical poet, Virgil. Only a highly literate person would know this, but regardless, it was inapplicable to Shakespeare, whose art was far more influenced by the classical poet Ovid than Virgil. If this monument was meant for a poet, then why was it not openly stated, like Edmund Spenser's tablet in Westminster Abbey, which was inscribed, "The Prince of Poets in his Time?"

Of course, John Shakspeare could not write—he signed with an X—and as far as known, his son William was also illiterate, with no surviving letters or evidence of education. The wool-dealer effigy and "all he hath writ," therefore, are incompatible, indicating that the inscription tablet was

changed—changed to *hint* that the deceased was a writer, so as not to confuse locals who knew the Shaksperes. In late 1622, records show that work was done in the church’s chancel where the monument is located (Fripp 2: 849).

Dismissing Digges’ “Stratford moniment” as evidence for William Shaksperere as Shakespeare demolishes one of the two pillars of the traditional theory of authorship. The other pillar is Jonson’s line, “Sweet Swan of Avon!,” but that too is not what it appears. “Swan” was a term for poet during the Elizabethan and Jacobean eras; Avon, as discovered by Alexander Waugh, was another contemporary name for Hampton Court Palace, where royal entertainments were performed (Waugh, *The Oxfordian*). Thus, the phrase could mean “sweet poet of Hampton Court Palace”—totally contrary to the official narrative for William Shaksperere, who supposedly wrote plays only for the public theater.

Are we in the 21st Century inferring too much from these statements? No, because contemporaries hinted that Shakespeare was a nobleman, or a man of rank, and that he wrote anonymously or used an alias. The two go together, as then it was considered frivolous for a nobleman to spend his time writing poetry and plays, and déclassé if they were printed, or if his plays were publicly staged for commercial profit. Indeed, it would amount to a loss of caste.

One contemporary reference that Shakespeare was a pen name was made by John Davies of Hereford, who addressed “Shake-speare” as “our English Terence” (*The Scourge of Folly*, 1611); it was then believed that the ancient Roman dramatist, Terence, was a front or a pseudonym for two noblemen-playwrights. “Shake-speare” was hyphenated, indicating a descriptive, made-up name. In the 16th–17th Centuries, about half of printed references hyphenated Shakespeare, as seen in the 1603 edition of *Hamlet*. In an earlier work (*Microcosmos* 1603), Davies wrote that “W.S.,” i.e., William Shakespeare, wrote as a pastime, not as a profession, and at least two other contemporaries implied Shakespeare had died by 1609, yet William Shaksperere was still alive.

Because contemporary comments and the Folio preface’s information do not comport, a closer critical look at the preface is justified, for this book connected William Shaksperere with the great author for the very first time. What we find are further ambiguities, unverified information, and some outright lies, all undermining its credibility.

Folio Ambiguities

The most significant piece of mendacity in the Folio’s preface is that the dedication letter and letter to the reader, both signed by actors John Heminges and Henry Condell, were written by them; since the 18th Century, scholars have accepted Ben Jonson’s authorship of both. The dedication letter

The Grand Deception of the First Folio

contains language and images from the classical writers Pliny and Horace. Heminges and Condell were neither scholars nor writers (Condell was a grocer after his stage career). Jonson, however, was a scholar well versed in the classics, so much so, that he was known as “English Horace” by his contemporaries.

In addition, many phrases in the actors’ letter to the reader echo phrases Jonson wrote before and after the Folio. Edmond Malone first noted the following examples (*William Shakespeare*, 2: 663–671):

- a. departed from that right (Heminges and Condell, 1623)
 - departed with my right (Jonson, *Cataline*, 1611)
 - departed with his right (Jonson, *Bartholomew Fair*, 1614)
 - My right I have departed with (Jonson, *The Devil is an Ass*, 1616)
- b. Judge your six-pen’orth, your shillings worth, your five shillings worth at a time, or higher (Heminges and Condell, 1623)
 - judge his six pen’worth, his twelve-pen’worth, so to his eighteen-pence, two shillings, half a crown... (Jonson, *Bartholomew Fair*, 1614)
- c. arraign Plays daily (Heminges and Condell, 1623)
 - arraign plays daily (Jonson, *Bartholomew Fair*, 1614)
- d. There you are number’d. We had rather you were weigh’d. (Heminges and Condell, 1623)
 - *Suffrages* in Parliament are numbered, not weigh’d (Jonson, *Timber, or Discoveries*, 1641)
- e. how odd soever your brains be, or your wisdoms, make your license the same (Heminges and Condell, 1623)
 - how odd soever men’s brains, or wisdoms are, their power is always even, and the same. (Jonson, *Timber, or Discoveries*, 1641)
- f. to him that can but spell. (Heminges and Condell, 1623)
 - if thou canst but spell (Jonson, *The New Inn, or the Light Heart*, 1628)

Besides the Jonsonian echoes, the letters were not complimentary to Heminges and Condell. The dedication letter opens with the actors saying they “are fall’n upon the ill fortune” of the “enterprise,” meaning the Folio, calling Shakespeare’s plays “trifles”—three times!—giving the impression of two fools who cannot discern great literature. Moreover, in their letter, the actors urge the reader to buy the book, as if desperate to recoup their investment; it was truly comical—Jonson was, after all, a comedy writer. This contradicts the dedication letter, in which the actors say they published the

Folio “without ambition” of “self-profit.” The falsehood that Heminges and Condell wrote these two letters taints the entire preface, calling into question everything it contains.

Jonson’s Folio elegy seems to chastise the actors’ dedication letter, which he covertly wrote. Shakespeare is “Above th’ill fortune of them,” writes Jonson, in a direct reference to the actors’ “ill fortune” of the Folio enterprise. Jonson says that “Ignorance,” “blind affection,” and “crafty malice” are not the way to praise Shakespeare, apparently meaning the two actors.

Furthermore, Heminges and Condell published Shakespeare’s plays, called “Orphans,” as an “office to the dead,” as said in their dedication letter. Heminges and Condell did appear in William Shakspeare’s will but there was no mention of their being his literary executors; they only received a small bequest to purchase mourning rings. In both of their letters, Heminges and Condell say they “collected” Shakespeare’s plays, which contradicts their doing an “office to the dead.” By the way, William Shakspeare’s will makes no mention of unpublished play manuscripts, books or theater shares.

That the Folio was Heminges and Condell’s production is contradicted by the end page, which says the book was “Printed at the Charges of” Jaggard, the printer, and Edward Blount, John Smethwick and William Aspley—all known publishers; this declares the Folio was a business endeavor, not a charity for the orphaned Shakespeare plays.

Moreover, in their dedication letter, Heminges and Condell ask the Folio’s dedicatees—the Earls of Pembroke and Montgomery—to be forgiven for the faults the book contains. This implies that they edited the plays, but no evidence supports it. The apparently uneducated Heminges and Condell would have had a difficult time editing the highly erudite Shakespeare plays.

In addition, while alive, Shakespeare received “so much favor” from the Earls of Pembroke and Montgomery, and was their “servant,” say Heminges and Condell in their dedication letter. There is no evidence of this.

Further Acts of Deception

Shakespeare wrote easily: “His mind and hand went together. And what he thought he uttered with that easiness, that we have scarce received from him a blot in his papers,” say Heminges and Condell. This fosters the idea that Shakespeare was a natural genius. Jonson contradicts this in his elegy, saying Shakespeare kept revising lines, “sweating” at “the Muses anvil” to perfect them, “so richly spun, and woven so fit....”

The Grand Deception of the First Folio

The actors' letter to the reader refers to the Folio preface contributors—Jonson, James Mabbe, Hugh Holland, and Leonard Digges—as Shakespeare's "Friends." There is no historical evidence of this. Jonson related a personal anecdote about Shakespeare in his private papers, but this was written years after William Shakspeare's death. The others were not professional writers, and had no theater involvement. One wonders why the Folio did not include tributes by more dramatists, like John Fletcher, Shakespeare's supposed co-author of *The Two Noble Kinsmen*, and George Chapman and John Marston, who had contributed poems, along with Shakespeare, in *Love's Martyr* (1601).

Shakespeare's play texts are "Published according to the True Original Copies," declares the Folio's title page; it was also mentioned in Heminges and Condell's letter to the reader, and on the last preface page. This is clearly false. Several Folio play texts were taken from earlier printed editions which contained flaws of misspelling, repeated text, missing text, confused text, unclear stage directions, etc. Such faults are also found in the previously unpublished Folio plays.

Martin Droeshout's portrait engraving of Shakespeare is the great author's likeness. In 1623, William Shakspeare had been dead for seven years—what was Droeshout's image based upon? It is unknown. The image has no light source since everything is evenly lit; this, and the unusually large image size, highlights the two lines shown at the neck. Along with the wooden face and strange, uneven hair, the overall impression is that the true author is wearing a mask, i.e., "William Shakespeare" is someone's cover name.

Jonson's verse, opposite to Droeshout's engraving, tells the reader not to look at it, probably because he knew it was not the real Shakespeare's portrait. Jonson says the true image of Shakespeare is to be found in "his Book," meaning the plays, which reflects someone with high learning, an aristocratic point of view, and presumably true-life incidents. As far as known, the humbly born and probably illiterate William Shakspeare has no biographical parallels in the entire Shakespeare canon.

The Folio's title page credits Edward Blount as its printer: this, too, is incorrect, for the book was printed by William Jaggard and his son, Isaac. Blount was the Folio's publisher.

The Folio contains "all" of Shakespeare's "Comedies, Histories, and Tragedies," according to the second title page, which precedes the first page of *The Tempest*. Incorrect. What of *Pericles*, which was added to the Third Folio (second issue) of 1664? Or *The Two Noble Kinsmen*? What about the now accepted Shakespeare history play, *Edward III*? What of *The Troublesome Reign of John, King of England* and *The Famous Victories of Henry the Fifth*,

and three others proved as Shakespeare's by Ramon Jiménez in *Shakespeare's Apprenticeship* (2018)? Interestingly, "all" is contradicted in the Shakespeare play list, which says the Folio contains "several Comedies, Histories, and Tragedies..."

Shakespeare was among the "Principal Actors" in his own plays, as seen in the Folio's Shakespearean actors list. Although a member of the King's Men acting company in 1603, there is no contemporary evidence that he actually acted, and the roles he played are unknown. Shakespeare, however, was named as an actor in Jonson's plays *Sejanus*, *His Fall* and *Every Man In his Humor*, but this is posthumous information, like that in the Folio, and supplied by the duplicitous Jonson.

Jonson "beloved" Shakespeare, as said in his Folio elegy's title. If William Shakspeare was the great author, then why didn't Jonson pen a tribute to his "beloved" in 1616 when he passed? Jonson had the perfect opportunity to do so in his 1616 collected works, but no, he allowed seven years to pass.

Jonson even *censured* Shakespeare in a personal conversation with William Drummond in 1618, saying that "Shakspeer wanted art"—meaning, he lacked art. And recalling Heminges and Condell's supposed statement that Shakespeare never blotted out a line, Jonson wrote, "would he had blotted out a thousand" (*Timber: or Discoveries Made upon Men and Matter*, 1641). In the same work, Jonson said that Shakespeare "redeemed his vices, with his virtues. There was ever more in him to be praised, than to be pardoned."⁴ These are hardly remarks made about someone beloved.

Jonson wrote in his Folio elegy to Shakespeare, "And though thou hadst small *Latine*, and less *Greeke*," which seemed to imply he lacked knowledge of classical languages. This is completely false. Several books and articles detail Shakespeare's deep knowledge of them, including plays which were then untranslated into English (see Earl Showerman's several articles on this topic). And many words that Shakespeare coined were based on Latin and Greek roots. This lie was so blatant that a 1638 poem questioned it. Regarding Jonson's good command of Latin, H. Ramsay wrote, "That which your *Shakespeare* scarce could understand?" (*Jonsonus Virbius*).

But Jonson's line could be read another way. In context, Jonson wanted to "call forth" to life again the classical dramatists Aescalyus, Euripides, Sophocles, and others so that Shakespeare could hear their praise of his great plays, *even if* he had "small Latin and less Greek." The knowing reader would read it that way; the unknowing reader would think Shakespeare was classically deficient, which jibed with Heminges and Condell's "testimony" that Shakespeare was a natural genius. In fact, Jonson's phrase, "small *Latine*, and less *Greeke*," was not original; it had appeared in a 1563 book by Antonio Minturno,⁵ as noted by Jonson's editors, Herford and Simpson (*Ben Jonson*, 11:145).

Absent from the Preface

Precisely what is missing from the Folio's preface?

- (1) A biography of the great author. Not even the year he died was given—it merely states that he is dead.
- (2) Shakespeare's reputation as a poet. His long poems, *Venus and Adonis* and *The Rape of Lucrece*, both published during the 1590s, were popular during his lifetime, yet neither were mentioned. Nor was reference made to *Shake-speare's Sonnets*, published in 1609.
- (3) Composition dates of the plays, or an order of composition. To this day, it is uncertain when any Shakespeare play was written.

If the author was William Shakspere, here are other notable omissions. (1) His coat of arms. Other writers were portrayed with them. (2) Notice that he was a member of the King's Men acting company. (3) Notice he was a member of the Lord Chamberlain's Men, as orthodox scholars believe. (4) An image of his supposed monument in Stratford-upon-Avon. (5) "Stratford-upon-Avon." The town's full name should have been given for clarity as the names of numerous English towns included "Avon" or "Stratford".

With five large blank pages in the preface, there was certainly space in which to add any of this information.

The Folio preface's lies apparently wished to convey the idea that the great author was *born* William Shakespeare, came from humble origins, and shared the same social status as actors Heminges and Condell. Yet Jonson, in his Folio verses, calls Shakespeare "gentle" three times; to contemporaries, "gentle" meant born into gentility or nobility, which did not apply to Shakspeare of Stratford. And Jonson seemingly revealed that Shakespeare was a descriptive alias by saying that his lines "shake a Lance,/ As brandish't at the eyes of Ignorance," emphasizing spear shaking, a warlike action or the sport of jousting. Furthermore, "Shake-speare" was hyphenated several times in the Folio's preface, indicative of a notional name—i.e., a pseudonym. Of course, Shakspere's surname never included a hyphen; and his name in legal records was spelled almost always *without* the "e" in "Shake," meaning the first syllable was pronounced "Shack," not "Shake."

The Folio Revelation

That the First Folio preface was questionable or fraudulent is not just a 21st Century viewpoint. Within a year of the Folio's release, in 1624, a contemporary implied that it was a fraud. Gervase Markham, in *Honour in his Perfection*—a brief work about the Earls of Oxford, Essex, and Southampton, and

barons Willoughby—wrote that “Vere” was omitted from a recently published book, calling it a “pretty secret or mystery”:

Vere cannot be omitted: only in that Story there is one pretty secret or mystery which I cannot let pass untouched, because it brings many difficulties or doubts into the mind of an ignorant Reader; and that is, the mistaking of names... (17)

Markham wrote that Vere’s name was mistaken with another’s in the “Story”—meaning a book. In the lines that followed, Markham implied that the mistaken name was one that people knew was associated with Vere. He described this Vere as a “great Vertue,” and himself, in comparison, as “the least spark of Vertue which is...” Virtue is a talent, and Markham’s talent was soldiery and writing. No Vere soldier had an associative name, but a Vere writer did—Edward de Vere, 17th Earl of Oxford, a recognized poet and playwright. Contemporaries said that Oxford wrote anonymously (*The Art of English Poesy*, 1589), and Gabriel Harvey, evidently alluding to the pen name, stated in Latin that Oxford’s “will shakes spears.”⁶ In another work (*Pierce’s Supererogation*, 1593), Harvey referred to the then recently published poem, *Venus and Adonis*, as “redoubtably armed with the compleat harness of the bravest Minerva,” implying that the poem’s author, “William Shakespeare,” was a cover name. Similarly, Edmund Spenser described a great courtier poet who had a warlike name, which could only be the spear-shaker, “Shakespeare” (*Colin Clouts Come Home Again*, 1595). The Earl of Oxford was a champion jousting at age 21, so Shakespeare would have been an apt pseudonym.

The recently published Vere book with the mistaken name that Markham complained about, therefore, was Shakespeare’s First Folio. Markham also wrote that this “injur’d” Vere, and accused a certain “pen” for “blanching” or lying:

the least spark of Vertue which is [i.e., Markham], cannot choose but repine [i.e., complain] when it finds a great Vertue injur’d by a pen whose blanching might make the whole World forgetful. (18)

Apparently, Markham was targeting Ben Jonson’s pen, which was behind the Folio’s fraud of Heminges and Condell’s letters. By the “mistaking of names,” Markham meant that Vere’s pen name was used instead of his real name, which “might make the whole World forgetful.” He was proved right—nearly 300 years passed before J.T. Looney discovered that the 17th Earl of Oxford was the true Shakespeare. Markham wrote a brief tribute to Oxford in the paragraph just before this comment, praising his character as learned, pious, and magnanimous, but omitting mention of his literary or dramatic achievement.

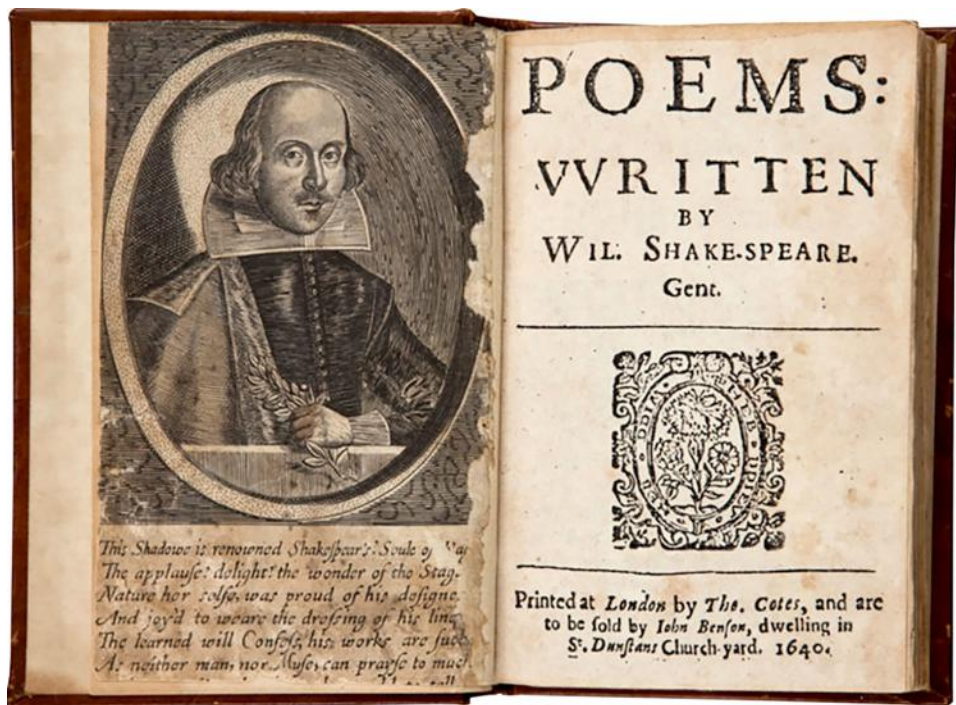


Figure 4: Poems: Written by Wil. Shake-speare. Gent. Note the verses underneath the image. Printed at London by Tho. Cotes, and are to be sold by John Benson, dwelling in St. Dunstans Church-yard, 1640. First edition.

A blatant criticism of the First Folio occurred in 1640, in *Poems: Written by Wil. Shake-speare. Gent.* The book featured an altered version of Droeshout's engraving to achieve a more human looking face and added bay leaves, which Droeshout had left out. An unsigned verse below it questioned Droeshout's image, followed by quotes from Jonson's Folio elegy:

This Shadow is renowned Shakespear's? Soul of th' age.
The applause? delight? the wonder of the Stage.

These questions about the Folio's Shakespeare portrait implied a deception, and were aimed directly at Jonson, although he was by then deceased.

The True Sponsors

Shakespeare orthodoxy usually takes at face value Heminges and Condell's statements that the Folio was their enterprise. Yet the expense for such a production was enormous, even if Blount, Jaggard, Smethwick and Aspley were contributing partners. It is thought that 750 copies were made of this 900 folio-page book, a project costing approximately £250 (Blayney 2, 26).

The bulk of the Folio's production expenses, therefore, must have come from its dedicatees, William Herbert, 3rd Earl of Pembroke, and Philip Herbert, Earl of Montgomery. Pembroke was one of the richest and most powerful men in England.

The brother earls also had connections with the Folio's publisher, Edward Blount, and preface contributors Ben Jonson and Leonard Digges, all preceding the Folio's publication. Jonson dedicated two sections of his collected works (1616) to Pembroke, who likely patronized the book. Pembroke furnished Jonson with money to buy books, secured him a royal annuity, and even wrote a letter to Oxford University recommending Jonson for an honorary degree, which was granted. Edward Blount dedicated a translation to Pembroke and Montgomery and published one of Jonson's plays. Leonard Digges dedicated a translation to Pembroke and Montgomery, which was published by Blount. In addition, Folio contributor James Mabbe was good friends with Blount, and Folio contributor Hugh Holland was friends with Jonson. Martin Droeshout's uncle was associated with Marcus Gheeraerds, who made a portrait of the Earl of Montgomery. Digges, Holland and Mabbe had no theater connections; all, however, were university educated, making it likely they were hired to edit Shakespeare's plays for the Folio. Most notably, other than Jonson, *none* of the Folio's contributors, or its dedicatees, were associated with Heminges and Condell.

In late 1615, Pembroke was appointed the king's Lord Chamberlain, which controlled the Revels Office, giving him total control over the theater and of play publication. Strangely, from that point onward, Shakespeare play publication ceased. On two occasions, however, publishers issued a Shakespeare play, and each time Pembroke issued a halting order through the Stationers' Company. This was predicted in 1609; an anonymous letter to the reader that appeared in some copies of the quarto of Shakespeare's play, *Troilus and Cressida*, warned that Shakespeare's comedies will soon be out of print, alluding to the "wills" of the "grand possessors." The Shakespeare plays, therefore, were controlled by others in 1609, not by the great author, implying he was then deceased; his property would naturally pass to his family members, who were evidently "grand"—people of rank and power. The letter was addressed to the "ever" reader, a punning reference to Edward de Vere, 17th Earl of Oxford, who died in 1604. The Earl of Montgomery was a member of Oxford's family: he married Oxford's youngest daughter, Susan, shortly after his death. The Earl of Pembroke was nearly engaged to Oxford's second daughter, Bridget. The two brothers certainly qualified as "grand possessors," yet their involvement in the Folio's production is never explored by Shakespeare experts in academia, nor is the possibility that they were its initiators. If that was the case, then the ambiguities and contradictions in the Folio's preface were all executed with their approval.

Their Objective?

What was the brothers' purpose behind the Folio's misleading preface? Evidently, they wanted to control Shakespeare's image, to dispel the notion that "William Shakespeare" was a pseudonym, as believed by some before the Folio's release. The title page's large portrait of a man purporting to be someone born as William Shakespeare trumpets this to the reader.

In addition, the Folio's preface tried to fill in the void of the great author's personality, re-forming his image away from the highly ranked, scholarly author who wrote plays, into:

- A professional author and actor
- Friends and fellows of actors Heming and Condell
- A writer of natural genius, unlearned in the classics
- A man who hailed from Stratford-upon-Avon

Transforming Shakespeare into a man of humble origins with no court connections meant that he could not write satirically about real courtiers such as Sir Philip Sidney as Slender in *Merry Wives of Windsor*, or Sir Christopher Hatton, Lord Chancellor of England, as Malvolio in *Twelfth Night*, or the powerful Lord Burghley, Lord Treasurer of England, who was lampooned as the wily counselor Polonius in *Hamlet*. The Earl of Oxford was Lord Burghley's son-in-law; he was the only playwright who knew Burghley intimately, and the only playwright who could survive writing such a portrayal.

Acknowledging William Shakspeare as the great author would decontextualize everything Shakespeare wrote, including the sonnets, which were clearly written by a nobleman, and seemed to reveal secrets touching upon the succession of Queen Elizabeth I. The middle-class striver from Stratford was the perfect front, not only because he was born with a similar name, but because he was involved in the theater. Surviving records, however, suggest that his involvement was only financial, as a theater investor and moneylender to acting companies.

The brother earls' motivation for the strategic deception that is the First Folio may never be completely known, but it had to be compelling to go to such lengths and expense. It must have been for the same reason that Oxford's death was met with complete silence, even though he was one of the highest-ranking noblemen in England. Not even still-living authors of books dedicated to Oxford publicly noted his death. In fact, Oxford was covertly disparaged soon after he died in the comedy *Westward Ho* (1605) by Thomas Dekker and John Webster. Even as late as 1640 this anonymous statement appeared: "*Shake-speare*, we must be silent in thy praise" (*Wits Recreations*).

During his lifetime, Oxford remained silent about his Shakespeare authorship, and some evidence suggests that he tried to prevent his works from being printed. This was to prevent the de Vere family from losing caste, and his literary peers respected his wishes, although they still made cryptic remarks publicly that suggested he was the great author. After Oxford's death, however, openly crediting him with the Shakespeare plays would have been acceptable, and for others to say so, but this did not take place. The courtier poet Sir Philip Sidney, for example, did not publish any literary works in his name while alive, but his sister, the Countess of Pembroke, published his *Arcadia* with his name on the title page several years after his demise.

Conclusions

The Earls of Pembroke and Montgomery could have simply employed the pseudonym to conceal the Earl of Oxford's identity in the First Folio, but they took the supplementary steps of adding a false face and incorporating clues that he was William Shakspeare of Stratford-upon-Avon. Indeed, if this book had never been printed, no one would have connected him with the great author. The authorship deception may have suppressed public commentary about the Folio, despite the book's popularity.

In essence, the First Folio preface was another piece of fiction orchestrated by Ben Jonson. Jonson knew Shakspeare, as he spoofed him as a character in two of his comedies as an ignorant fellow desperate to be a gentleman. In one of them, *Every Man in his Humor*, Jonson seemed to describe the Droeshout portrait in a line added to the play's 1616 version:

let the idea of what you are be portrayed in your face, that men may read in your physiognomy...*the true rare, and accomplished monster or miracle of nature.*" (1.2, italics in original)

A "miracle of nature" would help explain how a completely uneducated man could generate great works of literature. Francis Beaumont made a similar comment about Shakespeare in a verse addressed to Jonson, written before 1616: Shakespeare will be the example given to students of "how far sometimes a mortal man may go by the dim light of Nature" (Chambers 2:224). This scheme was apparently planned while Shakspeare was still alive.

Upon the First Folio's 400th anniversary, it would be fitting that academia recognize the hoax it has sustained over the centuries; only then can begin a whole new world of Shakespeare research and discovery.

Endnotes

1. *The First Part of the Contention*, and *The True Tragedy of Richard, Duke of York*, published separately in 1594 and 1595, were likely the author's early versions of *Henry VI* Parts 2 and 3, rather than orthodoxy's belief that they were bad quartos of the same plays.
2. King Charles I's copy of the Second Folio is in the Royal Library at Windsor Castle (RCIN 1080415). Thanks to Bonner Miller Cutting for this information.
3. The monument's inscription was transcribed on paper with handwriting dated circa 1625 and inserted into a copy of the First Folio, now at the Folger Shakespeare Library, Washington D.C. (First Folio No. 26). See Chiljan, *Shakespeare Suppressed*, Chapter 10.
4. Much of Jonson's commentary about Shakespeare in *Timber, or Discoveries* ("De Shakespeare Nostrati") derived from Seneca's *Controversia*, as noted in Sir George Greenwood's *Ben Jonson and Shakespeare*, Hartford, CT, 1922, 59–60.
5. Antonio Minturno, *L'Arte Poetica*, Venice (1563):
...there are some, who by chance know little of Latin and even less of Greek, who in Tragedy place Seneca, barely known by the Latin writers, before Euripides and Sophocles, who are considered by all to be the princes of tragic poetry. [Translated by Elizabeth Coggshalle]
6. Gabriel Harvey, *Gratulationis Valdinesis, Liber Quartus* (1578); Andrew Hannas, "Gabriel Harvey and the Genesis of William Shakespeare." *Shakespeare-Oxford Newsletter*, 29:1b, Winter 1993.

Works Cited

- Blayney, Peter W.M. *The First Folio of Shakespeare*. Washington D.C.: Folger Library Publications, 1991.
- Chambers, Edmund K. *William Shakespeare, A Study of Facts and Problems*. Oxford, 1930.
- Chiljan, Katherine. “Why was Edward de Vere Defamed on Stage—and his Death Unnoticed?” *The Oxfordian*, Volume 21, 2019.
- . “A Vere of “great Vertue” Wrote the Shakespeare Plays,” *Shakespeare Oxford Newsletter*, 57:1, Summer 2021.
- . *Shakespeare Suppressed: The Uncensored Truth About Shakespeare and His Works*. San Francisco, CA, 2011, 2016.
- Fripp, Edgar. *Shakespeare Man and Artist*. Oxford Univ. Press, 1938.
- Hart, Alfred. “The Growth of Shakespeare’s Vocabulary,” *Review of English Studies*. July 1943.
- Herford, C.H. and Percy Simpson, eds. *Ben Jonson*, Oxford, 1952.
- Kennedy, Richard J. *The Woolpack Man: John Shakespeare’s Monument in Holy Trinity Church, Stratford-upon-Avon*. Newport, OR: Stairway Press, 2005.
- Malone, Edmond. *The Plays and Poems of William Shakespeare*, ed. James Boswell. 21 volumes, Third Variorum edition. London, 1821.
- Oxford English Dictionary Online 2022 (OED)*.
- Price, Diana. *Shakespeare’s Unorthodox Biography*. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2001.
- Showerman, Earl. “Orestes and Hamlet: From Myth to Masterpiece.” *The Oxfordian*, Volume 7, 2007.
- . Also, “Gods and Greeks in *The Winter’s Tale*.” *The Oxfordian*, 10, 2010.
- Waugh, Alexander. “Waugh on Jonson’s ‘Sweet Swan of Avon,’” *The Oxfordian*, Volume 16, 2014.
- . *Sir Anthony Van Dyck & Sir John Suckling Knew*, YouTube video, May 28, 2020.

