

Triumphal Numbers and the “Stigma of Print”: Michael Drayton’s *Encomium to Shakespeare in Agincourt*

by Roger A. Stritmatter, PhD

The article explores the application of Jacobean aesthetic doctrines associated with the idea of “triumphal forms” to Michael Drayton’s 202-line friendship poem, originally printed in Drayton’s 1627 *The Battaile of Agincourt* under the title:

To my most dearely-loued friend
HENERY REYNOLDS Esquire, of *Poets & Poesie*

Judging by the evidence of this poem as well as other surviving testimony, the shared passions of Drayton and Reynolds included not only literature and good cheer, good food and drink by the fire, but—much more specifically, and perhaps, unexpectedly—the role of “number” and its power to convey secrets across time and space. Reynolds was, in fact, a leading advocate for using *number* to express secret knowledge. Since Drayton’s poem to Reynolds is the only surviving document in which Drayton, a Warwickshire native, mentions the name “Shakespeare,” the article poses and attempts to answer a simple but fundamental question about Drayton’s poem: in what ways might the study of Reynolds’ doctrines of numerical form and esoteric purpose inform our understanding of Drayton’s design, or even reveal previously undetected aspects of his testimony about “Shakespeare?”

There is no better way to pursue an inquest into the Shakespeare question than a candid consideration of the vexed relationship between Shakspeare

(1564–1616) and his fellow Warwickshire poet and playwright Michael Drayton (1563–1631). In one recent assessment, Meghan C. Andrews unambiguously classifies Drayton as “Our *closest parallel* for Shakespeare” (my emphasis) (275). Noting that Drayton’s biographical circumstance “more closely resembles Shakespeare’s than does the life of any other early modern writer” (273), Andrews further observes that Drayton “throughout the 1590s” pursued a “systematic imitation of Shakespeare” (284), adapting a “consistent patterning of himself on Shakespeare” and becoming “not just Shakespeare’s shadow,” but his “first literary reader” (306).

By all credible evidence, then, the comparison between Drayton and Shakespeare should be a fruitful one:

- Both poet-playwrights were born in Warwickshire, less than one year apart;
- Both were among the most prolific and influential playwright/poets of their generation;¹
- Both were from small town yeoman stock;
- According to John Aubrey, they were both butcher’s sons (Newdigate 4);
- They shared a common early interest and education in Ovid (Newdigate 20).

Drayton’s biographer Bernard H. Newdigate even claims that the careers of the two men “ran so nearly parallel...as to show how weak is the major premise advanced by those who argue that the son of John Shakespeare could never have written the plays that bear his name” (141).

But the closer we look, the more dubious this claim sounds and the more serious the discrepancies in the traditional narrative of Shakespeare as Drayton’s boon companion will appear. If the impression of affinity between the two writers is supported by the profound influence of Shakespeare in Drayton’s writing, this relationship is also unidirectional, evidently a sign of literary influence rather than personal association. While Andrews finds that no fewer than six of Drayton’s 25 known plays are either direct responses to or distinctly

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influenced by Shakespeare's works (274), the opposite is not true. Shakespeare never mentions Drayton and seems far less attentive to Drayton's work than Drayton is to his. In fact, the biographical parallels and copious literary influences of Shakespeare on Drayton fail to find support in any historical paper trail documenting an active association between the two men. The only real documentary connection consists of Drayton's admiring imitation of Shakespeare and his one explicit reference in the 1627 poem to Reynolds.

Based on this evidentiary lacuna, Newdigate cautions that "It has been generally but *too readily assumed* by biographers of Jonson and Shakespeare that Drayton was on terms of friendship and even of close intimacy with both those his fellow poets" (136; emphasis supplied). Yet even this conflation of Jonson and Shakespeare is misleading. Jonson's active friendship with Drayton is documented for posterity in his dedicatory encomium to *Agin-court*, which begins

It hath been question'd, Michael, if I be,
A friend at all, or if at all, to thee.

And concludes:

I call the world, that envies mee, to see
If I can be a Friend, and Friend to thee.

Jonson's mythopoeticizing encomium in the 1623 Shakespeare First folio, the only comparable link between Shakespeare and either of the other two poets, is both posthumous and evasive, not at all like Jonson's *bonhomie* with Drayton. Surely Newdigate is right to warn that "on such scanty evidence as we have, we must not assume that Drayton was in any sense the friend of Shakespeare" (142).

Drayton and Shakespeare in Fuller

This epistemological muddle is already foreshadowed in the very earliest prose account of Shakespeare's life, Thomas Fuller's biographical entry in his 1662 *Worthies of England*, a compendium of the lives of the distinguished men and women of England and inventory of the country's natural and cultural resources, organized by county. Here the account of Shakespeare's life appears in the chapter on Warwickshire alongside a corresponding yet remarkably divergent synopsis of Drayton. Fuller is a sophisticated lexicographer attuned to medieval and Renaissance commonplace traditions, a chronicler practicing a style of "fancy" that was by the 1660s already being superseded by rising Neo-classicism and the first waves of what would become enlightenment rationalism. Lawrence C. Wroth calls him "a master of the language and tactics of controversy" (2/7) with "an eye for color, an ear for delicate and ingenious phrasing," "sympathy for the whimsical" (4/7); and

“a good punster, one who punned etymologically and with a reason” (6–7). If to Coleridge Fuller remained in the 19th Century “incomparably the most sensible, the least prejudiced man of an age that boasted a galaxy of great men” (cited in Wroth, 2/7), the emerging dominance of practical, plain prose in the decades immediately following Fuller’s death, led to an early rejection of him as “a man of fancy...affecting an odd way of writing” (Patterson 335). This “commonplace book” mentality is evident in the engraving of Fuller prefixed to the first edition of *Worthies*, in which is inscribed Fuller’s Latin motto “method is the mother of memory” (Figure 1).



Figure 1: Fuller engraving from 1662 edition of *Worthies*: “METHODUS MATER MEMORIAE/ Method is the Mother of Memory.”

In the commonplace tradition under the influence of Plutarch’s *Parallel Lives*, it would be natural to read Fuller’s paired “parallel lives” of Drayton and

Shakespeare as coordinated for some larger literary or psychological effect. In fact, Fuller's two entries are so discordant in their construction and ethos as to already raise questions for any conscientious reader about Fuller's intent (table):

Fuller's Entries on Shakespeare and Drayton Compared	
Fuller on Shakespeare (284)	Fuller on Drayton (285)
<p>WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE was born at Stratford on Avon in this County, in whom three eminent Poets may seem in some sort to be compounded,</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. <i>Martial</i> in the <i>warlike</i> sound of his Sur-name, (whence some may conjecture him of a <i>military extraction</i>.) <i>Hasti-vibrans</i> or <i>Shake-speare</i>. 2. <i>Ovid</i>, the most <i>naturall</i> and <i>witty</i> of all Poets, and hence it was that Queen Elizabeth coming into a Grammar-School made this extemporary verse, <i>Persius a Crab-staffe, Bandy Martial, Ovid a fine Wag</i>. 3. <i>Plautus</i>, who was an exact Comaedian, yet never any Scholar, as our <i>Shake-speare</i> (if alive) would confess himself. Add to all these, that though his genius generally was jocular, and inclining him to festivity, yet he could (when so disposed) be so solemn and serious, as appears by his tragedies; so that Heraclitus himself (I mean if secret and unseen) might afford to smile at his comedies, they were so merry; and Democritus scarce forbear to sigh at his tragedies, they were so mournful. <p>He was an imminent instance of the truth of that rule, <i>Poeta non fit sed nascitur</i> ("one is not made but born a poet"). Indeed his learning was very little; so that, as Cornish diamonds are not polished by any lapidary, but are pointed and smoothed even as they were taken out of the earther, so Nature itself was all the art which was used upon him.</p> <p>Many were the wit-combats betwixt him and Ben Jonson; which two I behold like a Spanish great galleon and an English man-of-war; master Jonson (like the former) was built far higher in learning; solid, but slow, in his performances. Shakespeare, with the English man-of-war, lesser in bulk, but lighter in sailing, could turn with all tides, tack about, and take advantage of all winds, by the quickness of his wit and invention. He died anno Domini ____ and was buried at Stratford-Upon-Avon, the town of his nativity.</p>	<p>MICHAEL DRAYTON, born in this county at Atherstone, as appeareth in his poetical address thereunto:</p> <p>My native country, If there be virtue yet remaining in the earth, Or any good of thine thou breath'st into my birth, Accept it as thine own, whilst now I sing of thee, Of all thy later brood the unworthiest though I be.</p> <p>He was a pious poet, his conscience having always the command of his fancy; very temperate in his life, slow of speech, and inoffensive in company. He changed his laurel for a crown of glory, anno 1631; and is buried in Westminster Abbey, near the south door, with this epitaph:</p> <p>Do, pious marble, let thy readers know, What they and what their children owe To Drayton's name, whose sacred dust We recommend unto thy trust. Protect his memory, and preserve his story, Remain a lasting monument of his glory: And when they ruins shall disclaim To be the treasurer of his name: His name that cannot fade, shall be An everlasting monument to thee.</p> <p>He was born within a few miles of William Shakespeare, his countryman and fellow poet; and buried within fewer paces of Jeffrey Chaucer and Edmund Spenser.</p>

While both entries begin by stating a “fact” of Warwickshire birth, after that they diverge wildly. Drayton is the earthy son of Warwickshire, “a pious poet, his conscience having always the command of his fancy” (II: 285), one whose verses on his “native country” can readily be quoted as testimony to his Midlands roots. By contrast, “Shakespeare” emerges in Fuller’s account as a Pythagorean abstraction, an intellectual concoction “in whom three eminent poets may seem in some sort to be compounded” from the transmigrated souls of Martial, Ovid, and Plautus.²

The “fanciful” character of Fuller’s anecdotal biography is intelligible only in light of his methodological caveats. Fuller prefaces his *Worthies* with a lengthy and detailed account of his method, in which he minces no words in declaring those things to be “vainly believed” that are “believed without knowledge of the original thereof,” and accuses those indulging in such beliefs of engaging in “an easy, lazy, supine credulity” (I: 89). These caveats anticipate the obvious contrast between the self-reporting “original” of Drayton’s biography, a life documented in the poet’s own quoted own words, and that of Shakespeare, which commences with a fanciful etymological meditation on the surname and proceeds to chronicle “wit combats” with Ben Jonson.

Chapter 17 of Fuller’s methodology section, “Of the Often Altering of Surnames,” continues by noting that “the surnames of families have been frequently altered.” Fuller attributes such “altering” to the motives of social advancement or “concealment, in time of civil wars,” reporting that, “A name is a kind of face whereby one is known; wherefore taking a false name is a vizard whereby men disguise themselves, and that lawfully enough, when not fraudulently done to deceive others,”³ and subsequently declares that “however such diversity appeareth in the eyes of others, I dare profess that I am delighted with the prospect thereof” (I: 70). Most provocatively of all, under his “General Rules for the Author’s and the Reader’s Ease,” Fuller further declares that “if...in this account a mean man take place of a mighty lord, the latter (as being dead) I am sure will not, and the living reader should not, be offended therat” (I: 81). Such evasive qualifications already distinguish Fuller’s 1662 anecdotal “biography” of Shakespeare and are only made more conspicuous in comparison to his contrasting account of Drayton.

If Fuller’s ambiguous oracle looks backward to the ambiguities of Drayton’s own relationship with Shakespeare, it also looks forward to the contradictions and perplexities of today’s Shakespeare scholarship. Given Drayton’s prolific, multi-generic writing career, theatrical ties, and local Warwickshire roots, it is not surprising that Shakespeare scholars have often followed in Fuller’s footsteps to attempt to divine a closer nexus between the two poets or that they have been forced by the paucity of evidence to either indulge in specious conjecture or reflexive dogma. Less easy to understand is how these same scholars have so often trumpeted a purely hypothetical relationship, including legends of drinking parties, while consistently avoiding or evading

Drayton's *only* direct testimony on Shakespeare. This allusion occurs in Drayton's "Friendship" poem, first published in Drayton's 1627 collection of poems in various genres, *Agincourt* (Figure 2):



Figure 2: Drayton's *Agincourt* (1627) contains the only reference to Shakespeare in Drayton's surviving work. In this book, for the first and only time, Drayton writes of Shakespeare: "Shakespeare thou hadst as smooth a Comicke vaine..."

Scholars who ignore this document and allusion include Halliwell-Phillipps (1907), Chambers (1930), Lewis (1941), Vickers (1974), Schoenbaum (1975), and Cooper (2006), all standard reference works on Jacobean literary references to Shakespeare—those, indeed, on which many others depend on as authoritative accounts of the earliest Shakespeare allusions. Collectively they illustrate a remarkable series of ellipses in the record, effectively turning Shakespeare studies into the highbrow version of a police properties office in which essential evidence routinely and predictably goes missing.

The invaluable 1941 Oxford University Press Hebel-Tillotson collected works of Drayton contains further evidence for the difficulty this allusion has had in gaining traction in the critical literature, for while the editors devote five pages of critical apparatus to this poem (V: 214–218), they do not say even one word about these four lines to Shakespeare. Bernard

Newdigate’s biographical companion to the Oxford edition, *Michael Drayton and His Circle*, does quote from Drayton’s poem, only to dismiss the four lines on Shakespeare as “faint praise.” More provocatively, perhaps, than he may have intended, Newdigate also draws a sharp contrast between Drayton’s “cold” appreciation of Shakespeare and the “glowing terms in which Drayton writes of his particular friends, Alexander of Menstrie, Drummond of Hawthornden, the two Beaumonts and William Brown” (142). Perhaps most striking of all, Meghan C. Andrews’ 2014 *Shakespeare Quarterly* study of the textual influence of Shakespeare on Drayton also ignores this poem.

These omissions jar, especially given Newdigate’s jovial assurance that “we may be sure, at any rate, that Shakespeare and Drayton were *known to one another*” (141, my emphasis). The pattern of avoidance of genuine original literary documents in favor of dubiously reliable third or fourth-hand oral legend or appeals to obligatory assumptions like “we may be sure that” suggests an underlying anxiety about the original document; with closer inspection, the reasons for the widespread, pervasive, and endemic *avoidance* pattern in the critical literature will become obvious.

If Drayton’s lines about Shakespeare have been ignored by most Shakespeare scholars and actively avoided by others, a few scattered remarks in the critical tradition may help to contextualize the passage and explore some of the possible implications. Disraeli (1841, 406) considers Drayton’s lines “parsimonious” because they praise Shakespeare only for comedy and not tragedy. At least since 1874, another critical source that has included a small part of Drayton’s poem while ignoring its implications, in successive editions over many decades, are the *Shakespeare Allusion Books* (Ingleby et al.),⁴ which reproduce Drayton’s four lines about Shakespeare and make no attempt to contextualize them. Indeed, beyond reprinting this four-line excerpt with the note about the date of the poem’s composition, Ingleby et al. offer virtually nothing else of consequence about the allusion. Gibson (1965) credits the passage as showing “that in his own day Shakespeare was considered as little more than an ordinary competent dramatist, certainly not as one who towered head and shoulders above his contemporaries” (261, but fails to offer any detailed reading of the poem or explain its curious structure and language. Shapiro (2010) brings our literature review up to the 21st Century in the characteristic hypothetical voice of the modern bardolator, by insisting that of Shakespeare’s poetic contemporaries Drayton “*may have known Shakespeare longer than most,*” before proceeding to celebrate this posthumous verse as evidence of Drayton’s unproblematically “warm praise” of Shakespeare (238, my emphasis)—all without considering or even summarizing the context in which Drayton’s lines appear or examining them as poetry.

This 202-line “friendship” poem contains the names of 34 contemporary poets and playwrights, arranged in a “equipage” or triumphal schema.

Located at the precise numeric center of this list and in the context of fondly recalling his friendship with his former tutor Reynolds is—the name “Shakespeare”:

Shakespeare thou hadst as smooth a Comicke vaine,
Fitting the socke, and in thy natural braine,
As strong conception, and as Cleere a rage,
As any one that trafiqu'd with the stage.

As recently as 1941, the OUP editors of Drayton's works were uncertain about the identity of the poem's dedicatee; however, Reynolds is now known to have been the literary theorist, tutor, and author of *Mythomystes* (1632), a neo-Platonic, neo-Pythagorean treatise on allegory, esotericism, and the “art of number.” In the book, Reynolds argues that “High and Mystically matters should by riddles and enigmatical knots be kept inuiolate from the prophane Multitude” (Reynolds 1632, 29–30), and that the “Art of Numbers” should be employed to “vnlocke and explaine....Mysticall meanings” (37). Reynolds is also the author of the unpublished Latin treatise *Macrolexis*, which Mary Hobbs summarizes as a treatise on the theory of “secret methods of communication at a distance” (414). A Pythagorean elitist,⁵ Reynolds in this work “exhorts poets to steep themselves in the cabala and in the lore of Pythagoras the Master of Silence” (Fowler, 9). Pythagoras was the “master of silence” not only on account of the esoteric character of his teachings and the role of silence as a practice in his school, but because number itself constitutes a universal language that technically requires no verbal explanation or justification, instead signifying through mathematical symbols and expressions.

As a theorist and advocate of concealed discourse in the arts, and advocate of the application of mathematical principles of design both as *épistémè* and compositional praxis, Reynolds insists that the virtue of ancient writers was their belief in number as the original and constitutive element of creation. Thus, Drayton's ornate dedicatory title becomes the first clue that readers are being let in on a conversation between Drayton and a beloved mentor and elder, who believes that a prime function of poetry is to embody and communicate secrets at a distance, and that “number” plays an essential key in this process of transmission.

A literature review confirms that Reynolds' “elitist” esotericism—the idea that every text should have dual registers of meaning, one for popular appeal or avoidance of controversy and another dedicated to the transmission of controversial truths for learned and careful readers—was familiar to many 17th Century readers. Arthur Melzer's seminal 2014 University of Chicago study, *Philosophy Between the Lines*, shows how writers of all kinds up until and including Diderot (1713–1783), followed esoteric precepts. The book

conclusively demonstrates that “most philosophers of the past routinely hid some of their most important ideas beneath a surface of conventional opinions” (xiii) and that “if we do not read [early modern writers] esoterically, we will necessarily misunderstand them” (18). Melzer approaches the problem of “writing between the lines” from philosophical, linguistic, sociological and political points of view, but another aspect of the history of secrecy is the science of concealed messages, the history of which includes the Torah, Herodotus, and Pindar among many other ancient sources of doctrine and anecdote.

For over 2,500 years, literature and literary forms have co-evolved not only with the hermetic traditions of philosophers but also with the more well-known and well-documented secret writing methods of diplomats and states that belong to the history and practice of cryptography. Theories of secret writing drew special impetus during the Renaissance from the transcription of hieroglyphics, interacting richly in the emblem book tradition, which would produce the first image of a polyalphabetic cypher wheel, already known in Venice before 1612, several hundred years before the device was supposedly invented (Figure 3):



Figure 3: Henry Peacham's 1612 image of a polyalphabetic cipher wheel (180). The motto, “Sorte et Labore,” means “By lot or by labor.”

In one of the earliest and most influential books on secret writing, *Steganographia* (1499), the Catholic mystic and founding father of cryptography Johannes Trithemius imagines transmitting secret messages across space using two magnetized needles, each set within a circular frame bordered by an alphabet: by linking one needle to the other magnetically a message spelled out with one disk would transmit to the other. Gaspar Schott in his *Schola Steganographica* (1655) replied that the method could never work since it was impossible to link the magnetism of one needle to the magnetism of the other, especially at a distance. Two centuries later the principle, if not the exact mechanism of Trithemius's vision, would be embodied in the telegraph.

In the absence of electricity or Morse code, poets like Drayton used what methods they had to convey messages across distances of time and space. Perhaps their chief—and certainly the most overlooked—tool was *number*, a common factor shared by all early modern poetry and cryptography. One of cryptography's most fundamental operations, inherited from the Judaic tradition of gematria, makes numbers interchangeable with letters. Katherine Ellison notes in the 2014 special issue of the *Journal of the Northern Renaissance*, in an article on “Numbers in Early Modern Writing,” that numbers and systems of numeration are ideal for simple encryption systems: “language as articulated through arithmetic provides attractive textual solutions to eavesdropping because it can circulate freely in the public yet hide thoughts that at least two people want to keep between themselves” (12–13).

Analyzing Drayton's Poem

The 202-line poem in which Drayton's sole allusion to Shakespeare by name occurs was first published in Drayton's 1627 *The battaile of Agincourt Fought by Henry the fift of that name, King of England, against the whole power of the French* (Figure 2). In 1627 any literate reader encountering this title would inevitably have recalled the Shakespearean play *Henry V* (1600), which had made the patriotic topos of Agincourt far more widely accessible than any other account of the battle, including Holinshed.

Drayton's poem has long suffered from critical neglect, partly because it belongs to a defunct genre of public narrative poetry celebrating friendship between men of letters. Other examples of the genre of the literary epistle include Jonson's previously mentioned 94-line poem, “THE VISION OF BEN JONSON, ON THE MUSES OF HIS FRIEND, M. DRAYTON,” also published in Drayton's 1627 *Agincourt* volume (A-A2). Drayton begins with a classical proem or framing introduction, implicating his dedicatee Reynolds in a shared memory and placing the general reader in the position of vicariously eavesdropping on a close literary friendship: the scene is one

of comfort, conviviality—good food, wine, fun, and fire:

My dearly loued friend how oft haue we,
In winter evenings (meaning to be free,)
To some well-chosen place vs'd to retire;
And there with moderate meate, and wine, and fire,
Haue past the howres contentedly with chat,
Now talk of this, and then discours'd of that,
Spoke our owne verses 'twixt our selves, if not
Other mens lines, which we by chance had got,
Or some Stage pieces famous long before,
Of which your happy memory had store. (ll. 1–10)

The genre of the “public friendship” poetry to which this poem belongs characteristically involves the conscientious juxtaposition of private and “mixed” audiences; to facilitate these distinctions among readers, Drayton makes careful use in this poem of the complexities of early modern pronouns. The first line directly addresses Reynolds to establish a plural first person voice: “how oft have *we*.” This initial pronominal usage emphasizes the shared experience of “winter evenings” before the fire, while Reynolds and Drayton “spoke our own verses ’twixt ourselves” (7) or sometimes delivered “other men’s lines” or even read from “stage pieces famous long before” (9).

Given the title of Drayton’s entire volume, *Agincourt*, the “stage pieces famous long before” seems a probable allusion to a shared experience with plays like *Henry V* or even *The Famous Victories of Henry V* (published 1600), both “famous” long before 1627. Certainly, the passage introduces a theme of shared theatrical memory of plays that were in their first vintage in Drayton’s youth in the 1590s.⁶ Indeed, Drayton’s title recalls the British public relations success that Henry V scored in his 1415 victory over the French in a showdown between over-armored knights on horseback and the English longbowmen. Drayton is exploiting the patriotic topos, long before treated by Shakespeare, and perhaps suggesting that both writer and recipient might be counted among Henry V’s “we few, we happy few” who participated in the historic battle now passing into legend.

Early modern “friendship” poems, including Drayton’s to Henry Reynolds, oscillate around the ambiguities of their own genre: in a world still privileging the oral and laboring under the “stigma of print,” in which even John Donne looked forward to the prospect of publishing his private reflections in his poetry only “under an unescapable necessity,” fearing that “I shall suffer from many [mis]interpretations” (as cited in Traister 1990, 75). Wasn’t *publishing* friendship *cheapening* it? Responding to this circumstance, these poems are characterized by exoteric, public praise of the dedicatee embedded in layers of esoteric implication which readers, listening in on a privileged, private communication, are challenged to apprehend.

Triumphal Numbers and Privileged Centers

Given the avoidance behaviors of orthodox scholars, Henry Reynolds' brand of mystical Neoplatonism may have potent justification. As Fowler remarks, even though the application of numerical design was "common to the best medieval and renaissance poets and almost universal in the period 1580–1680," numerological study has remained "practically a virgin province of the critical continent," and modern scholars have been trained "to despise the notion that literature is spatial in character" since "number symbolism is not quite respectable: we associate it with cranks or lunatics, not with great authors and serious scholars" (Fowler 2). Given this context, a poem by Michael Drayton about Shakespeare, directed to the special attention of the mathematical theorist and master of neo-Pythagorean poetics Henry Reynolds, the deviser of schemes to "communicate secrets at a distance," cries out to be avoided by any scholar whose chief concern is to remain "respectable."

In their posthumous tributes, Ben Jonson's followers praised him as "the prince of *numbers*," who "mightst in *numbers* lie" (my emphasis) (Mayne, 29). The repeated word, *numbers*, used here and elsewhere as a synonym for poetry, illustrates the strong association between poetics and numeration in early modern thinking. To "write in numbers" was to write poetry, as distinct from prose, and early modern readers were far more closely attuned to numerical dimensions of poetry—as Alastair Fowler, John MacQueen and others have shown—than we. Although mathematics was an arcane and taboo subject (still not being included, for example, in the standard pedagogies of the 16th or 17th Centuries), number theory had long remained a prominent topic of *sub rosa* speculation and inquiry. According to Paulinus of Nola (c. 354–431), articulating a widely shared metaphysics, all things in creation had been disposed "ut numerus cum re conveniret/so that number should agree with matter."⁷

Drayton's poetry itself contains many clear signs of adherence to these customary early modern doctrines of the privileged structural role that number could play in the design of complex communication. His 1619 *Idea. In Sixtie Three Sonnets*. is a densely numerological treatise in verse, in which the content of each sonnet represents Drayton's fanciful exploration of the ideas represented in that number, with "63" of course being the "grand climacteric."⁸ In his equipage to Reynolds Drayton assigns Chaucer the ultimate praise, among the English poets, for being the "first [who] spake/In weighty *numbers*?" (my emphasis) (50–51), and calls William Alexander, Earl of Stirling, "that most ingenious knight" not only on account of "the loue that was twixt vs," but also for "his *numbers* which were braue and hie" (my emphasis) (ll. 169–170).

These overt allusions to the idea of number as a structural principle occur in a poem whose genre has an ancient and unambiguous association to spatial

doctrines of art that employed mathematics to envision forms embodying a rich ceremonial symbolism: the Triumph. In his *Triumphal Forms*, Fowler’s classic study reveals that “numerical organization in works of literature, especially English poetry of the Elizabethan period” was characteristic of the age, an art involving the “composition of substantive and formal elements into special patterns” and “all art was thought of spatially” (ix). Originally based on the Roman Triumph so feared by Cleopatra, the *triumph* in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance had become not only a sociological festival and display of power and domination by the victor, but a model for the arts, a subject for painting, for poetry, and for drama as well as a common *topos* for expressing various triumphalist ideals.

The first lesson regarding Drayton’s reference to Shakespeare, then, is that it occurs in Drayton’s *triumph* of literary writers; that is, in a literary genre strongly associated with detailed and elaborate patterns of numerological or concentric design and a privileged center. The idea of the “Triumph” in European arts of the Renaissance represents a special application of generic ring-structures that Mary Douglas has discovered in texts as various as the Bible and Greek epic. The “triumph” is a type of ring structure, as inflected through the traditions of the Roman triumph and the rites and forms of the European monarchies, reproduced in card games and other popular festive forms, in which a monarch or a royal family represents the center of the social universe and the cosmos. In a *triumph*, the triumphator is in the center, and

an outstanding feature of triumphal motifs is their emphasis of the centre. This position once carried a generally recognized iconological significance: it was the place, if not for an image of sovereignty, at least for a “central feature.” (Fowler 23)

Drayton’s own poem, it turns out, will illustrate Fowler’s description nicely.

Number and Center in Drayton’s Poem

After establishing his intimacy with the dedicatee (and therefore, by proxy, with the reader), Drayton proceeds to record his educational influences, starting when he was about 10 years old and reasonably well versed in Latin, when he asked his Tutor to “make me a poet” (29). Reynolds was a well-known and widely respected tutor to Charles I, so both Drayton and his dedicatee shared an interest in pedagogical theory. In Drayton’s account, the tutor agrees to the challenge, and begins by reading him Mantuan.

Blending the readings assigned by his tutor with his own poetic influences as they developed over the years, up to and including many Jacobean contemporaries, whom he respects and sometimes warmly recommends as friends,

Drayton fills the ensuing verses with praise of more than 30 poets in the equipage. The list of names begins with Mantuan (1447–1516) and Virgil (70–19 BC), who were early school aids in the Latin curriculum, and proceeds forward through Chaucer (1340–1400), Surrey (1516–1547), and the early Elizabethans, before Nashe and Shakespeare, but then including Seneca, Plautus, Homer, and Hesiod before concluding with such contemporaries of Drayton as Alexander, Drummond, Browne, and “two Beaumonts.”

The complete list of poets, numbered in the order in which Drayton describes them, are as follows:

- | | | | |
|--------------|-----------------|---------------|----------------------------------|
| 1. Mantuan | 10. Churchyard | 18. Daniel | 27. Bartas |
| 2. Virgil | 11. Spenser | 19. Jonson | 28. Sands |
| 3. Elderton | 12. Sidney | 20. Seneca | 29. Ovid |
| 4. Chaucer | 13. Lyly | 21. Plautus | 30. Alexander |
| 5. Gower | 14. Warner | 22. Chapman | 31. Drummond |
| 6. Surrey | 15. Marlowe | 23. Musaeus | 32. One of the “two Beaumonts” |
| 7. Wyatt | 16. Nashe | 24. Homer | 33. Other of the “two Beaumonts” |
| 8. Bryan | 17. Shakespeare | 25. Hesiod | 34. Browne |
| 9. Gascoigne | | 26. Sylvester | |

Of the 34 poets in the list, two (32–33) have the same name, Beaumont. Drayton places Shakespeare exactly in the middle of the equipage in the 17th position, making him, in Fowler’s terms, a “central feature” of the entire poem. Given the well-documented importance of the ceremonial center in early modern poetics, it seems unlikely that this placement is a coincidence: “Among Elizabethan poets attempting a neo-classical closeness of construction, numerological emphasis of the centre became a regular convention” (Fowler 67). Fowler devotes an entire chapter to discussing the interrelatedness of the concept of the sacred center with various other arithmetic modes of symmetry and design, but the concept of the privileged center is unquestionably foundational: not only did “sovereignty of the centre found its most splendid expression in royal entries and other triumphal pageants” (Fowler 27), but in poetry the triumphal array should be “symmetrical, with the Triumphator at, or next to, the captor” (Fowler 39).

A well-designed version of Drayton’s argument, however, also requires a key, and it is the presence of the key, as much as the literary triumphalism that begins with the title and the dedication of the poem to Reynolds, that confirms Drayton’s premeditated emphasis on numeration and the idea of a “central feature.” The anomalous listing in line 176 of “the two Beaumonts” (32 & 33) in place of one to fill out the numbers is Drayton’s key,⁹ for it immediately signals, directly and unambiguously, the logical possibility that

one name can refer to more than one person. As we shall see, this possibility is a necessary condition for the fulfillment of the poem’s design. Remember Drayton’s poem is dedicated to a contemporary theorist of esoteric knowledge who wrote books on how to transmit secret messages at a distance.

Pronominal Usage

Another method Drayton uses in his poem which exemplifies Reynold’s concept of “secret methods of communication at a distance” is pronominal usage. Early modern writers were not only well-versed in the applications of numbers to verses, but were also especially well-attuned to the complex social implications of the second person pronoun, and had available a double system, including the formal (and originally only plural) *you*, and the more intimate *thee* (dative) or *thou* (nominative, vocative), the use of which varied by social circumstance, but also could be employed in poetry as words with definite social, and therefore literary, implications. Having established a “we” with Reynolds (ln. 1), Drayton’s speaker then switches to calling him, in the poem’s first usage (ln. 11), *you* (“and I remember *you* much pleased were/ of those who lived long ago to hear”). Later he will apply *you* to the reader, but here it unambiguously refers to the direct object of his address, Henry Reynolds.

The second person pronoun turns out to not only be a significant structural feature of the design of Drayton’s poem, but also an expression of his pedagogic theme. The distribution of uses is as follows:

- Speaker of Reynolds — 5 times (ll. 11, 17, 28, 29, 30)
- Reported speech of Reynolds to speaker — 3 times (ll. 32, 33, 34)
- Speaker to the reader — 1 times (l 181).¹⁰

In line 181, for the first and only time, the pronoun refers to the reader of Drayton’s poem: “but if *you* shall/Say in your knowledge...”. To follow the logic of Drayton’s finely architectonic poem, it is important to grasp this rhetorical structure. This is a poem about transmitting the secrets that Drayton and Reynolds shared in the pleasurable moments recalled in the poem’s exordium to the reader, transforming the “you” of line 11 into the “you” of line 181.

Between these uses, of course, lies Drayton’s equipage, including the four lines about Shakespeare. The poem’s artful construction is further indicated by the fact that the triumphalist logic of the privileged center is reinforced by Drayton’s pronominal distribution. Uniquely in the poem Drayton employs the intimate singular pronoun *thou* in reference to Shakespeare in the “*Shakespeare, thou*” of line 119. Drayton’s use of the formal second person pronoun, *you*, as we have seen, establishes the epistemic norm of the poem. It is used

to express Drayton's theme of the transmission of knowledge through education and careful observation of the features of documents by and about Shakespeare.

Drayton frequently expresses his warm collegiality with poets in his equipage whom he has personally known, like "my deare Drummond," or the two Beaumonts and Browne, whom he terms "my dear companions"—but not even these intimates are ever invoked in direct address or the use of the second person pronoun. That privilege is reserved for only three parties: Drayton's dedicatee and beloved tutor, the reader, and *Shakespeare*. Of these, only Shakespeare is referred to using the form "thou."

The distinction between *you* and *thou* is not only consequential in early 17th Century rhetoric, but also diagnostic of key relationships articulated in Drayton's poem. Although *thou* had by 1700 almost entirely disappeared, in 1627 and throughout the 17th Century, the *you/thou* distinction was used in several clearly identified ways to classify the speaker's relationship to a listener, as Charles Barber has enumerated (1976, 152–157): Originally the distinction was only one of number, with *you* expressing a plural, and *thou*, singular,¹¹ although *thou* could also be used to address one regarded as a social inferior. Later the rules of these pronouns varied by circumstance according to various speech codes related to class among other factors. Thus, it would be customary for someone of lower status to address a social superior with the formal—polite, but also distancing—*you*, but prefer *thou* in speaking to a social equal or in a more intimate context.

Beyond this general pattern, Barber identifies three additional uses of *thou* that he terms emotional: 1) to express negative emotion against a stranger of equal or greater rank; 2) to convey *intimacy*, *affection*, or *tenderness*, or 3) in apostrophes to "supernatural beings...inanimate objects, and abstractions" (Barber 154). As this poem begins with a powerful image and symbol of intimacy between two friends, the second example—that the word implies an inward intimacy between literary peers—would be consistent with the poem's entire tone and scope, yet the idea that Drayton's "Shakespeare" is a deified abstraction would also be consistent with the available evidence.

That Drayton had both meanings in his mind might be supported from a close reading of the four lines about Shakespeare in their original context as preceded by Drayton's commentary on Thomas Nashe:

And surely <i>Nashe</i> , though he a Proser were	111
A branch of Lawrell yet deserues to beare,	
Sharply <i>Satirick</i> was he, and that way	
He went, since that his being, to this day	
Few haue attempted, and I surely thinke	115

Those wordes shall hardly be set downe with inke;
 Shall scorch and blast, so as his could, where he,
 Would inflict vengeance, and be it said of thee,
Shakespeare, thou hadst as smooth a Comicke vaine,
 Fitting the socke, and in thy naturall braine, 120
 As strong conception, and as Cleere a rage,
 As any one that trafiqu’d with the stage. 122

The violent lines about Nashe using his writing to “scorch and blast” in order to “inflict vengeance” are not only unique in Drayton’s otherwise smoothly politiqué poem, but they are also artfully enjambed with and contrasted to Shakespeare’s “smooth” and “Comicke vaine.” (ln. 118), invoking a theme of violent comedy, or comedic tragedy, genre at war with genre. The perception of a problem in the text is confirmed in the tension between Drayton’s refusal to name Shakespeare as a writer of tragedies and his corresponding use of the word “rage” to describe the tone of Shakespeare’s comedies; in his “Epistle of Shores wife to King Edward the fourth” Drayton associates the word more plausibly with tragedy:

Or passionate tragedian in his rage,
 Acting a love-sick passion on the stage
 (Drayton 1598, 12^v).

A Shakespeare thus introduced in conflict remains in conflict over the successive lines, as further indicated in the contrast between the intimate “thou” of 119 and the commercial implications of “any one that *trafiqu’d* with the stage” (my emphasis) (123). While “thou” implies a kind of *gemeinschaft*, a privately shared commonality like the one modelled by Drayton earlier in expressing his personal fondness for Reynolds, “Trafiqu’d” is unmistakably vulgar by implication, emphasizing the commercialization of the public theatrical world that was especially taboo for members of the Elizabethan aristocracy. As a noun *traffic* was probably already long a synonym for prostitution in 1591, when *OED* first records its definite use with that meaning; it could also mean “worthless stuff, rubbish, or trash,” a meaning that approaches the ironic use of the “trifles” for a literary work in the tradition established by Horace. One common and early meaning of the verb is I.2.b “to have dealings of an illicit or secret character; to deal, intrigue, or conspire”; in any usage, the word was strongly tinged with the ideals of commercial advantage that characterized the emergence of the Elizabethan “new men,” disrupting the more medieval values of the aristocracy. “Trafficking” with the stage was not something an aristocrat, especially, did. In the precedent of Ecclesiasticus 13.1, it was to “touch pitch and be defiled.”

This contrast between the aristocratic, medieval ethos of the courtier and the commercial values of the expanding bourgeois sphere, including the

commercial theatre, will resurface later in the poem, when we begin to see the full scope of Drayton's design. For now, this much is obvious: paradoxically, as if to echo and embody Jonson's "not for an age but for all time," Drayton has given to Shakespeare the honored place of the ceremonial center of his equipage, and has underscored his singularity with the pronoun *thou*, indicating feelings of *intimacy* and/or *awe* towards an object of ceremonial reverence. Why has this not been noticed before? And how will Drayton now qualify this celebration of Shakespeare as literary triumphator?

The tenth and final instance of the word *you* in Drayton's poem, we have already noticed, refers to Drayton's biggest and most comprehensive "as if": having heard the recitation of Drayton's literary mentors and his enduring relationship with the "master of the esoteric" Henry Reynolds, and now knowing to whom Drayton is speaking, the reader in effect exchanges places with the tutor, before the fire, and is inducted into the literary cognoscenti. Surprisingly, given this narrative circumstance, Drayton imagines a reader who is about to challenge the *completeness* of his equipage, as if to accuse him of having failed to transmit a comprehensive or fully transparent message, of having omitted one or more significant names from the list:

[...] but if you shall	182
Say in your knowledge, <i>that these be not all</i>	
<i>Have writ in numbers</i> , be inform'd that I	
Only my self, to these few men doe tye,	185
Whose workes oft printed, set on euery post,	
To publike censure subiect have bin most;	
<i>For such whose poems</i> , be they nere so rare,	
In <i>prinate chambers</i> , that <i>incloistered are</i> ,	
And <i>by transcription</i> daintly must goe,	190
As though the world <i>vnworthy were to know</i>	
There rich composures, let those men that keepe	
These wonderous reliques in their iudgement deepe,	
And cry them up so, let such Peecees bee	
<i>Spoke of by those that shall come after me</i> ,	185
I passe not for them [...]	
(emphases supplied)	

Thus, Drayton draws his poem to a conclusion by admitting that his equipage may be imperfect or incomplete, acknowledging that his reader may have "knowledge" of some other, who is not named, but who has also "writ in numbers" (ln.184) and deserves inclusion in his list. Since the word "numbers" was a synonym for poetry, the passage actively confirms the existence of the pattern used above in reading the triplication of the pronoun, *you*, and the allusion to Shakespeare as a being placed in the ceremonial center of the array. Number and ceremonial triumph are essential parts of Drayton's design.

Just as importantly, in this passage Drayton harnesses the reader’s doubt to explore the customary circumstance of the “stigma of print” or “stigma of the stage,”¹² that separated those “wondrous reliques” and “rich composures” held in manuscript transcriptions “incloistered” in “private chambers,” from “workes oft printed, set on euery post,”—that is, he distinguishes productions “traffiqued” in public from those passed around in manuscript among a few noble patrons and coterie readers.

The gap between the private study and the public audience is here filled by the transcription of works by an amanuensis, so that “*by transcription*” the work “daintily must goe,” from private study to the public stage. The process contrasts “daintily” with “traffiq’d,” reflecting the juxtaposition of the aristocratic and commercial worlds that is discussed at length by Debotel (2009) as a primary factor in the enduring “stigma of print.” Well into the 17th Century, to avoid the deadly taint of commercialization, the literary production of aristocrats could only enter the public sphere under a mask, or pass by some other indirection, including *transcription*, from the study to the stage. A somewhat analogous process of manuscript transmission is dramatized in *Hamlet* through the device of Hamlet’s authorship of the “dozen or sixteen lines” that he proposes to insert into the “Murder of Gonzago,” a play otherwise “extant” in “choice Italian.”

This migration of the manuscript from study to printing press under explicit conventions of the “stigma of print” is treated in forensic first-person detail in Shake-Speare Sonnet 48: “how careful was I, when I took my way,/each *trifle* under truest bars to thrust/that to my use, it might unused stay,/from hands of falsehood/in sure wards of trust” (my emphasis) (48/1–4). *Trifle* is the customary English translation of *nuga*, the word Horace with ironic self-deprecation applied to his lyric poems. It is applied to describe the Shakespeare plays, no less than three times by First Folio editors in the address to Pembroke and Montgomery. The curious expression of Sonnet 48, “that *to my use*, it might *unused* stay,” where “use” implies the suppressed practice of borrowing or lending of money at interest, invoking the aristocratic ethos of avoidance of the “mercenary” implications of engaging in art for profit’s sake.

Ultimately, Drayton confirms his unwillingness to speak thoroughly or directly on matters of contemporary stage controversy. He relies instead on referring the case to the reader, so that the “encloistered” texts that “by transcription daintily must go” must be “Spoke of by *those that shall come after me*” (my emphasis) (ln. 185). Why, we must ask, is Michael Drayton’s only reference to his alleged Warwickshire neighbor and fellow dramatist “Shakespeare” fraught with ambiguities such as these?

Drayton’s “Shakespeare allusion” has been systematically ignored in the critical literature because it does not easily lend itself to our usual professional

assumptions about Shakespeare and instead calls attention to the “stigma of print” that led many aristocrats, among other avoidance gambits, to “suffer” their works “to be published without their own name to it,” as the *Anonymous Arte of English Poesie* describes it in 1589.

Conclusions

Drayton’s emphasis on texts that escape manuscript culture into print *by transcription* is the *direct result* of Drayton’s own imagined doubt—carefully attributed by Drayton’s method to the *reader*—about the completeness or accuracy of Drayton’s equipage of poets; the concept of “stigma of print” is therefore implicit in the problem of the reader’s doubt. We cannot understand the full implications of the equipage without taking into consideration the possibility of concealment resulting from “transcription” under conditions of the “stigma of print.”

The ambiguous, liminal status of a transcribed manuscript facilitates the culture of pseudonymous production. Once a manuscript leaves the author’s desk, the journey of the text’s alienation has begun, and between the giving hands of the author and the publication of the work many factors may intervene, either by intent or accident. Barring the interesting possibility of collusion between an author and a printer, in early modern law before 1710 the author lost control—over how, when, and by whom the manuscript would be published—as soon as he or she transferred it to a third party. As Jerome—the 4th Century Bible scholar and founder of critical method in textual studies—concluded, “nothing is easier than to place any name you want on front of a book” (75).

At the same time, the otherwise aberrant phrase, “the two Beaumonts” (176) drives home the point that one name can describe two men. What is Drayton doing? Why this dramatic *mis-en-scene*, like a puppet show inserted into a play, of manuscript transmission by amanuensis? Does he have a point? Given that he has placed Shakespeare in a position of honor at the center of the equipage and invoked a reverential tone towards him with the pronoun “thou,” and compared him favorably to all the others who have “trafficked” with the stage in the public theatre, it is obvious that this summary of the problem of the “stigma of print” must be applicable to the figure named in the poem’s “central feature.” Even if we had no other reason to think so, that is the logic of the poem.

As Robert Detobel has noted (2009), the prescribed social role of the Elizabethan aristocrat was to uphold tradition and prepare for the common defense. An aristocrat could patronize the creative labors of professional writers, or underwrite a theater company, but to be seen as a writer—let alone an actor or an author of plays—was to invite status-destroying scandal.

Theatre was by far the most dubious literary genre, according to the religious Puritans who by 1640 would succeed in stamping it out as a form of public entertainment for more than 20 years.

In her recent *Shakespeare Quarterly* study of the intense literary conversation that existed between Drayton and Shakespeare, Meghan Andrews refers to Drayton as existing in an “empty space” (276). To her the evidentiary problem of Shakespearean biography seems to lie in the disappearance of many of Drayton’s “coauthor plays.” If “more [of these] had survived, we would probably have a much greater understanding of [Drayton’s] personal and professional connections to Shakespeare” (276). The actual evidence of social network theory, however, tells a very different story. The documentary record shows Michael Drayton surrounded by numerous friends and literary colleagues, a poet among poets, honoring his literary colleagues in many contexts, including his public exchange of letters of friendship with Ben Jonson, and in his equipage his poem to Reynolds. The discrepancy is manifest of all the Elizabethan writers mentioned in Francis Meres’s *Palladis tamia* in 1598.

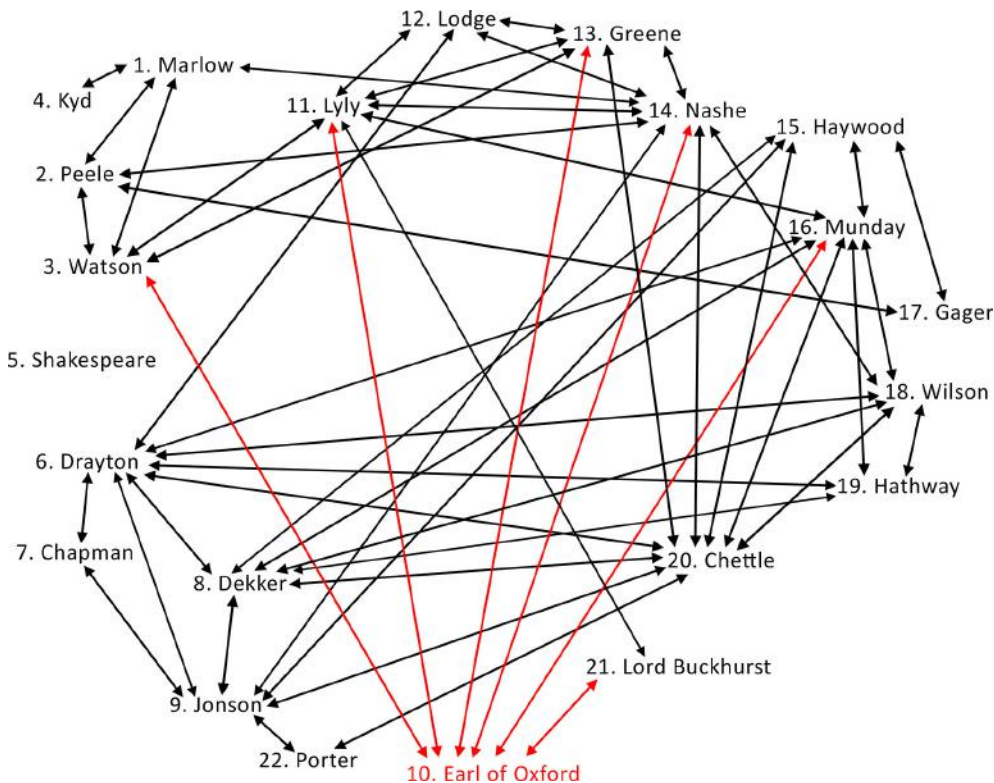


Figure 4: While Drayton is surrounded by contemporary writers, Shakespeare inhabits the “empty space” that Andrews attributes to Drayton. Diagram prepared by Alexander Waugh and Lucinda Foulke.¹⁴

As startling as this graphic is, it understates the magnitude of the evidentiary challenge that the comparison between Drayton and Shakespeare poses for orthodox belief. Between 1597 and 1599 alone Drayton published dedicatory epistles to 13 different individuals.¹³ Newdigate's *Drayton and His Circle* (1941) reproduces Drayton's correspondence or communication with the Gooderes of Polesworth; Lucy, Countess of Bedford; William Henslowe; Thomas Lodge; Walter Aston, and many others (70-86). From the 1590s into the Jacobean years Drayton is reaching out in conversation with multiple other writers, friends, and patrons. Indeed, by the latter half of his career, Drayton had become among the most well-contextualized of Jacobean authors, exchanging public poems with Jonson as well as being in regular conversation with his patron the Earl of Dorset. Drayton is talking in print to Jonson as well as Reynolds, and Jonson is talking to Drayton as well as being a friend of Reynolds. Shakespeare, meanwhile, is nowhere to be found.

Uniquely, Shakespeare has no documented connection to any other writer in Meres. It is Shakespeare, not Drayton, who exists in an "empty space," as a man cut off and disassociated from the networks of literary exchange in which so many others, including Drayton, Jonson, and Reynolds, may easily be identified as active and knowing participants. Even in Fuller, we have seen, "Shakespeare" hovers like a fanciful composite of state secret and religious mystery. He is not a man like Holland, who left behind his magic pen, or, like Drayton, who lived a life in transparent relation to his bred-in-the-bone Warwickshire roots. Demonstrating Shakespeare's literary influence on an impressionable but also well-contextualized contemporary such as Drayton does not alter this problem; literary influence does not prove the existence of a personal relationship, and may instead merely reflect one writer's familiarity with the work of another in print or manuscript.

These interpretative difficulties have resulted in the virtual banishment of Drayton's words about Shakespeare from major sourcebooks of critical history. Drayton's poem pays great homage to "Shakespeare" by placing him centrally in the equipage; it underlines this specialness with the vocative, *thou*, signifying intimacy or reverence or both, yet at the same time surrounds the name with language of violent conflict and commercial pollution. Drayton's Shakespeare is distinguished by the fact that his "conception" and clarity of "rage" make him the equal of the other playwrights of his age. "Even though you're slumming it with the rest of us poets and actors," Drayton seems to say, "we accept and honor you as one of us, I will prove that honor by giving you the central position in the equipage."

With transcription and manuscript transmission, the use of pseudonyms and the employment of literary fronts was a common method for aristocrats to circumvent the "stigma of print." As Marcy North verifies, the English

literary renaissance during which Shakespeare and Drayton both lived, was a golden age of pseudonymous publication. North also suggested, in a book now 19 years in print, that

despite the new critical emphasis on the process of authoring, recent scholars of early modern culture have generally supported the model in which anonymity serves as a relic of the medieval author's indifference—if not explicitly, then in their continued reliance on the author's name as a focal point. Anonymity's importance as a Renaissance convention, its contributions to Renaissance print and manuscript culture, its popularity, the frequency of its use, and especially its cultural meanings remain critically undervalued. (2–3)

The chief witness to traditional attribution of the Shakespearean works—the 1623 folio—had appeared in print only four years before Drayton's *Agincourt*. This book is, in the words of Leah Marcus, designed to “set readers off on a treasure hunt for the author” and invite our complicity in the troublesome and tabooed question: “where is the ‘real’ Shakespeare to be found?” (1988, 19). The question is not new and seems unlikely to go away on account of the personal attacks of a diminishing *status quo ante* in Shakespeare studies. It emerges, fundamentally, from the long-known discordance between the “biographical” and the “literary”—a discordance already evident in Fuller by 1662—in the case of “William Shakespeare.” As William H. Furness, the father of W.W. Furness, the great variorum editor of the 19th Century, remarked in 1866:

I am one of the many who has never been able to bring the life of William Shakespeare within planetary space of the plays. Are there any two things in the world more incongruous? (cited in Reed, 9)

This essay has been a study in revaluing the role of anonymity—and with it, the use of language as subversive discourse carefully designed to outwit the forces of censorship while communicating across time and distance to readers “with ears to hear.” In his “To my most dearly-loued friend,” Drayton supplies a testament to his love for the same kind of “Shakespeare” that Katherine Chiljan has found in the documentary record many years before Drayton's poem appeared in print in 1627:

Years before the First Folio created the myth of the Stratford Man as Shakespeare, literary contemporaries were describing the great author as a very different person: a nobleman who wrote plays and poetry anonymously or with a pseudonym; a supreme poet who could not be

publicly recognized or acknowledged by his actual name, or even by his pen name in some cases; a patron of writers who idolized him. He wrote as a pastime, not as a work. (Chiljan 2011, 266)

By 2022 the “empty space” of Shakespeare in the early modern record has become the black hole of early modern studies, exerting an overwhelming gravitational force powerful enough to bend the fabric of literary studies, curve our preconceptions and perceptions of both evidence and reason, and support editorial and scholarly practices otherwise without precedent or reasoned justification.

Drayton’s 1627 Poem to Henry Reynolds

To my most dearly-loued friend
HENERY REYNOLDS Esquire, of Poets & Poesie

To my most dearly-loued friend HENERY REYNOLDS Esquire, of <i>Poets & Poesie</i>	
My dearly loued friend how oft haue we, In winter evenings (meaning to be free,) To some well-chosen place vs’d to retire; And there with moderate meate, and wine, and fire, Haue past the howres contentedly with chat, 5 Now talk of this, and then discours’d of that, Spoke our owne verses ‘twixt our selves, if not Other mens lines, which we by chance had got, Or some Stage pieces famous long before, Of which your happy memory had store; 10 And I remember you much pleased were, Of those who liued long agoe to heare, As well as of those, of these latter times, Who have inricht our language with their rimes, And in succession, how still vp they grew, Which is the subiect, that I now pursue; For from my cradle, (you must know that) I, Was still inclin’d to noble Poesie, And when that once <i>Pueriles</i> I had read, And newly had my <i>Cato</i> construed, 20 In my small selfe I greatly marueil’d then, Amonst all other, what strange kinde of men These Poets were; And pleased with the name, To my milde Tutor merrily I came, (For I was then a proper goodly page, Much like a Pigmy, scarce ten yeares of age) Clasping my slender armes about his thigh. O my deare master! cannot you (quoth I) Make me a Poet, doe it if you can, And you shall see, Ile quickly bee a man, Who me thus answered smiling, boy quoth he, If you’le not play the wag, but I may see You ply your learning, I will shortly read Some Poets to you; <i>Phoebus</i> be my speed, Too’t hard went I, when shortly he began, And first read to me honest <i>Mantuan</i> , Then <i>Virgils Eglogues</i> , being entred thus, Me thought I straight had mounted <i>Pegasus</i> , And in his full Careere could make him stop, And bound vpon <i>Parnassus</i> ’ by-clift top. I scordnd your ballet then though it were done And had for Finis, <i>William Elderton</i> . But soft, in sporting with this childish iest, I from my subiect haue too long digrest, Then to the matter that we tooke in hand, <i>Ioue</i> and <i>Apollo</i> for the <i>Muses</i> stand. Then noble <i>Chaucer</i> , in those former times, The first inrich’d our <i>English</i> with his rimes,	And was the first of ours, that euer brake, Into the <i>Muses</i> treasure, and first spake 50 In weighty numbers, deluing in the Mine Of perfect knowledge, which he could refine, And coyne for currant, and as much as then The <i>English</i> language could expresse to men, He made it doe; and by his wondrous skill, 55 Gaued vs much light from his abundant quill. And honest <i>Gower</i> , who in respect of him, Had only sipt at <i>Aganippas</i> brimme, And though in yeares this last was him before, Yet fell he far short of the others store. 60 When after those, foure ages very neare, They with the <i>Muses</i> which conuersed, were That Princely <i>Surrey</i> , early in the time Of the Eight <i>Henry</i> , who was then the prime Of <i>Englands</i> noble youth; with him there came 65 <i>Wyat</i> ; with reuerence whom we still doe name Amongst our Poets, <i>Brian</i> had a share With the two former, which accompted are That times best makers, and the authors were Of those small poems, which the title beare, 70 Of songs and sonnets, wherein oft they hit On many dainty passages of wit. <i>Gascoine</i> and <i>Churchyard</i> after them againe In the beginning of <i>Eliza</i> ’s raine, Accompted were great Meterers many a day, 75 But not inspired with braue fier, had they Liu’d but a little longer, they had seene, Their works before them to have buried beene. <i>Graue</i> morrall <i>Spencer</i> after these came on Then whom I am perswaded there was none 80 Since the blind <i>Bard</i> his <i>Iliads</i> vp did make, Fitter a taske like that to vndertake, To set downe boldly, brauely to inuent, In all high knowledge, surely excellent. The noble <i>Sidney</i> with this last arose, 85 That <i>Heroe</i> for numbers, and for Prose. That thoroughly pac’d our language as to show, The plenteous <i>English</i> hand in hand might goe With <i>Greek</i> or <i>Latine</i> , and did first reduce Our tongue from <i>Lillies</i> writing then in vse; 90 Talking of Stones, Stars, Plants, of fishes, Flyes, Playing with words, and idle Similies, As th’ <i>English</i> , Apes and very Zanies be, Of euery thing, that they doe heare and see, So imitating his ridiculous tricks, 95 They spake and writ, all like meere lunatiques. Then <i>Warner</i> though his lines were not so trim’d, Nor yet his Poem so exactly lim’d And neatly ioyned, but the Criticke may Easily reprooue him, yet thus let me say; 100

Drayton's 1627 Poem (continued)

For my old friend, some passages there be
 In him, which I protest haue taken me,
 With almost wonder, so fine, cleere, and new
 As yet they haue bin equalled by few.

Neat *Marlow* bathed in the *Thespian* springs 105
 Had in him those braue translunary things,
 That the first Poets had, his raptures were,
 All ayre, and fire, which made his verses cleere,
 For that fine madnes still he did retaine,
 Which rightly should possesse a Poets braine. 110

And surely *Nashe*, though he a Proser were
 A branch of *Lawrell* yet deserues to beare,
 Sharply *Satirick* was he, and that way
 He went, since that his being, to this day
 Few haue attempted, and I surely thinke 115
 Those wordes shall hardly be set downe with inke;
 Shall scorch and blast, so as his could, where he,
 Would inflict vengeance, and be it said of thee,
Shakespeare, thou hadst as smooth a *Comicke* vaine,
 Fitting the socke, and in thy naturall braine, 120
 As strong conception, and as *Cleere* a rage,
 As any one that trafiqu'd with the stage.

Amongst these *Samuel Daniel*, whom if I
 May spake of, but to sensure doe denie,
 Onely haue heard some wisemen him rehearse, 125
 To be too much *Historian* in verse;
 His rimes were smooth, his meeters well did close
 But yet his maner better fitted prose:
 Next these, learn'd *Johnson*, in this List I bring,
 Who had drunke deepe of the *Pierian* spring, 130
 Whose knowledge did him worthily prefer,
 And long was Lord here of the Theater,
 Who in opinion made our learn't to sticke,
 Whether in Poems rightly dramatique,
 Strong *Seneca* or *Plautus*, he or they, 135
 Should beare the Buskin, or the Socke away.
 Others againe here liued in my dayes,
 That haue of vs deserued no lesse praise
 For their translations, then the daintiest wit
 That on *Parnassus* thinks, he highest doth sit, 140
 And for a chaire may mongst the Muses call,
 As the most curious maker of them all;
 As reuerent *Chapman*, who hath brought to vs,
Musaeus, *Homer* and *Hesiodus*
 Out of the Greeke; and by his skill hath reard 145
 Them to that height, and to our tongue endear'd,
 That were those Poets at this day aliue,
 To see their bookes thus with vs to suruiue,
 They would think, hauing neglected them so long,
 They had bin written in the *English* tongue. 150

And *Siluester* who from the *French* more weake,
 Made *Bartas* of his sixe dayes labour speake

In naturall *English*, who, had he there stayd,
 He had done well, and neuer had bewraid
 His owne inuention, to haue bin so poore 155
 Who still wrote lesse, in striuing to write more.

Then dainty *Sands* that hath to *English* done,
 Smooth sliding *Ouid*, and hath made him run
 With so much sweetnesse and vnusuall grace,
 As though the neatnesse of the *English* pace, 160
 Should tell the letting *Lattine* that it came
 But slowly after, as though stiff and lame.

So *Scotland* sent vs hither, for our owne
 That man, whose name I euer would haue knowne,
 To stand by mine, that most ingenious knight, 165
 My *Alexander*, to whom in his right,
 I want extreemely, yet in speaking thus
 I doe but shew the loue, that was twixt vs,
 And not his numbers which were braue and hie,
 So like his mind, was his clear Poesie, 170
 And my deare *Drummond* to whom much I owe
 For his much loue, and proud I was to know,
 His poesie, for which two worthy men,
 I *Menstry* still shall loue, and *Hauthorne-den*.
 Then the two *Beamounts* and my *Browne* arose, 175
 My deare companions whom I freely chose
 My bosome friends; and in their seuerall wayes,
 Rightly borne Poets, and in these last dayes,
 Men of much note, and no lesse nobler parts,
 Such as haue freely tould to me their hearts, 180
 As I have mine to them; but if you shall
 Say in your knowledge, that these be not all
 Haue writ in numbers, be inform'd that I
 Only my selfe, to these few men doe tye,
 Whose works oft printed, set on euery post, 185
 To publique censure subiect haue bin most;
 For such whose poems, be they nere so rare,
 In priuate chambers, that incloistered are,
 And by transcription daintly must goe;
 As though the world vnworthy were to know, 190
 Their rich composures, let those men that keepe
 These wonderous reliques in their iudgement deepe;
 And cry them vp so, let such Peeces bee
 Spoke of by those that shall come after me,
 I passe not for them: nor doe meane to run, 195
 In quest of these, that them applause haue wonne,
 Vpon our Stages in these latter dayes,
 That are so many, let them haue their bayes
 That doe deserue it; let those wits that haunt
 Those publique circuits, let them freely chaunt 200
 Their fine Composures, and their praise pursue
 And so my deare friend, for this time adue.

Endnotes

1. Although known especially for his chorographical magnum opus, *Poly-Olbion* (1613), the ESTC attributes 21 surviving works to Drayton during the period 1593-1630, but he also wrote or collaborated on as many as 25 plays, almost all of them now lost.
2. Fuller’s fanciful entry on Philemon Holland, the famous Coventry translator of Pliny and other classic works, furnishes a further instance of his insistence of the value of primary evidence. Apparently with a straight face, Fuller records this of Holland:

Many of these his books he wrote with one pen, whereupon he himself thus pleasantly versified:

With one sole pen I writ this book,
Made of a gray goose quill;
A pen it was when it I took,
And a pen I leave it still. (II: 287)

This pen, moreover, was an object of special local devotion in Warwickshire: “This monumental pen he solemnly kept, and shewed to my reverend tutor Doctor Samuel Ward,” continues Fuller with obvious tongue-in-cheek: “It seems he leaned very lightly on the nib thereof, though weightily enough in another sense, performing not slightly but solidly what he undertook” (II: 287). This account exemplifies the “fancy” to which even Fuller’s earliest readers soon found mystifying, but which to Fuller represented the fulfillment of his fourth primary objective in writing the book, to “entertain the reader with delight” (I:1). How much literal faith Fuller put into his account of Holland’s literary relic, and how much the episode is intended as a joke, is perhaps less relevant than the fact that Fuller has seized on the account for its symbolic value in forming a vivid contrast between Holland and Drayton on the one hand, and Shakespeare on the other. Pens also feature in Fuller’s anecdote of Henry de Vere: “Once he came into the court with a great milk-white feather about his hat, which then was somewhat unusual, save that a person of his merit might make a fashion. The reader may guess the lord who said unto him in some jeer, ‘my lord, you wear a very fair feather.’ ‘It is true,’ said the Earl, “and, if you mark it, there’s ne’er a taint in it.’ Indeed, his family was ever loyal to the crown, deserving their motto, VERO NIHIL VERIUS [nothing truer than the truth]” (II: 515). Likewise, in his account of Aubrey de Vere, Fuller includes the saying of a “witty gentleman” that “nobleman have seldom anything in print save their clothes” (II: 517).

3. In affirming the legality of false names so long as there is no intent to defraud, Fuller follows Camden, who in his *Remains* (1605) states that “men were not forbidden to change name or surname, by the rescript of Diocletian...so be that it were ‘*Sine aliqua fraude jure licito*’ (‘unless for the purpose of some fraud, the law allows it’)” (150); “the Romans of the better sort had three names” (139); and later, “I have observed that the change of names hath most commonly proceeded from a desire to avoid the opinion of baseness” (176), and “I may say nothing of such as for well acting on the stage have carried away the names of the Persons which they acted [i.e., become known under the names of their characters], and have lost their names among the people” (177).
4. Originally published in 1874 by New Shakspeare Society President Clement Ingleby (1823-1886), but including revised and updated reprints in 1879 with Lucy Toulmin Smith, in 1909 with James Munro, and in 1932 with E.K. Chambers.
5. While the term is apt, it should be noted for the record that Pythagorean doctrine is both elitist and universally accessible, to the extent that it is based on principles of design that are so fundamental that they should be, and could be, known to an inquiring mind of any background.
6. *The Famous Victories of Henry V* (f. p. 1600), a precursor to the Shakespearean *Henry V*, had belonged to the repertoire of the Queen’s Men as early as 1583-87.
7. A frequent objection to numerical analysis of Renaissance literary works is the absence of any explicit discussion, either in ancient or renaissance arts theory, of the application of number theory to literature. More generically, as John MacQueen attests, despite impressive witness that “numbers, ratios, and geometric figures link the arts generally, by way of the microcosm, to the macrocosm” (MacQueen 2), numerical analysis of literary works has historically been inhibited by the fact that “the principles underlying the applications of numbers to composition tend to remain assumed rather than expressed” (MacQueen 5). In other words, evidence for numerical structure is largely implicit, concealed in the numeric and proportional aspects of the works themselves rather than articulated in explicit doctrine.
8. Greek κλιμακτηρικὸς or “turning point” in a biography as astrologically determined. The years 21, 42, 56, and 63 were all regarded as biographical pivot points, with 63 being the “grand climacteric.”

9. As he does not otherwise mention Francis Beaumont’s close collaborator John Fletcher, Drayton (who knew Beaumont well), could be referring to Fletcher as the “second Beaumont”. Certainly, this was his reputation in other sources when, for example, we read in Wither, *q.v.* Ap. 3, “Beaumont and Fletcher *make one poet*, they /Single, dare not adventure on a Play.” (my emphasis). More literally, the phrase likely contains allusion to Francis Beaumont’s brother Sir John Beaumont of Grace Dieu (1582–1627), also a poet, who in 1602 at age nineteen had already dedicated his *Metamorphosis of Tabacco* [sic] to “My Loving Freind, Master Michael Drayton” (Newdigate et al. V: 60).
10. In addition, the possessive form “your” occurs four times, twice applied to Reynolds (10, 41), once by Reynolds to Drayton (33), and once to the reader (182).
11. Barber states that “it has never been possible to use thou as a plural” (153).
12. On the stigma of print, see especially, Saunders (1951), Traister (1990), and Price (2016), the latter reproducing a current and more complete bibliography.
13. Newdigate, 72–86. The dedications are to Lucie Harrington, Countess of Bedford; Lord Mounteagle; Anne Harrington; Edward, Earl of Bedford; Lord Henrie Howard; Sir John Swinerton; Elizabeth Tanfelde; Thomas Mounson; Henrie Goodere; Frauncis Goodere; Henry Lucas; James Huish; and Walter Aston. Based on extant documentary evidence, Newdigate further identifies among Drayton’s close associates William Camden (93); William Lambarde (94); Ben Jonson, Sir John Beaumont, Sir William Alexander, George Chapman, John Selden, Sir Edward Coke, Hugh Holland, Sir. Edmund Scory, and John Wiliams (95); Francis Meres (96); Nicholas Ling (97); John Weever (98); and Edward Alleyn (101–111). The contrast to Shakespeare could not be more evident; it is Shakespeare, not Drayton, who exists in an “empty space.”

14. The following notes provide evidence of one recorded association between each of the playwrights connected by a single line, although in many cases more than one documented connection can be found. By joining the lower number to the higher number at each end of the connecting line (e.g. 7–10), a note explaining the documented association between the two playwrights at either end may be sourced below:

1–2 (Marlowe-Peele): Peele published a tribute to Marlowe, dated, 26 June 1593, “Honour of the Garter” in the month following Marlowe’s death.

1–3 (Marlowe-Watson): Marlowe and Watson arrested together for the murder of William Bradley in Hog Lane (September 1589).

1–4 (Marlowe-Kyd): Kyd discusses his relationship with Marlowe in two letters to Sir John Puckering (1594).

1–14 (Marlowe-Nashe): Nashe writes of Marlowe and is listed as co-author with him of *Dido Queen of Carthage*.

2–3 (Peele-Watson): Peele publishes poem in praise of Watson in the latter’s *Hekatompathia* (1582).

2–17 (Peele-Gager): Gager writes two Latin poems in praise of Peele’s *Iphigenia* (c. 1577).

3–10 (Watson-Oxford): Watson dedicates *Hekatompathia* (1582) to Oxford while in his service.

3–11 (Watson-Lyly): Lyly describes Watson as “my good friend” in his epistle to *Hekatompathia* (1582).

3–13 (Watson-Greene): Watson contributes commendatory verses to Greene’s *Ciceronis Amor* (1589).

6–7 (Drayton-Chapman): Drayton calls Chapman “my worthy friend” in Chapman’s *Hesiod* (1618).

6–8 (Drayton-Dekker): Henslowe’s Diary (1598) lists Drayton and Dekker (with Chettle) as co-authors of *Henry I*.

6–9 (Drayton-Jonson): Drayton praises “Learned Johnson, who long was Lord here of the Theater” *Of Poets* (1627).

6–12 (Drayton-Lodge): Lodge praises Drayton as “diligent and formal” in *Wit’s Misery* (1596).

Endnote #14 continues:

- 6–16 (Drayton-Mundy): Henslowe’s Diary lists Drayton and Mundy as co-authors on three plays (1599–1601).
- 6–18 (Drayton-Wilson): Henslowe’s Diary lists Drayton and Wilson as collaborators on three plays (1598–99).
- 6–19 (Drayton-Hathway): Henslowe’s Diary lists these playwrights as co-authors of *Fayre Constance of Rome* (1600).
- 6–20 (Drayton-Chettle): Henslowe’s Diary lists Drayton and Chettle as collaborators on two plays (1598).
- 7–9 (Chapman-Jonson): They collaborate on *Eastward Ho!* (1605) Jonson calls Chapman “my worthy & honoured friend” in Chapman’s *Hesiod* (1618).
- 8–9 (Dekker-Jonson): Jonson and Dekker co-wrote *Page of Plymouth* and *Robert King of Scots* (1599).
- 8–15 (Dekker-Heywood): Henslowe’s Diary lists the two playwrights as co-authors of *Lady Jane* (1602).
- 8–16 (Dekker-Mundy): Henslowe’s Diary lists the two playwrights as co-authors of *Fayre Constance of Rome* (1600).
- 8–18 (Dekker-Wilson): Henslowe’s Diary lists the two playwrights as co-authors of *Black Batman of the North* (1598).
- 8–19 (Dekker-Hathway): Henslowe’s Diary lists the two playwrights as co-authors of *Fayre Constance of Rome* (1600).
- 8–20 (Dekker-Chettle): Henslowe’s Diary lists the two playwrights as co-authors of *Robert King of Scots* (1599).
- 9–14 (Jonson-Nashe): Collaborated on *Isle of Dogs* (1597)
- 9–15 (Jonson-Heywood): Heywood praises Jonson’s “learned pen, dipped in Castaly” in *The Hierarchie* (1635).
- 9–20 (Jonson-Chettle): Henslowe’s Diary lists the two playwrights as co-authors of *Robert King of Scots* (1599).
- 9–22 (Jonson-Porter): Henslowe’s Diary Jonson and Porter as co-authors on 2 plays (1598).

Endnote #14 continues:

- 10–11 (Oxford-Lyly): Lyly serves as Oxford’s secretary and theatrical manager, dedicating several works to him.
- 10–13 (Oxford-Greene): Greene dedicates *Gnydonius* (1584) to Oxford.
- 10–14 (Oxford-Nashe): Nashe serves ‘My Lord of Oxford’ with Greene in pamphlet war and dedicates ‘Strange News’ (1592) to him as ‘Apis Lapis.’
- 10–16 (Oxford-Mundy): Mundy serves as secretary to Oxford and dedicates several works to him.
- 10–21 (Oxford-Buckhurst): Co-signatories to a letter concerning the death of Elizabeth (24 March 1603).
- 11–12 (Lyly-Lodge): Lodge praises Lyly’s “famous facility for discourse” in *Wit’s Misery* (1596).
- 11–13 (Lyly-Greene): The two authors under Oxford’s roof launch a pamphlet war and are attacked by Harvey.
- 11–14 (Lyly-Nashe): Lyly is mentioned by name over 30 times in the works of Nashe.
- 11–16 (Lyly-Mundy): Mundy coyly describes himself as Lyly’s friend in *Zelauto* (1580).
- 11–21 (Lyly-Buckhurst): Giordano Bruno reports that Buckhurst was translating Lyly’s *Euphues* (c. 1584) .
- 12–13 (Lodge-Greene): Co-authors of *A Looking Glass for London* (c. 1589).
- 12–14 (Lodge-Nashe): Lodge praises Nashe as “*Tb. Nash*, true English Aretine” in *Wit’s Misery* (1596).
- 13–14 (Greene-Nashe): Greene says that he “writ a comedie” with Nashe in *Groatworth* (1592); Nashe gives frequent references to Greene in his works.

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