William Shakespeare: A Study of the Poet and Five Famous Contemporaries Who between Them Used the Rune Ciphers to Reveal His True Identity

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Abstract—While it is true to say that the identity of William Shakespeare has thus far survived numerous doubts, the problem of his authorship continues to remain in want of a permanent solution. But with little contemporaneous, documentary evidence to support an alternative author, the traditional acceptance of his right to recognition remains intact. It will therefore be argued that since both literary and historical arguments have failed to resolve the authorship question, a mathematical resolution is available from the science of cryptography. Shakespeare flourished at the close of the Italian Renaissance, by which time advances in secret writing had kept pace with those in natural philosophy and the arts. Among the most noted of contributors to codes and ciphers in the Sixteenth Century was the mathematician Girolamo Cardano. His method of concealing secrets within an innocent passage of prose or poetry required a template, cut with apertures over the words and letters of a passage written in ciphertext. The template, when placed in position, revealed the secret through the apertures. Later, when the ciphertext was reproduced on a grille (from which it acquired its name, Cardano Grille), the secret could be read acrostically from the vertical alignment of cells in a set number of columns on a grille conforming to a unique key. Without the key, alternative grilles display nothing but a random spread of disconnected words that form an incoherent babble. It will be argued that Cardano Grilles became the modus operandi for informing posterity of Shakespeare's real name. Five known poets of the Elizabethan period, Ben Jonson, Edmund Spenser, Edward de Vere, Thomas Nashe, and Leonard Digges, joined by two publishers of Shakespeare's sonnets, Thomas Thorpe and John Benson, each wrote about Shakespeare in ciphertext, while embedding a plaintext encryption that included his real name as an acrostic, alongside the invented codeword, *rune*, with its archaic meaning of "whisper, talk in secret." Evidence will be produced, both documentary and

circumstantial, that demonstrates why secrecy about Shakespeare's written work threatened England's national security to such an extent among the ruling class that a lower-class member of society was made responsible for its authorship. This presentation will offer conclusive proof, validated by seven contemporary sources, that provides a resolution to the authorship dilemma. It will explain the repeated absence of Shakespeare's name where most researchers have been led to expect it to appear. It will also account for the failure of Shakespeare's death, in 1616, to have been of any public interest beyond the confines of his immediate neighborhood, and why his last will and testament made no mention of books, fellow writers, or even those plays now attributed to him that were not made public until seven years after his death, when the *First Folio* was published.

Extraordinary claims require extraordinary evidence. Secret plaintexts that have lain hidden in centuries-old dedications, and poems that contradict the 'standard model' of Elizabethan history, are so unexpected that their effect has the potential to undermine the scholarship of both past and present. Charles Dickens showed concern at this prospect, and committed it to writing (13 June 1847): "It is a fine mystery; and I tremble every day lest something should come out." Current accounts of Shakespeare's literary life are unlikely to withstand the revelations that have now "come out." The evidence contained in this paper is a straw in the wind: an augur of the literary storm required to sweep away old notions of Shakespeare and prepare for new research about a poet who was compelled to hide behind the characters of his creative genius.

Cryptology during the Italian Renaissance

The Renaissance period that began in Italy, and flourished in Europe between the Fourteenth and Sixteenth Centuries, is primarily identified by its contribution to humanism and the artistic life of man. It introduced a surge in new ways of thinking about architecture, painting, and sculpture. Literature, too, went through a transition with the discovery of ancient Greek and Roman texts. These provided a fresh impetus to rethink philosophical ideas about man's place in the world, both politically and theologically; and from the writing of the ancients there emerged new genres for expressing the written word.

Classical drama was another subject that profited from the Renaissance. The performances given by traveling actors eventually developed into the theatre we know today. One of the chief driving forces for the development in stage entertainment came from the Italian commedia dell'arte, and it came at the time when Elizabethan dramatists, such as William Shakespeare, were

ready to make a transition from plays modeled upon the Greek and Roman classics to ones that reflected life in the then current era.

The Italian Renaissance also heralded the emergence of modern-day scientific thinking, as astronomers looked beyond Ptolemy's geocentric model of man's place in the universe, replacing it by a heliocentric one. Anatomists, too, began making their first major discoveries about the working of the human body. But historians are apt to display negligence when bypassing the fact that cryptology, too, dates its progress into a science from the Renaissance period. Before then, codes had been of the type referred to as Caesar-shift ciphers, in which one letter is systematically replaced by another. These continued to be used in Europe until the Fifteenth Century, when the cipher disk made its first appearance in 1466–1467. With this invention, the West, which up to this point had equaled but had never surpassed the East in cryptology, took the lead that it has never lost (Kahn 1967).
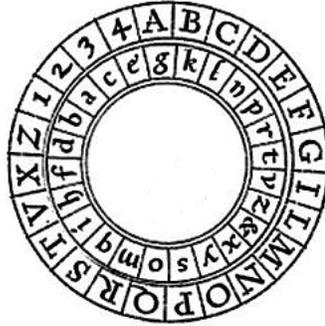
Invention of the disk is attributed to Leon Alberti, "the father of cryptology." There were two disks. The larger was stationary and consisted of a circle inscribed with the alphabet and the first four numbers. The smaller, inner disk rotated on top of it. This contained the alphabet written in a form of Atbash. The idea was to use the two discs as a single-step replacement device commencing with a 'trigger' letter (in this case 'g') aligned with A on the outer disk. Each time a letter in the plaintext fell in line with one of the four numbers, it became the new 'trigger': and this was aligned with A until another trigger occurred. These repeated realignments upgraded cryptology from a monoalphabetic substitution cipher to a polyaphabetic cipher, but the system was slow in becoming popular.

In 1606, Johannes Trithemius, Abbot of Sponheim, published *Steganographia* in three volumes, only to find it had been placed on the Vatican's list of prohibited books. In fact, according to Paul Lunde (2009), the Vatican archives contained thousands of pages of coded intelligence gathered by the papacy over the years, a clear indication of the extent to which cryptology was in use by Catholic nations. Of Trithemius' three volumes, one includes a complex work on cryptography; in which there is described a variety of systems for secret writing (Lunde). Twelve years later, Trithemius published *Polygraphiae*; this was the first European book to be written that was entirely devoted to cryptology, and it anticipated work

that would appear later by Giovan Battista Bellaso, and Giambattista della Porta, the latter having improved upon the former's ideas in his *De Furtivis Literarum Notis* (1563).

It was during this time that cryptology in England came under the intellectual province of Dr. John Dee, whom Queen Elizabeth I described as 'my philosopher'. His travels, learning, and access to rare texts, and Europe's leading thinkers, placed him in the excellent position of opening up the riches of the Renaissance to the English court (Woollet 2001). Such was his reputation that Shakespeare later cast him as the magician, Prospero, in *The Tempest*.

Dee's biographer, Benjamin Woollet, wrote that "Dee was fascinated by, and evidently expert in, cryptography." In 1563, Dee visited Antwerp to make a copy of Trithemius' *Steganographia*, which was later republished in Frankfurt in 1606, together with *Clavis—*the Key to understanding the content in the first two volumes. The Key had apparently eluded attempts to discover it earlier. But when it was reprinted, the Key revealed a very sophisticated means of concealment in the form of an Equidistant Letter Sequence (ELS), hidden by an innocent Latin ciphertext, "Padiel aporsy mesarpon omeuas peludyn malpreaxo."

The plaintext message within this ciphertext is revealed by taking alternate letters in alternate words.

Padiel aPoRsY mesarpon oMeUaS peludyn mAlPrEaXo

The letters then spell 'Primus apex' (the first summit). The *Clavis* was then able to show that Books I and II of the *Steganographia* were full of ciphers (Woollet).

Cryptology in Sixteenth-Century England

Renaissance Italy's fascination with the methods of secret writing quickly spread. By 1542, the Republic of Venice had already set up its own secret service in the Doge's palace, with the employment of three encipher secretaries to develop new means of encoding diplomatic secrets; the duchies of Florence and Milan already employed cryptographers of their own; and from 1555, the Vatican began employing a cipher secretary to deal with incoming coded papers. But, in England, the same urgency for developing new ways of coding and decoding secret information to counter political espionage failed to keep pace with continental Europe until 1573, when Sir Francis Walsingham became Secretary of State and the country's 'Spymaster'. Realization of its importance appears to have come only when it was learned that not only Catholic priests but also

conspirators against Elizabeth were corresponding by cipher (Cooper 2012). Thereafter, Walsingham became Elizabeth's most ruthless minister. He was a Machiavellian figure, a spymaster who was responsible for the Queen's security. To meet the task before him, he acquired a small network of spies, which he rapidly expanded into the Continent, where many of the plots against Elizabeth were being hatched. Simon Singh (1999) goes on to say that Walsingham had originally encountered codes and ciphers while reading a book written by the Italian mathematician and cryptographer Girolamo Cardano. It was this book that aroused Walsingham's interest.

Cardano has been credited with being the first person to publish solutions for cubic and quartic equations. But he also achieved fame for his outstanding contribution to cryptography. Building upon Alberti's "cipher discs," his first invention was the so-called auto-key, in which the first few letters of the plaintext (the hidden, intended message) provides the rule that tells the recipient of a polyalphabetic cipher how far and how often the inner wheel should be turned against the outer.

Cardano's second contribution to cryptology was the forerunner of the grilles by which he is known: and it was based upon the Cabbalist practice of equidistant letter sequencing; that is, the skipping of letters within an otherwise innocent text. It is also this form of cipher that is the subject matter of the present article.

Cardano published details of his system in 1550; and it certainly became widely used in diplomatic correspondence for hundreds of years after its invention (Callery 2006). It also attracted the military, where it received a number of serious studies, initially by C. F. Hindenburg in 1796 and then by M. De Prasse in 1799. Ten years later, C. J. Mendelsohn (1939) described how J. H. Klüber was able to improve upon de Prasse's calculations in his *Kriptographik* (1809). But the two most outstanding contributions to the effectiveness of the grilles have since been recognized as those of F. von Wostrowitz in his *Handbuch der Kryptografie* (Vienna, 1881), and by General Luigi Sacco in *Manuale di Crittografia* (second edition, Rome, 1936).

The success of Cardano's invention was proved by its effectiveness in allowing innocent-looking documents to be written as ciphertext, thereby camouflaging the existence of an enciphered secret. As Jeffrey Satinover remarked (1997):

> To decipher a message, the recipient must either have a grille [or templet] identical to the sender's, or must know the spacing rule that created it, if it conforms to a rule. An equidistant letter cipher is the equivalent of a 'simple Cardano Grille'.

He then acknowledged that

> although the *rule* is simple, the encryption process is more difficult, since the encoder must devise a sensible-sounding message that accommodates encrypted letters at fixed positions: for a complex message, an exceedingly challenging problem in 'combinatorics'.

Genuine, cryptographic facts are singularly irrefutable, especially when in acrostic form. William and Elizebeth Friedman confirmed this when remarking "that acrostics were popular in Elizabethan literature;" adding that "acrostics have unquestionably been used to establish claims of authorship." To emphasize this, they then provided several examples.

In 1599, Sir John Davies published "twenty-six poems entitled *Hymns to Astraea*, each of which is an acrostic on the words *Elizabetha Regina.*" Sir Francis Walsingham too was named in an acrostic poem to commemorate his memory, and this is thought to have been written by his granddaughter, Elizabeth. Another Elizabethan was the Welsh poet, Sir John Salusbury (1567–1612); he became "as devoted to acrostics as he was to a lady called Dorothy Halstall, [having] enfolded her name in poem after poem." There was also "A striking example . . . in an anonymous Latin work published in 1616. The consecutive initial letters of each of the fifty-three sections into which the book is divided spell [in Latin] . . . Francis Godwin, Bishop of Landaff, wrote these lines." As the Friedmans commented, "In each case there is no room to doubt that they were put there by the deliberate intent of the author."

At the time Walsingham came to office, England was in the midst of a period of instability, with Queen Elizabeth in constant danger of losing not just her throne, but also her life: as several plots to assassinate her bear witness. Her court and capital swarmed with Spanish spies, reporting back to Philip II that England was on the verge of ruin, being without money, men, armour, fortresses, practice in war, or else good captains (Thompson 1937). Spain's interest was to return England to the Catholic fold, which it attempted, but failed, with its Armada in 1588. As a result of this political and religious turmoil,

> Late sixteenth-century England was a country that provided a ready audience for dissident code: Its people were addicted to hidden meanings. Codes, devices, and punning allusions were everywhere—in street songs and ballads, conversation, poems, plays, woodcuts, portraits, jewellery, costumes. Entire buildings were constructed in the form of riddles. (Asquith 2005)

Sir Thomas Tresham's house in Northamptonshire is just one example of what was happening at that time. It was constructed with three triangular walls, on three floors, with three windows to each side and three gables on each facade: thus representing the Holy Trinity. To this, Asquith added: "There were literary codes, too, accessible only to a sophisticated elite." It is a selection of these with their acrostics that will occupy the central theme of this paper.

William Shakespeare: A Mystery Wrapped Inside an Enigma

Against this backdrop of English life in the second half of the Sixteenth Century, William Shakespeare suddenly emerged in the heart of London: like the literary equivalent of Athene, plucked from the head of Zeus; fully equipped in every genre of literature, but with no known path having paved the way to his abilities. If that were not enough, there also remains unexplained his unbelievably intimate involvement in the life of the 3rd Earl of Southampton, who was then a sheltered youth under the protection of Lord Burghley: the most powerful man in England, next to the Queen. Yet, with no letter of recommendation, and having published nothing, Shakespeare was lucky enough for the young Southampton to immediately became his patron. Academics refer to the period prior to this as Shakespeare's "lost years." But this lack of relevant information extends far greater. As Bill Bryson (2007), one of a great many who have attempted to write a biography of Shakespeare, was forced to admit.

> On only a handful of days in his life can we say with absolute certainty where he was. . . . By the time he is first mentioned in print as a playwright, in 1592, his life was already more than half over. For the rest, he is a kind of literary equivalent of an electron—forever there and not there.

Sir Hugh Trevor-Roper (1962) gave an even more forthright and explicit account of this problem in the following terms.

> During his lifetime nobody claimed to know him. Not a single tribute was paid to him at his death. As far as records go he was uneducated, had no literary friends, possessed at his death no books, and could not write.

To this, he expressed further vexation.

> It is exasperating and almost incredible that he should be so. After all, he lived in the full daylight of the English Renaissance, in the well-documented reigns of Queen Elizabeth and King James I. . . . Since his death and particularly in the [19th] century, he has been subjected to the greatest battery

of organized research that has ever been directed upon a single person. Armies of scholars, formidably equipped, have examined all the documents which could possibly contain at least a mention of Shakespeare's name. One hundredth of this labor applied to one of his insignificant contemporaries would be sufficient to produce a substantial biography. And yet the greatest of all Englishmen, after this tremendous inquisition, still remains so close to a mystery that even his identity can still be doubted.

Biographical details of Shakespeare's life and times proliferate, but none go beyond historian Hugh Trevor-Roper's account. Instead, they surmise, suppose, and conjecture about the connections with literature he must have had to justify his authorship. Upon such a background, biographies of the man are little more than historical romances.

For the first twenty-nine years of his life—more than half of his lifetime—absolutely nothing of a literary or scholarly nature is known about this person; even his school records have been removed—if they even existed—and by excluding the plays and poems with which he is associated, although only by the similarity of his family name, Shaxpere to that of Shakespeare, there is no evidence he could actually write; the more especially since his will had to be written by another hand.

The name Shakespeare first appeared in public in 1593, when *Venus and Adonis* was published under the patronage of the twenty-year-old 3rd Earl of Southampton. The poet referred to this poem as the first heir of his invention. But when it was examined by Professor James Morgan (1900), a dialectologist, whose expertise was the English dialect, he was perplexed at discovering that it totally lacked a single word of the Warwickshire patois, since this would have been inculcated into any Warwickshire-born resident living among family and neighbors during his formative years. Morgan's conclusion was unequivocal. He explained it was absolutely impossible that the lad Shakespeare acquired or used any other dialect than the Warwickshire he was born to, and that his father, mother, and neighbors spoke. Morgan then went on to explain, "words are detectives that never fail to detect, and whose reports cannot be bribed, distorted or gainsaid. No man can write in a language he has never heard, or whose written form he has never learned." And with this, we have a dialectologist's expert testimony; the author of *Venus and Adonis* was not born and bred in Warwickshire's Stratford-upon-Avon. But it left Morgan in dismay, having to admit Shakespeare's poem represented an unsolved mystery.

Despite this, the poem proved an enormous success. By 1616, it had gone through eight editions. It appealed to the cultivated, the Court, and fashionable society; it found its audience especially among the young men of the Inns of Court and universities, who found it stimulating (Rowse 1973).

The excitement had barely time to settle before Shakespeare's second poem, *The Rape of Lucrece,* went on sale at the White Greyhound in St. Paul's Churchyard. This too went through six editions by 1616. But Shakespeare's sudden leap to fame as a poet, with its lucrative promise of further reward, is extraordinary. He never again published a single work. Instead, he went into hiding.

In 1595, the year after *Lucrece* was published, Thomas Edwards, author of *Cephalus and Procris*, made a revealing remark about Shakespeare. He described 'Adon'—widely assumed to mean Shakespeare—holed up, 'I have heard say', somewhere in London, 'the centre of our clime', hidden by the 'purple robes' of the aristocracy and 'tilting under Friaries' (Asquith 2005). 'Tilting' means covering with an awning for its protection. Edwards is indicating that he had learned that Shakespeare was being kept away from the public eye, 'holed up' in a London Friary. Moreover, his concealment had become the responsibility of the 'purple robes' of the nobility.

Edwards' reference to a London Friary points to Blackfriars: the friary that took its name from the color of the Dominicans dress. After Henry VIII's 'Dissolution of the Monasteries', part of the friary became a theatre (Smith 1964). It was where the Children of the Chapel Royal performed their plays between 1566 and 1597. In 1584, Edward de Vere, 17th Earl of Oxford, about whom we shall hear more, acquired its sublease for performances by his young actors, Oxford's Boys, alongside the Children of the Chapel.

William Shakespeare (or Will Shaxpere, to call him by his married surname), therefore emerges as a person with connexions to a member of the royal court, the theatre, and to the poems *Venus & Adonis* and *The Rape of Lucrece*. Yet, according to the dialectologist, James Morgan, he could not possibly have written *Venus & Adonis*, which would imply that he was not the author of *The Rape of Lucrece* either. Nevertheless, he was certainly identified as the author of these poems, and by a sufficient number of people to force a member of the nobility to provide him shelter in a London friary: to which this nobleman obviously had access.

The inference from these few facts is that a person other than Shaxpere wrote both poems, using Shakespeare as his pseudonym; and that Shaxpere was paid to play the role of the pseudonymous poet. But due to the success of both poems, Shaxpere became a centre of attraction, and no doubt this invited curiosity concerning what else he had written, and what he was working on for his next publication. Shaxpere would eventually have been irked by this constant demand for answers, especially if he had insufficient education to make reply. Eventually, failure to meet the impossible demands placed upon him would explain why he appealed for protection, and was taken into hiding. Moreover, since a member of the nobility responded

to his appeal, this suggests it was the same man who wrote the poems. A nobleman would also have had good reason for not wishing to be publicly identified as having employed a man of Shaxpere's low class to stand in for him, especially with authority to act as the acknowledged author of his work. It is therefore of interest to note that when this suggested subterfuge was taking place, *The Taming of the Shrew* was written. It is a play that commences with a nobleman deceiving a drunken Warwickshire tinker into believing that he is that nobleman—Art imitating reality?

The purpose of this paper, which is firmly based upon positive evidence from cryptology and the absence of any substantive reasons to the contrary, is to pursue the hypothesis that William Shaxpere was not William Shakespeare. Instead, it is proposed that William Shakespeare was the pen name adopted by Edward de Vere, 17th Earl of Oxford; and that Shaxpere was employed to serve his Lordship, with procuratory authority to assume authorship as an allonym.

This resolves several major problems that mystify those wedded to the belief that Shakespeare and Shaxpere were the same person. It explains why Shaxpere was forced to escape the public eye by hiding at Blackfriars, when the pressure had became too great for him to handle; it is also a reason why 'Shakespeare' was compelled to cease publication after *Lucrece*; and it explains why the 3rd Earl of Southampton was no longer needed as the poet's patron; which in turn explains why no record of Shakespeare's association with Lord Southampton exists in the family's archives (Stopes 1922). It also clarifies the passage in Robert Greene's *Groats-worth of Wit*, in which Shaxpere is correctly referred to as Aesop's 'Crow', beautified by the feathers of another: when, in reality he was a Jack-of-all-trades ('Johannes fac totum'), acting in his own conceit (as the poet Shakespeare). And, it explains, too, why the real poet's superior education in language, history, law, and court protocol, together with his knowledge of foreign lands, their customs and language, is incompatible with the absence of these same abilities, in what little is known about Shaxpere, with his insular, rural upbringing. All of which makes it abundantly clear why there has to be a lack of his biographical detail in the plays and poems of 'Shakespeare'; but which, by contrast, emerge in the biography of Oxford. Solved, too, is Professor Morgan's otherwise unexplained mystery concerning the absence of a single word of Warwickshire dialect in *Venus and Adonis*.

To add to this, the hypothesis accounts for those embarrassing absences in Shaxpere's will: where there is no mention of his library—not even a single book, and certainly no reference to literature. Yet, several of Shakespeare's plays were still unknown at the time of his death, and they would remain unknown for a further seven years. As for his life in the theatre, the only

reference to this in his will is an interpolation added to the document after it had been completed. It bequeathed £1. 6s. 8d to each of three actors: John Heminge, Henry Condell, and Richard Burbage.

By January 1616, Shaxpere had begun dictating his last will and testament, possibly to the Warwick lawyer Francis Collins. In his opening statement he professed to be 'in perfect health and memory, God be praised.' However, the will took three months to complete, and is remarkable for having been written on three different-sized sheets of paper, suggesting as many lacks of continuity. The will is also unusual among legal documents for its large number of alterations, substitutions, and interpolations (Wilson 1993). It was not until 25 March that it was finally completed. Twenty-nine days later, despite being in 'perfect health' at its commencement, Shaxpere was dead. Some fifty years later, when the Reverend Doctor John Ward was vicar of Holy Trinity, where Shaxpere lay buried, the clergyman was informed that Shaxpere's death had occurred immediately after the arrival of two fellow poets, Ben Jonson and Michael Drayton. They "had a merry evening and it seems drunk too hard. For it seems Shakespeare died of a fever there contracted" (Ogburn 1988).

In which case, this is puzzling. What was the purpose of the poets' 100-mile visit—surely not for a single night in the local alehouse? Then again, why did these two visitors hurry back to London, having just arrived after a three-day journey: thereby abandoning the dying Shaxpere? Even more curious, when Shaxpere died on 23 April, neither Jonson, Drayton, nor a single writer, actor, or member of the Queen's court were prepared to utter a single word of condolence at having seemingly lost England's most outstanding writer—nor was there even a solitary person at that time who was sufficiently moved to write a eulogy for him. Where was Cuthbert Burbage: first a manager of the Theatre in Shoreditch and then of the Globe? Both playhouses had, over the past years, produced most of Shakespeare's plays. Moreover, Shakespeare had also been one of the Globe's shareholders. Yet, all and everywhere remained silent at his death. The easy answer to this mystery is that of an 'open secrecy' concerning Shaxpere's role at the Globe. As a shareholder, he was perfectly placed to act as a proxy: collecting new plays from one of Oxford's servants and passing them to Burbage to produce. Outwardly, it would look to the unenquiring mind that Shaxpere had written them. It is therefore not difficult to imagine that something similar had occurred to enable Philip Henslowe, manager of the Rose, to produce the earlier Shakespeare plays, which he dutifully recorded in his daybook (Foakes 2002), but with neither an author named, nor any payment made; thus implying his resolve to remain silent about their provenance.

Surely, therefore, it is necessary to enquire—what did the entire literati of that age know about Shakespeare that the present age fails to acknowledge? It is a question that lies at the very heart of the controversy.

Its significance cannot possibly be doubted, because 48 days prior to Shaxpere's death, the less gifted poet, Francis Beaumont, also died. But the contrast between these two deaths is astounding. Beaumont's death was met with a flurry of tributes and eulogies from a list of poets. He was also immediately awarded a burial in Westminster Abbey, and placed among the great men of literature in what has become known as 'Poets Corner'. So, what is it that was known about Shaxpere that caused his death to pass as a non-event? And it is with this mysterious response to his death and its contrast to Beaumont's demise that suspicion concerning 'Shakespeare' grows deeper.

One month before Shaxpere's death, Lord Pembroke—brother-in-law to Susan Vere, daughter of the deceased 17th Earl of Oxford—recommended to King James I that Ben Jonson be awarded a pension of 100 marks per annum (≈ $20,000), paid quarterly. Jonson was therefore financially free to commence the mammoth task of collecting and editing the 36 plays written by 'Shakespeare' that would later appear in the *First Folio*. This edition became a public record of the writer's dramatic work, which had never before been authorized for publication. Up until that time, *Timon of Athens, Coriolanus,* and *All's Well That Ends Well* were completely unknown— seven years after their proposed author's death.

Shaxpere's death also removed him from exposure to the fame and praise which, thirty years earlier, had forced him to take refuge in a London friary, following publication of *Venus & Adonis* and *Lucrece.* By an uncomfortable coincidence, given that before he purchased New Place, two former occupants had been poisoned there, the death of his widow Anne, on 6 August 1623, removed her, too, from recognizing his fame; and preventing her giving a personal account of her husband's genius: especially at a time when the *First Folio* of his plays was about to go on sale and her testimony would have been most revealing. In the same respect, it is noteworthy that just weeks before Shaxpere's sudden death, his 31-year-old, spinster-daughter Judeth, had hastily married Thomas Quiney; despite his having just recently impregnated another woman. The wedding took place during Shrovetide, when marriages without a special licence—which they did not have—were banned. Shaxpere's other daughter, Susanna, had previously married Dr. John Hall in 1607. Therefore, by the time the *First Folio* was published in late 1623, both Shaxpere and his wife were dead, and his two surviving daughters were safely under the covertures of their respective husbands. Interestingly, too, neither Shaxpere's neighbors, nor

his associates, have ever provided one shred of evidence to indicate they were aware that he was anyone other than a wealthy, local businessman: a tradesman in malt, wool, and no doubt other commodities, as well as practicing usury.

Doubts concerning the identity of Shakespeare actually date back to the age in which he lived; and these can still be discerned by the comments made by writers who knew the man. Within weeks of *The Rape of Lucrece* appearing in the bookshop, *Willobie His Avisa* went on sale. It contains the first printed mention of Shakespeare by another person; but the name is separated by a hyphen, suggesting that the author already knew it was a pseudonym—"And Shake-speare paints poore Lucrece rape." The hyphen separating the name continued to be used thereafter, especially upon pirated versions of Shakespeare's plays. But this did not occur until after 1598, when Francis Meres gave the green light to acknowledge that 'Shakespeare' had already written twelve previously anonymous plays.

The hyphen even made its appearance in the carefully edited *First Folio*, in which I. M. (John Marston, representing the world of theatre, although James Mabbe is more often quoted) wrote "To The Memorie Of M. W. Shake-speare." The hyphen was again repeated in his tribute: "Wee wondered (*Shake-speare*) that thou went'st so soone / From the World's-Stage, to the Graues-Tyring-roome." The hyphen also appeared a further three times in the accompanying tribute written by Leonard Digges, representing Oxford University. He wrote: "*Shake-speare,* at length thy pious fellowes give / The world thy Workes: . . . when Posteritie / Shall loathe what's new, think all is prodigie / That is not Shake-speare's . . . Be sure, our *Shake-speare,* thou canst neuer dye." So as not to miss the point of these hyphens: the tributes were made to honor the author of *The Workes of William Shakespeare*: but with the name in the title spelt without a hyphen. The author received tributes from both Oxford and Cambridge (the latter, courtesy of Hugh Holland): it being from both these universities that the Earl of Oxford had received degrees. Shaxpere, of course, had no connexion with either university, and was merely a shareholder of the Globe theatre and a bit-part actor.

John Marston is of particular interest in this matter, because of his three books of satire, *The Scourge of Villainy*, published in 1598 and enlarged in 1599. Within its pages he wrote of an unnamed poet as "my love," adding "Most, most of me beloved, whose silent name / One letter bounds. Thy true judicial style I ever honour." 'I ever honour' or I honour E Ver, explains the one letter E that bounds that silent name: Edward de Vere.

Willobie was an instant success, although ranking low in literary merit, its subtle references to recognizable members of Elizabethan society

ensured its popularity. It also partly plagiarised certain verses in *Venus and Adonis*, while loosely following the storyline in *Lucrece*, as its author frankly admitted in his epistle to the reader. Its allusion to Shakespeare further occurred when the author referred to W. S. "as the old player" and H. W. as the "new actor"; thus, allowing a semblance to be made to the supposedly, secret relationship between 'William Shake-speare' and Henry Wriothesley. Also, when W. S. meets H. W. he greets him in satirical style, calling him, "Friend Harry," and then proceeds ("in loving comedy") to give him lessons in love, which reduces the student lover to a quivering mess. *Willobie* evaded the censor until 1599, when it was 'called in' and destroyed.

A further mystery concerning Shakespeare's identity occurs in Thomas Thorpe's dedication to the author's sonnets. Not only is the dedication notoriously asyntactic (not conforming to accepted patterns of syntax), but each word is interposed by a funerary stop (a dot carved between each word on a gravestone). Thorpe also described the author as "ever-living"—a word that is only used to commemorate someone who had died: thus acknowledging de Vere's death in 1604; whereas, Shaxpere was very much alive. The book's title, Shake-speares Sonnets, with the name separated by the near-customary hyphen is also consistent with the death of its author, for it implies that no more will be written.

A further reason for rejecting Shaxpere as Shake-speare is discerned from examples set by the Reverend Charles Fitzgeffrey, Thomas Vickers, and Henry Peacham; all three refused to name 'William Shakespeare' in company with the named poets of their era. In 1601, Fitzgeffrey wrote *Affaniae: Sive Epigrammatum*, in which he acknowledged all the great names in contemporary English literature—Daniel, Drayton, Jonson, Chapman, Nashe, Marston, Spenser &c., but no mention of Shakespeare; even though Meres had lauded his excellence at every level of the written word just three years earlier (Anderson 2005).

One year after publication of the *First Folio*, Thomas Vicars published his manual of rhetoric, which included a list of England's most excellent poets—but, again, no mention of Shake-speare. Four years later, he found a way of correcting this omission to accord with his conscience. "To these [names] I believe should be added that famous poet who takes his name from 'shaking' and 'speare'." One does not *take* a name that one is born with; one *takes* a name when one adopts a name they were *not* born with.

In 1622, Henry Peacham published *The Compleat Gentleman*. Peacham was the son of the Reverend Henry Peacham, also an author, who had once attended a performance of *Titus Andronicus* in 1574, when Shaxpere was aged 10. After this performance, Peacham gifted a signed and dated copy of

a scene and dialogue from the play to Lord Burghley's secretary, Michael Hicks, a collector of antiquities (Roper 2011).

Peacham's publication date, 1622, was intended to coincide with that of the *First Folio* (advertised in the Frankfurt Book Fair catalog of 1622). Yet, in his book, Peacham had included a chapter in praise of those "who honoured poesie with their pens and practice." He described this time as "a golden age (for such a world of refined wits and excellent spirits it produced . . . are hardly to be hoped for in any succeeding age)." He then listed those he had been referring to, placing "Edward Earl of Oxford" at the top of his list; but nowhere does he record the name of Shakespeare. In 1624, the popularity of this book required a second edition: but again Shakespeare's name was omitted from the 'golden age' of Elizabethan poets. In 1634 *The Compleat Gentleman* was published for a third time; yet, still the author made no mention of Shakespeare (ibid.). Peacham had obviously recalled hearing of his father's visit to watch *Titus Andronicus* in 1574.

Key Issues for Resolving the Shakespeare/Oxford Debate

From what has been said this far, it is understandable that those defending the traditional biography of Shakespeare have a need to make clear why their arguments are superior to the doubts that exist. Much ink has been spent on the era in which the poet lived, and the legal documents and court cases in which he (Shaxpere) was involved. None of which is doubted by those in dissent. Records are also produced in support of the orthodox position that refer to Shakespeare—never Shaxpere—and his artistry; but this fails to prove Shakespeare was not another poet's pen name, for which familiar usage had made its use customary. Therefore, exactly what are the key facts that safeguard Shaxpere's reputation as a poet and playwright?

Are there any existing records of Shaxpere having received an education? Did any notable writer of that time record having met and conversed with him? Is there any record of his having received payment for the plays and poems he wrote? Are there any actual records in Stratford-upon-Avon, during the time he lived, that acknowledge him as a poet or playwright? Does his last will and testament contain the least mention of his literary career? Did any member of his family, including Judeth who lived for 46 years after her father's death, ever remark upon their personal relationship to William Shakespeare? When he died in 1616, did one single person anywhere in England take notice of his death as being worthy of public comment? The answer to every one of these questions is a resounding no!

In 2001 Diana Price published *Shakespeare's Unorthodox Biography*, in which she compiled a list of 25 writers, contemporaneous with, and including Shakespeare. Price then investigated the question: Are there any

miscellaneous records that refer to each of those listed as having been a writer? For all but one of those named, she found existing references. For William Shakespeare (or Shaxpere), she found none. This would help to explain why his death was totally ignored when it occurred: especially by those expected to commemorate him for making an unrivalled contribution to literature and the English language.

Those defending Shakespeare's traditional right to be the world-famous poet of Stratford-upon-Avon, were described by Professor Alan Nelson at a symposium organized by the University of Tennessee College of Law in 2004: where the question, *Who Wrote Shakespeare?* was debated. Nelson admitted to the assembled audience:

> I agree that antagonism to the authorship debate from within the profession is so great that it would be as difficult for a professed Oxfordian to be hired in the first place, much less gain tenure, as for a professed creationist to be hired or gain tenure in a graduate-level department of biology. (*Tennessee Law Review 72*:149)

Nelson was admitting that defense of the Stratford position is ensured by the safe hands of an embedded professorship. It is therefore one that has a group-think attitude, and can therefore be relied upon to maintain the status quo. In other words, a key issue in the Shakespeare authorship debate is 'groupthink'.

Yale psychologist Irving Janis (1970) described 'groupthink' as

> a mode of thinking that people engage in when they are deeply involved in a cohesive in-group, when the members' striving for unanimity override their motivation to realistically appraise alternative courses of action.

Janis has described what is quite evident within the arguments that are repeatedly proposed to uphold belief in Shakespeare's Stratford origin. For, when taken too far on a wrong course, the inevitable result is to educate oneself with absurd conclusions, and then defend them to the hilt.

One attempt at a cornerstone for Shaxpere's defense has been to argue that his plays were published under the name Shakespeare at the time when he lived. But this, by itself, is not sufficient to prove that Shakespeare was not a familiar pen name adopted by some other author. To add to this: These very same publications are those that Heminge and Condell condemned in the *First Folio*, as "stol'n and surreptitious copies, maimed and deformed by frauds and stealths of injurious impostors." If Shakespeare's company of actors, or even Shakespeare himself, owned these plays, then why did these pirate publishers believe they could escape prosecution with impunity, just because the author was Shakespeare?

The defense has therefore to lean heavily upon the *First Folio*, with its title, *Mr. William Shakespeares Comedies, Histories, & Tragedies*. Beneath the title is a picture of the author; but which, upon inspection only increases the doubts that surround his identity. The figure appears two-faced. The dividing line below the ear lobe, with the hair extended outward, would appear natural on a face viewed from the rear of the picture. This Janus effect has also been emphasized in a most incredible manner by the right-half of the wearer's doublet, including the arm and shoulder, which very clearly belongs to the rear, left-half of the same garment (*Gentlemen's Tailor* 1911). In which case, one half of the figure is facing forward; the other half is facing the rear. Lord Russell Brain, President of the Royal College of Physicians (1950–1956), and a neurologist who was also a member of the Royal Society, noticeably observed that the figure had been given two right eyes. This would be a symbolic gesture: since a Janus figure does have two right eyes, although the second one looks rearward. Tarnya Cooper, Chief Curator at the National Portrait Gallery in London, with an expertise in Sixteenth century dress, added to the mounting criticism by explaining that only noblemen were allowed to wear embroidered cloth (2006). And this is precisely what the figure is attired in. It could therefore have been worn by Shakespeare, but only if he were the Earl of Oxford. The starched, pleated collar worn by the figure is also noteworthy. Apart from the fact it has no fastening at the front, which gives it a shield-like appearance, it happens to be identical to the collar worn by Thomas Wentworth, 1st Earl of Strafford. Hence, observe the subtle paragram—"a low form of humour," achieved by changing a single letter in a name or phrase. By exchanging the first F for T, the 1st Earl of Strafford becomes the 1st Earl of Stratford: a deliberate pun on Shaxpere's role of misdirecting attention away from the Earl of Oxford, and onto his allonym: a resident of Stratford.
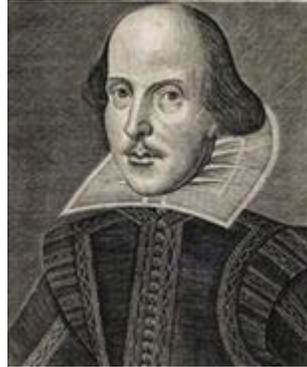
Let it be supposed that before publication of the *First Folio*, the picture at its front was shown to notables of Stratford-upon-Avon; and they were asked if they recognized this person. Apart from pointing out that the dress was that of a nobleman, it is doubtful that anyone would have identified a

likeness to the recently deceased Shaxpere. But, if the same question were asked, when shown a picture of the original bust of Shaxpere, before it was positioned above his gravesite, the answer would be one of recognition. Yet both pictures, supposedly of this man, were produced at approximately the same time.

The logical inference is that the picture in the *First Folio,* complete with its deliberate oddities, was devised to prevent either Edward de Vere or William Shaxpere being recognizable as Shakespeare. The secret of de Vere's authorship was to remain inviolate: acknowledged only by artistic subtleties, capable of being understood by those aware of the truth. At the same time, Shaxpere's authorship was to continue being assumed by playgoers, and others who had never been introduced to him, but who were admirers of his art.

Despite the picture, the *First Folio* enjoys an overriding position of being a major key to the authorship question, with the effigy repeatedly reproduced as if exempt from the oddities that have been exposed.

Defenders of Shaxpere, having ignored the picture's deficiencies, concentrate upon Ben Jonson's encomium of Shakespeare's art, which commences after the picture. After this, they make reference to words written by Leonard Digges, which follows those of Jonson, in which he writes of the future: when, "Time dissolves thy *Stratford* Moniment." This unquestionably connects Shakespeare to Stratford-upon-Avon, and reinforces Jonson's naming of the poet as, 'Sweet Swan of *Auon.*' All doubts can therefore be set aside—or so it would seem.

Other key issues have been *Venus and Adonis* and *The Rape of Lucrece*; each with a dedication by William Shakespeare. But the lack of any local dialect in *Venus and Adonis*, which would have been a major part of Shaxpere's upbringing, and the failure to find any reference to Shakespeare in the family archives of his supposed patron, the 3rd Earl of Southampton, seriously enfeebles this evidence to the point of a mystery, if not patent doubt.

However, there still remains Shakespeare's Sonnets: another cornerstone in his defense. But to this, the asyntactic dedication written by the publisher raises unexpected concern; and when this unease is coupled with the fact that Shaxpere took no interest in the illegal appropriation of his literary property, which was totally contrary to his legalistic character, doubt as to the authorship of the sonnets is increased rather than diminished.

Mention must also be made of Henry Chettle's reference to "Shake-scene" in *Greenes Groats-worth of Witte,* which is another key issue in maintaining the orthodox view of Shakespeare. There is also an oft-repeated claim that *The Tempest* was written after de Vere's death. But the arguments

proposed as evidence for this come to nothing: as was successfully demonstrated by Professor Roger Stritmatter and Lynne Kositsky (2013).

It is with this that we depart from the semantics of defenders and dissenters, and turn to the secure ground of numbers and their recognized application to cryptography. First in line is Ben Jonson, followed by Leonard Digges; both have been named in defense of Shaxpere's right to be recognized as William Shakespeare. In what follows, we shall allow the evidence to decide which of the two sides they support.

Ben Jonson and the Stratford Monument

Stratford-upon-Avon's failure to acknowledge Shaxpere, other than as a local businessman, especially when 'Shakespeare's' entire collection of plays was about to go on sale countrywide, would inevitably raise questions when visitors arrived to pay their respects to the author in his hometown. Therefore, to meet the expected flow of people, a monument was commissioned in London, and constructed by Gheerart Janssen, a Southwark monumental mason. To assuage any doubts that might arise among those who knew him personally, Janssen received orders to carve a bust of Shaxpere, showing him to be a merchant, thus conforming to the local remembrance of this man. The original woolsack, once held by the bust of Shaxpere, and confirmed by Sir William Dugdale—"a man of scrupulous accuracy united with stubborn integrity"—who copied the bust in 1634, for inclusion in *The Antiquities of Warwickshire Illustrated* (1656), has long since been replaced by a cushion. This is presently shown as a support for the sheet of paper placed upon it. To further complete the idea of his authorship, a quill is poised above the cushion, as if the business-like figure is about to invoice a customer.

Beneath this monument is an inscription; and below that is a ledger stone covering Shaxpere's grave. Both have interest for the cryptographer. The English part of the inscription reads:

S<small>TAY</small> P<small>ASSENGER</small>, W<small>HY</small> G<small>OEST</small> T<small>HOV</small> B<small>Y</small> S<small>O</small> F<small>AST</small>, │R<small>EAD</small> I<small>F</small> T<small>HOV</small> C<small>ANST</small>, W<small>HOM</small> E<small>NVIOVS</small> D<small>EATH</small> H<small>ATH</small> P<small>LAST</small>. │W<small>ITH</small> I<small>N</small> T<small>HIS</small> M<small>ONVMENT</small> S<small>HAKSPEARE</small>: W<small>ITH</small> W<small>HOME</small>, │Q<small>VICK</small> N<small>ATVRE</small> D<small>IDE</small>: W<small>HOSE</small> N<small>AME</small> D<small>OTH</small> D<small>ECK</small> Y<small>S</small> T<small>OMBE</small>, │F<small>AR</small> M<small>ORE</small> T<small>HEN</small> C<small>OST</small>: S<small>IEH</small> A<small>LL</small>, Y<small>T</small> H<small>E</small> H<small>ATH</small> W<small>RITT</small>, │L<small>EAVES</small> L<small>IVING</small> A<small>RT</small>, B<small>VT</small> P<small>AGE</small>, T<small>O</small> S<small>ERVE</small> H<small>IS</small> W<small>ITT</small>.
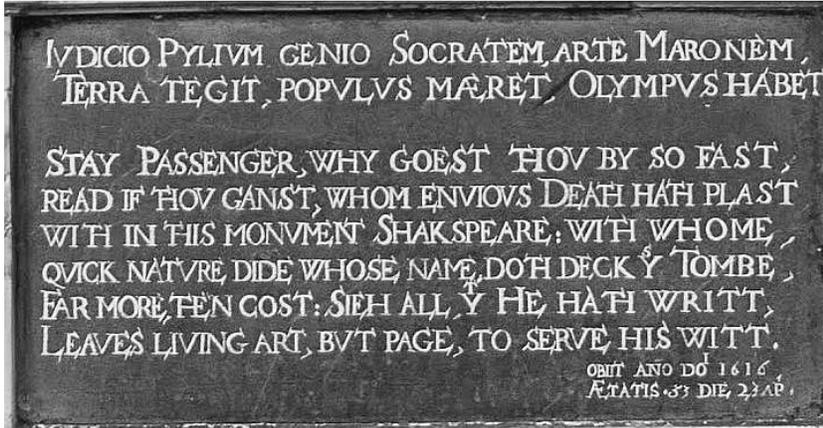
As may be noted, the inscription challenges each passerby to read, if they can, whom death has placed within this Shakspeare monument. Why should the author challenge passersby to *read if they can* who, other than the named person, has been placed there? Why is the one named not sufficient?

The possibility that this inscription may actually be a cryptogram is heightened by the words of David Kahn (1967). He observed that awkwardness in phrasing may betray the very secret that the phrasing should guard: the existence of a hidden message. Some 'awkwardness' is indeed evident within this inscription.

➢ W<small>HOM</small>, when first spelt, is without e: but it is spelt with e, when it next appears.
➢ T<small>HIS</small> is written firstly in full, but when it is next required, it is abbreviated to Y<small>S</small>.
➢ T<small>HAT</small> has unnecessarily been abbreviated to Y<small>T</small> .
➢ M<small>ONVMENT</small> S<small>HAKSPEARE</small>, in mid-sentence, appears in this reverse order for no apparent reason.
➢ S<small>HAKSPEARE</small> has been spelt by omitting the letter E between K and S.
➢ S<small>IEH</small> is not an English word at all; it is the German imperative from siehen: Look or See.
➢ W<small>RITT</small> has been spelt with a second T.

In the Cardano Grille below, the plaintext message depends upon the presence of each one of these anomalies for the positioning of its letters to make a meaningful sentence. The first letter of plaintext, 'S', commences in the 8th cell of the first line, thus coinciding with the final letter of Profecto (truly): a Latin synonym for Vere (*Collins Latin Dictionary & Grammar* 2005). All rune ciphers follow suit, by referring to Edward de Vere. Jonson's known love for Latin is apparent here.

P R O F E C T O

```
S T A Y P A S S E N G E R W H Y G O E S T T H O V B Y S O F A S T R
E A D I F T H O V C A N S T W H O M E N V I O V S D E A T H H A T H
P L A S T W I T H I N T H I S M O N V M E N T S H A K S P E A R E W
I T H W H O M E Q V I C K N A T V R E D I D E W H O S E N A M E D O
T H D E C K Y S T O M B E F A R M O R E T H E N C O S T S I E H A L
L Y T H E H A T H W R I T T L E A V E S L I V I N G A R T B V T P A
G E T O S E R V E H I S W I T T
```

HIM, SO TEST, HE, I VOW, IS (WHISPER, TALK IN SECRET) E DE VERE: AS HE SHAKSPEARE: ME, I.B.

First, observe how the E added to WHOME (row 4) allows TEST, VOW, RUNE, VERE, DE, and ME to be essential parts of the plaintext. Next, observe how Yˢ (row 5) in place of THIS (row 3), perfectly complements the additional E in WHOME; while Yˢ, written in full as THIS, allows N and V to complete both RVNE and VERE; added to which, it also exactly aligns AS and HE with the S and E in SHAKSPEARE.

It can therefore be understood why MONUMENT SHAKSPEARE has been written in reverse, particularly with the E omitted from SHAK[ ]SPEARE. The inclusion of the German word, SIEH (row 5) can also be seen as an essential part of the ciphertext, because it supplies the necessary letter E in ME at exactly the place needed. Finally, the additional T in WRITT (row 6), permits the correct spelling of VERE, I B, HE, and IS in the plaintext.

The grille displayed above, with its 34 columns of vertically aligned words, is in stark contrast to any grille with the inscription laid out in a different number of columns. When the late Professor Albert Burgstahler examined these words in grilles, ranging from 10 columns to 50, he could find nothing remotely comparable to the 34-column grille (cf. the 33-column grille below).

```
S T A Y P A S S E N G E R W H Y G O E S T T H O V B Y S O F A S T
R E A D I F T H O V C A N S T W H O M E N V I O V S D E A T H H A
T H P L A S T W I Y H I N T H I S M O N V M E N T S H A K S P E A
R E W I T H W H O M E Q V I C K N A T U R E D I D E W H O S E N A
M E D O T H D E C K Y S T O M B E F A R M O R E T H E N C O S T S
I E H A L L Y T H E H A T H W R I T T L E A V E S L I V I N G A R
T B V T P A G E T O S E R V E H I S W I T T
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This one example serves all. From which it may be inferred that the 34-column grille is unique among those available, for it is not only coherent throughout, it also responds to the challenge in the ciphertext.

The grille must now be examined for further evidence to confirm the authenticity of the plaintext. Is there a key to this particular display? Although it was first discovered by a crib and a simple arithmetical algorithm during a single evening, Dr. Bruce Spittle's attention was drawn to one particular line in the inscription that had been inset, and which leads immediately to the ciphertext beneath it. The line contains 34 characters, the same number as the columns that produce the vertical alignment of the plaintext. To meet this number, the Latin word MAERET has been spelt with the digraph Æ in place of AE, thus reducing the number of characters from 35 to 34: the number required for the key.

Further evidence of the plaintext's authenticity is provided by the word RUNE, attached to E VERE. All 8 grilles appearing in this study include this word as a cipher, which makes it appear to have been a codeword that was agreed privately by those involved in affirming the identity of Shakespeare. As a matter of fact, it is an extremely apt choice: since one of its archaic meanings was, "whisper, talk in secret" (http://www.yourdictionary.com/rune#DRzukbTPdfEZFBGh.99).

When the actual words of the plaintext are inspected for their validity, a different set of questions have to be satisfied. Although codes in the Sixteenth Century were abundantly used (Friedman & Friedman 1957), this does not guarantee every proposed solution is authentic, but it does favor the possibility.

In the first place, the plaintext must be seen as having been intended for the benefit of someone who would profit from the knowledge it conveys. Secondly, as the Friedmans said: The experienced cryptologist looks for two things, and they are equally important. First, the plaintext must make sense, in whatever language it is supposed to be written; and it must be grammatical and it must mean something, and say it intelligibly.

Because the plaintext commences with HIM, the direct object of the verb to TEST, it has been argued that this destroys the grammar of the sentence.

But in Elizabethan literature, it is not difficult to discover similar examples: especially where Ben Jonson has made the same inversion. Examples such as one found in *The Alchemist* (Act 5 sc. v 121), where Jonson wrote: "The Doctor, he shall hear of him at Westchester." And another, in *Every Man In His Humour* (Act 1 sc. ii 82), in which he wrote: "From the bordello, it might come as well." Quite notably, therefore, the initials I. B. adjacent to ME in the plaintext are the same that Jonson used in the *First Folio*, which was published close to the time when the Stratford monument was set in place.

Attention therefore refocuses upon two new questions. Would Jonson have been aware of Shaxpere's lack of ability to be the author of Shakespeare's work? And, is Jonson known to have used cryptography, other than on the monument?

The answer to the first question is resoundingly positive. Not only did Jonson conduct the editorial section of Shakespeare's *First Folio*, but he also acknowledged William Shake-speare (carefully hyphenating the name) as having acted in his own play, *Every Man In His Humour.* This play includes a character believed to be based upon Shaxpere, named Sogliardo. Jonson pitilessly lampoons him as "so enamoured of the name of a gentleman, that he will have it though he buys it." This is widely believed to refer to Shaxpere's purchase of a coat-of-arms from Sir William Dethick, who was later charged with forging historical evidence for personal gain. Jonson's suggestion for Sogliardo's motto was, 'Not Without Mustard'. Shaxpere's motto was 'Not Without Right', which depicted a black bend on a mustard-colored background.

As for the second question, it is known that Jonson liked to test his audience's powers of interpretation. His cleverness at devising appropriate anagrams and impresas in this manner was to become a hallmark for his success as a masque writer (Kay 1995). Jonson also admitted to having made use of ciphers in the past. In his book of *Epigrammes* (1616), he admitted to William Earl of Pembroke that "when I made them, I had nothing in my conscience, to expreßing of which I needed a cipher." Jonson's conscience is not unimportant in this manner; for he confided to William Drummond "that of all styles he loved most to be named honest" (Kay). Two plays by Jonson, *Volpone* and *The Alchemist,* are also of some interest, as each one is summarized with an acrostic poem that spells the name of the play.

It is with this that we return to the ciphertext on the Stratford monument, which has a second level of encryption to support the plaintext arrayed by 34 columns. It is found in the words QUICK NATVRE DIDE, which significantly links the two clusters of plaintext between Jonson's vow and de Vere's name.

In Latin, QUICK NATVRE can be translated as SUMMA DE VELOCIUM RERUM

NATURA. In fact, it is an expansion derived from the three words in Titus Lucretius' poem, *De Rerum Natura,* in which *'Summa'* has been added to comply with Epicurus' atomic view of Nature—which was the basis for Lucretius' poem—as the *Summa*, i.e. sum of its working parts. To this has been added *Velocium* (the genitive case for *velox*: re, *velox mortis*—a swift death). Lucretius' book was popular at that time, and Jonson was exceptionally proud of his Latin scholarship. By allowing these words to die, or fade away—as clues in crossword puzzles sometimes suggest: e.g., 'died' is the solution to: 'Diane and Edward faded away'—they leave behind their first syllables: SUM DE VE RE NATU—I AM DE VERE BY BIRTH; perhaps, just another case of Jonson testing the reader's powers of interpretation?

A point has therefore been reached when the mathematical theory of probability can be applied, and the chances calculated with an exactness to fit the present situation. William and Elizebeth Friedman (Friedman & Friedman 1957) maintained that if a chance value is "one in one thousand million, the cryptanalyst's solution will be more than justified." In this regard, the entire grille—as with those that follow—deserve a detailed statistical analysis that goes beyond the scope of the present paper, and merits a paper to itself. Even so, to again quote the Friedmans:

> Scan the initial letters of any book of poetry, or of prose for that matter, and, see how often *short* "acrostics" turn up by accident. But when a long straightforward, simple acrostic is found, its objective existence can hardly be questioned. The probability that it is an accident is so small that it may safely be completely disregarded. . . . In short, the appearance of the acrostic appellation is not an accident; and if not an accident, it follows that it is there by intent, and because of the very nature of the mechanics of acrostics it can only have been placed there by the author himself. (Friedman & Friedman 1959)

With this information at hand, the curious ledger stone nearby, which covers Shaxpere's grave, but without naming him, also includes the codeword, RUNE: a discovery made by Art Neuendorffer. Speculation concerning the author may therefore be put to rest, since both inscriptions appear to have been written by the same person.

By commencing with the letter in the 12th cell—to comply with the connection to Edward de Vere—the first letter of RUNE is spelt vertically. The key to the number of columns, 28, is equivalent to the 28 letters spelling 'William Shakspeare's gravestone', with the deceased's surname spelt exactly as it is written on the wall monument above his grave. This meets the requirement that a key must apply to the plaintext—as maintained by the Friedmans. They held that a key must conform to some rule, "*corroborative*
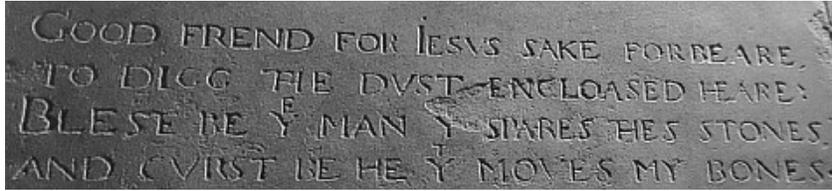
E D W A R D d e V E R E   →   17

G	O	O	D	F	R	E	N	D	F	O	**R**	I	E	S	V	**S**	S	A	K	E	F	O	R	B	E	A	R
E	T	O	D	I	G	G	T	H	E	D	**V**	S	T	E	N	**C**	L	O	A	S	E	D	H	E	A	R	E
B	L	E	S	E	B	E	Y	E	M	A	**N**	Y	T	S	P	**A**	R	E	S	T	H	E	S	S	T	O	N
E	S	A	N	D	C	V	R	S	T	B	**E**	H	E	Y	T	**M**	O	V	E	S	M	Y	B	O	N	E	S

in nature and purpose: something other than the mere choice of letters themselves must substantiate and validate the selections made" (Friedman & Friedman 1959). In this case, the key describes the location of the plaintext. And the 12 letters in Edward de Vere indicates the 12th column of the grill, where the count for RUNE begins. Similarly, the 17th number of de Vere's earldom points to where the count for letters spelling SCAM begins.

As for these two words of plaintext: Of all the four-letter words in the English language that might have occurred by chance, RUNE ('whisper, talk in secret') and SCAM ('traditionally . . . where an individual would misrepresent them self as someone with skill or authority') stand alone. No other four-letter word can be seen. According to the Persian philosopher Aviconna (981–1037), in his treatise concerning cause and effect, he said 'scamonia' defines "anything that destroys the end or purpose of something by eliminating its supporting condition" (https://www.thefreelibrary.com/Causality+in+Islamic+philosophy%3A+the+arguments+of+Ibn+Sina-a0201086401). Scammonia in its abbreviated form, 'scam', can therefore be seen as an apt description for describing the prevention of Lord Oxford's authorship rights, by having eliminated the conditions supporting it, by a person misrepresenting him).

The encoding of RUNE on both Shaxpere's gravestone and his monument continues to suggest Ben Jonson was the author of both verses. The use of a Latin 'I' for 'J' in Jesus; the abbreviation of 'that' with Y^T and a 'v' instead of 'U' are all found in the inscription on the monument.

Clarification is also required for the word, BLESE (sic) on the ledger stone. Close inspection shows that a clumsy attempt has been made at converting the second E into a digraph, with the vertical part of E sharing its upright with an intended T. The result, through lack of space, is that the top,

left bar on the intended T appears to have been cut later; it is far too short and uneven to have been part of the original word. It has also collided with the adjacent S. Compare this with the digraph in THE, in the line above. Quite clearly, the chipped stone between S and E in BLESE bears scant comparison with the other, professionally carved digraphs.

The encipherment of RUNE together with SCAM not only consolidates the secret cipher in the inscription above the grave, it reinforces it by positioning these two words in columns that refer to Edward Vere 17th Earl of Oxford, whom the encoder (surely, honest Ben Jonson) vowed was Shakespeare.

The ciphertext inscribed on the gravestone is clear. Leave this body where it has been buried: with a curse added—made in a superstitious age—to anyone with the temerity to do otherwise. The intention of its author can be interpreted as an attempt to prevent Shaxpere being removed at some future time for re-interment inside Westminster Abbey.

There is also reason to believe that Shaxpere's remains were later taken from his grave to prevent a future generation depositing them in Westminster Abbey. This became evident in the early Nineteenth Century, when work was done to the floor close to his grave. The cavity dug nearby enabled the church sexton to peer into the grave where his coffin had been laid. When asked by Washington Irving, who had arrived in England in 1815, what the grave revealed, the sexton confessed he "could see neither coffin nor bones; nothing but dust." Interestingly, in 2016, the grave was scanned by ground-penetrating radar, seeking for human remains. The grave was found to be empty.

Let it therefore be observed that the ledger stone bears no name. An examination of other memorial inscriptions—surely in any cemetery across the world—will undoubtedly fail to find another gravesite monument that has omitted to name the famous person to whom lines of remembrance have been addressed. And to those inclined to claim the incumbent of the grave was so famous, he needed no other recognition, it must be asked: 'Why, then, did not one single person from the world of art, theatre, or literature recognize his fame at the time of his death?' Clearly, there was some 'open secret' that was too dangerous to mention—hence, the pressing need to impart it through cryptograms, lest his recognition be lost forever.

Leonard Digges's Dedicatory Poem to Shake-speare

Leonard Digges was a distinguished man of letters, an Oxford graduate who was later awarded his M.A. for the studies he conducted abroad. He was also descended from a well-connected and influential Elizabethan family. But his special importance to the problem of Shakespeare's identity resides in the fact that he not only wrote a tribute to the man, whom he named

Shake–speare, but at the age of 28, his stepfather, Thomas Russell, who lived in the village of Alderminster, four miles south of Stratford-upon-Avon, was invited to act as overseer to the will of William Shaxpere shortly before his death. This fact connects Digges to the life of Shaxpere and the truth about Shakespeare.

Digges's first tribute in praise of Shake-speare, and published alongside other poetic accolades at the front of the *First Folio*, made use of several English words belonging to the Thirteenth Century—Maister instead of Master, and moniment in place of monument. Therefore, when Digges looked into the future, "And Time dissolues thy *Stratford* Moniment"; this would have formerly been understood to mean: "And Time [resolves as doubts, riddles; archaic: refer Chambers] thy *Stratford* Moniment [evidence (of some fact); O.E.D.]"; and it suggests that Digges's choice of Middle English was intended to refer to a Time (sic) when the Stratford monument has resolved the doubts he foresaw would occur: once Shakespeare's plays and poetry were scrutinized, and comparisons were drawn between Shaxpere's lack of education and alternate lifestyle, and that of their courtly author. It therefore strongly implies that he knew very well what had been concealed in the memorial inscription at Stratford-upon-Avon. And since Digges was a first-class scholar: "esteemed by those who knew him in Univ. coll. a great master of the English language, a perfect understander of the French and Spanish, a good poet, and no mean orator" (Anthony à Wood), it may be concluded that Digges's choice of words was made in the full knowledge of what he intended to be inferred by them.

Digges also wrote a second commendatory poem in praise of Shakespeare, but with an encryption concealed within its opening words. The verse survived his death, and was subsequently used as part of John Benson's introduction to his new

Poets are borne not made, when I would prove
This truth, the glad rememberance I must love
Of never dying *Shakespeare*, who alone,
Is argument enough to make that one.
First, that he was a Poet none would doubt,

edition of Shake-speares Sonnets, published in 1640.

It can be seen from this grille that Digges has imitated the layout adopted by Ignoto (see below): the unidentified poet who wrote his tribute to Edmund Spenser in the *Faerie Queene*; excepting that Digges has reversed the horizontal plaintext for the vertical and the vertical for the horizontal. His ELS key of 18 is signalled by *Shakespeare,* written in italics, which contains the number of letters that spell William Shakespeare, to whom the poem is dedicated. The plaintext conforms to the 'rule' of commencing with the first

→ 17

```
P O E T S A R E B O R N E N O T M A
D E W H E N I W O U L D P R O V E T
H I S T R U T H T H E G L A D R E M
E M B E R A N C E I M U S T L O V E
O F N E V E R D Y I N G S H A K E S
P E A R E W H O A L O N E I S A R G
U M E N T E N O U G H T O M A K E T
H A T O N E F I R S T T H A T H E W
A S A P O E T N O N E W O U L D D O
U B T
```

letter in a cell connected to Edward de Vere; in this case, 17, the number of his earldom. The key has also obeyed Friedman's "corroborative" rule. And it is equally important to observe that Digges has placed his cipher, which identifies de Vere by name, at the very beginning of his poem. He has therefore complied with the cryptographic rule that dates back to the Attic plays, when:

> Authors of Greek tragedies constructed their first eight iambic lines so that they not only made sense but also provided letters to make eight other iambic lines, the first two giving the writer's name. (Thompson & Padaver 1963)

This, of course, stresses the importance of a Cardano Grille as the preferred method of encryption. Whereas a code advertises the presence of a secret that can be decoded, a Cardano ciphertext conceals that fact entirely. And, when the finest poets of the Elizabethan Age set their pens to the task of composing ciphertext, their results were to remain hidden for more than four centuries; time enough for the tradition of Shaxpere's supposed artistry with a pen to usurp the Earl of Oxford's right to recognition.

Even so, tradition can no longer obstruct the fact that in all cases of de Vere's encrypted name, the plaintext always commences with a letter preceded by the number of letters in de Vere's name; or, alternatively, at the 17th letter of the ciphertext. Moreover, this, too, is constantly accompanied by the codeword RUNE. Although by chance, a concurrence of letters on a random grille may occasionally form a grammatical phrase, it cannot be expected to bear any relationship to the ciphertext from which it was derived; nor can it be expected to bestow knowledge of a secret nature to benefit the person discovering it. These preclusions leave the deciphered secrets on these grilles in the unique position of having accomplished those requirements.

The foundations supporting traditional belief about Shaxpere's authorship are systematically being shaken to destruction. Both the Stratford monument and the gravestone beneath it have been overturned by force

of the evidence exposed and the accompaniment of the codeword RUNE, implying the need for secrecy. There is also the loss of Shaxpere's peculiar portrait to contend with. For this is infected by too many oddities to be counted reliable. *Venus and Adonis* has also been lost: it having failed the dialect test, which then affects the authorship of *Lucrece*. To these losses, traditionalists have now suffered further embarrassment. Leonard Digges's use of Middle English has provided a deeper meaning to his choice of words than the superficial meaning formerly attributed to them. And when this is accompanied by Digges having enciphered the name of E de Vere and rune into a poem that outwardly praises Shakespeare; ensuring that it is positioned to accord with the Attic tradition of commencing his name in the opening lines of ciphertext, it remains only for science to confirm that this cipher, too, may be accepted as being another one of deliberate intent. As the Friedmans remarked, "a short one [acrostic], say of five letters or less, may and often does occur purely by accident." Digges's acrostic, however, consists of nine letters. And even though de Vere is transposed, this does not negate it; for, as the Friedmans admitted: "exceptions are made to the rules, and these permit the right kind of messages to be extracted. This tactic is acceptable to the professional cryptologist only if the exceptions do not exceed a certain minimum" (Friedman & Friedman 1957). A single transposition, as in the present case, would therefore be acceptable.

One key issue still remains. Ben Jonson referred to Shakespeare as "Sweet Swan of Auon." Can this be an expression that defies any realistic connexion between the Earl of Oxford and the river Avon?

John Benson's Preamble in His Reissue of Shakespeare's Sonnets

It was not until 1640, after a gap of more than three decades, that Shakespeare's sonnets were again released to the public. But it would seem that a license for their publication was made conditional upon the young man, to whom they were mainly addressed, being understood as female. This was achieved by the simple strategy of changing the gender of several pronouns; sonnets 18, 19, 43, 56, 76, and 136 also were omitted. It would be almost a century and a half before Edmund Malone redirected attention back in time to Thorpe's original edition, and the realization that Shakespeare had not been wooing some fair maid with 'sugared sonnets', but it was a teenage boy who had been receiving the poet's devotional poetry.

The man responsible for altering the youth's gender was John Benson, a London publisher, who entered his revised edition of the sonnets in the Stationers' Register on 4 November 1639: describing it as POEMS: VVRITTEN BY WIL. SHAKE-SPEARE. Gent. Attention is drawn to the word 'Gent' and to the two Vs representing W, as compared with the single

letter W in W<small>IL</small>. It means that the word VV<small>RITTEN</small> consists of 8 letters. There is also the fact that the hyphenated name in capital letters contradicts the excuses made for it appearing hyphenated only when printed in lowercase letters (Shapiro 2010). Quite the opposite, the hyphenated capital letters alert the wary that Shake-speare was a pseudonym.

Benson's edition is no less contentious than Thorpe's had been. The cover depicts an altered copy of Martin Droeshout's anamorphosis of Shakespeare, which appeared in the *First Folio*. William Marshall, the new engraver, has added a nobleman's cape to his copy of Droeshout's figure, while also retaining the 1st Earl of Strafford's starched collar. Tarnya Cooper (2006) noted the further contradiction this displayed to 'Shakespeare's' social class in society, where the penalties for violating sumptuary laws could be harsh, and heavy fines were imposed for dressing out of one's class. "Only men above the rank of gentlemen could wear a cape over their clothing." Therefore, take note of Benson's deliberate emphasis upon class, when he stresses S<small>HAKE</small>-<small>SPEARE</small> as G<small>ENT</small>. The Droeshout engraving, with Shaxpere wearing embroidered cloth, also flouting the sumptuary law, may have failed to achieve sufficient notice; and so a cape has been added to accentuate the nobility of the wearer by clothing him above the status of Gent.

This Shadowe is renowned Shakespear's: Soule of th'age The applause! delight! the wonder of the Stage. Nature her selfe, was proud of his designes

Of further interest to this ennobled figure of Shake-speare is the sprig of hyssop (belvedere in French) it holds: This allows the French word to reform as 'bel de vere'—in English, 'noble de Vere'. But Benson did not stop there. The opening comments of his poem, which he placed beneath the purported image of 'Shakespeare' is punctuated by question marks. "This shadow is renowned Shakespear's**?** Soule of th'age | The applause**?** delight**?** the wonder of the Stage . . . "

Aside from this, the third denouncement of this man is found in the letter which Benson addressed to his readers. It is this that establishes him as a member of the circle of writers who were bold enough to jeopardize their safety, by adding to the paper trail of rune ciphers; each one of which leaves little doubt as to who was meant by the name Shakespeare.

Benson's ciphertext commences: "To the Reader. | I here presume

(under favour) to present to your view, some excellent and sweetely composed Poems, of Master William Shakespeare, . . . "

Benson has therefore commenced his encryption, like Digges, to accord with the Attic tradition of using the first words of ciphertext as concealment for his secret plaintext. In addition, the first letter of his plaintext occurs in cell 4, allowing 17 in Latin numerals to conform to previous grilles that employed the strategy of identifying the subject of the cipher by matching the poet's name or earldom with the first letter of plaintext. The key to deciphering it is governed by an ELS of 8, which is denoted by the 8 letters in VVRITTEN—an apt choice of key for an epistle—also by the repetition of 17 in numerals. Benson's plaintext can then be read from a single cluster of words: ME: LO, E. VERE, RE: MARY S. OWED [i.e. indebted to] HIS ROTE. The word ROTE is archaic: derived from ancient French, in which it is defined as "companionship, or company (of actors)" (Greimas 1987); and from which the modern meaning of 'learning by rote' is obtained. Credit for discovering E. Vere's name is due to Art Neuendorffer.

The close clustering of the plaintext in the grille is evident. This has importance; because vertically aligned words by themselves are of no consequence unless the whole is connected to the parts by syntax and grammar. Additionally, the message must be meaningful to the author, as well as to the decoder. It can be seen how well this applies in Benson's grille, where the plaintext provides an implicit reason for Jonson's reference to Shakespeare as 'Sweet Swan of Avon'.

Benson's use of the word OWED, which, in the present case, means 'indebted to', is the preferred choice of synonym, because it so easily fits this type of grille. By connecting it

to MARY S and ROTE, it directs attention to the year 1603, when 'Shakespeare' visited Mary S. (Sidney) at Wilton House—"the paradise for poets" as it was called—watered by the river Avon, and where the poet was joined by King James I and his court (Wilton House no date). The royal party had recently left London to shelter from an outbreak of plague, and had travelled through Surrey and Hampshire into Wiltshire. The King's Men (often referred to as 'Shakespeare's' company of actors) were then summoned from their winter retreat in Mortlake, Surrey, to entertain the King and his court gathered at Wilton (Michael 1873).

Mary Sidney was at that time owner of Wilton House, and this was remarked upon by Aubrey (*Brief Lives*), who commented upon the scholars visiting the House, and its collegiate way of life. It was also where "Shakespeare wrote a number of his works," which inclines toward making de Vere's presence at Wilton especially significant. Moreover, according to its collegiate description, it was where Nashe had been taken in 1592, when he returned from "the country" with "my Lord"—"where there be more rare qualified men and selected good Schollers than in any Nobleman's house that I know in England."

In the *First Folio*, we recall that Ben Jonson had been scrupulously careful to ensure that any statement referring to Shakespeare was ambiguous, thus allowing it to apply equally to de Vere. But, when Jonson described the poet as 'Sweet Swan of Avon', attention became fixed upon the town of Stratford-upon-Avon: as mentioned by Digges, where a false trail had been laid to William Shaxpere. To counter this, Benson refers to Mary S. alongside E. Vere: and her indebtedness to his ROTE (company of actors). It redirects attention to Wilton House. For there, across its once extensive parkland, three little rivers flowed, of which the river Avon was the main waterway; the other two were its tributaries (Rose 1887).

De Vere's association with the river Avon in Wiltshire, and Jonson's reference to 'Sweet Swan of Avon', is therefore established. In 1951 during the Festival of Britain, and again in 1964, during the 400th anniversary of 'Shakespeare's' birth, Wilton House played an important role in these celebrations: as can be seen by an advertisement from that time.

> There's history in every corner. King Charles the first spent many happy summers here. Shakespeare wrote a number of works here. Queen Elizabeth not only slept here, she left a lock of her hair, which is still a treasured heirloom. (*Glasgow Weekly News* 19 May 1951)

To this may be added further evidence from the Victorian poet William Cory who stayed at the House in the summer of 1865. It was while residing there as classics tutor to the son of Sidney Herbert, 1st Baron of Lea, that he recorded in his diary how he had been reminded, by his pupil's mother,

of James I's visit to Wilton House in 1603. The invitation was extended by Mary Sidney, who had been made aware that the King was nearby. After the visitors departed, she honored the occasion with a building, which Cory made note of in his diary (Warre-Cornish 1897). "To commemorate it a temple was built at Wilton, and known as 'Shakespeares House'" (Compton Mackenzie 1950).

Actually, Mary Sidney had a second reason to commemorate the occasion. Her son had just become engaged to Lady Susan Vere, the daughter of the 17th Earl of Oxford—the same man, which the rune ciphers declare was the real William Shakespeare. The forthcoming wedding may explain de Vere's visit to the House at that time; although it also coincided with an outbreak of plague in the London parish of St. Botolph in June 1603. Of special note, therefore, is the fact that Oxford's future son-in-law, the Earl of Montgomery, together with his brother, the Earl of Pembroke, were to later become the 'brethren' to whom the *First Folio* of Shakespeare's plays were dedicated.

Sweet Swan of Avon is therefore no longer the sole preserve of William Shaxpere, for whom no record exists of his ever having written anything at Stratford-upon-Avon—not even a letter. With the strength of the *First Folio* totally devitalized, we turn next to Shakespeare's Sonnets.

Thomas Thorpe's Dedication to Shakespeare's Sonnets

One of the most ingenious cryptograms ever devised must surely be the Dedication that appeared at the front of Shakespeare's Sonnets, published by Thomas Thorpe in 1609. Within a mere 144 letters, it includes four statements in plaintext that refer to either Edward de Vere, the 17th Earl of Oxford, or to Henry Wriothesley, the 3rd Earl of Southampton: the teenage youth to whom the sonnets were mostly addressed.

In England's divisive and highly charged atmosphere of religious affiliations and political unrest, especially so soon after the Spanish Armada's attempt to conquer England, such a loving relationship between an elderly statesman and a teenaged earl, if made public, would likely cause a hugely, damaging outcry against the ruling class. This could prove fatal to the career and aspirations of Lord Burghley, at a time when he was the most powerful man in England. But Burghley was in a delicate position; he was related to both parties: being grandfather to Oxford's three daughters, while also acting as Elizabeth I's appointed guardian to young Southampton. He was therefore responsible to the Queen for the boy's moral welfare. At the same time, he was desirous of protecting his family members from any salacious gossip at court, or from a public outcry.

Burghley may be judged to have responded to this dilemma with

political astuteness. As the head of censorship in an era known as "Regnum Cecilianum," when for 52 years, William Cecil and his son Robert effectively governed England, they created a dynasty so powerful its effects can still be felt today (Asquith 2005). And, as George Orwell sagely remarked, "He who controls the present, controls the past. He, who controls the past, controls the future." From this power base, and with the ear of Queen Elizabeth, Burghley ensured that his son-in-law, Lord Oxford, would never be associated with his sonnets to Southampton. And for two decades, all but two of the sonnets remained unpublished. But, for long-lasting security, a Cambridge graduate, Francis Meres, was persuaded to name William Shakespeare as the author of the Sonnets (even though they had never been published, and were unknown to all but a few of the poet's "lewd friends"). To commence removal of the author's previous anonymity, Meres heaped praise after praise upon Shakespeare's art of composition: naming him many times for his admirable ability at every level of literature. Meres's encomium was published in *Palladis Tamia* (1598). With his goal achieved, England was suddenly awakened to a named, literary genius among its population: a poet and playwright ranking alongside the greatest names in classical literature.

Eleven years later, the Sonnets were 'leaked'. Thomas Thorpe had somehow managed to obtain the complete collection. Very probably, they were sold by Oxford's son, Henry, who had assumed his deceased father's profligate lifestyle, and was in financial difficulties at that time. Mr. W. H., named by Thorpe, is therefore likely to be Mr. William Hall, who lived in the vicinity of Oxford's widow and son, and who occasionally dealt in manuscripts. Hall would have sold them on to Thorpe, who rushed them through the press as 'Shake-speares Sonnets neuer before imprinted'. They were accompanied by a dedication that has dismayed lovers of Shakespeare's poetry ever since. Sir Sydney Lee described the words as "fantastically arranged and in odd grammatical order." Louis Gillet simply dismissed them as "a few lines of gibberish." John Leslie Hotson concluded the entire declaration appeared "preposterous," because it had been written back-to-front. It should have read: "To the only begetter of these insuing sonnets, Mr. W.H., the well-wishing adventurer (in setting forth) wisheth all happiness, and that eternity promised by our ever-living poet." It must therefore be a "cryptogram," Hotson concluded; which happened to be the truth.

Shaxpere expressed no reaction whatsoever to the publication of 'his' sonnets; as Thorpe must have known would happen when he published them. Although, in common law, the author of any book or composition held the sole right of first publication, and the right to sue anyone who

printed, published, or sold the same without consent. Shaxpere's disinterest was therefore completely contrary to the ruction 'he' is said to have set in motion when Henry Chettle published *Greene's Groats-Worth of Wit*. Instead of prosecuting Thorpe, Shaxpere commenced court proceedings against Thomas Hornby: who had stood surety for the purchase of a supply of malt by John Addenbrooke, who disappeared without paying.

It was the late Dr. John Rollett, a scientist, who broke the first level of Thorpe's cryptogram. He queried why each word had been separated

> TO.THE.ONLIE.BEGETTER.OF.
> THESE.INSVING.SONNETS.
> Mʳ.W.H. ALL.HAPPINESSE.
> AND.THAT.ETERNITIE.
> PROMISED.
>
> BY.
>
> OVR.EVER-LIVING.POET.
>
> WISHETH.
>
> THE.WELL-WISHING.
> ADVENTVRER.IN.
> SETTING.
> FORTH.
>
> T. T.

by a stop, and why the dedication had been divided into three parts of six, two, and four lines. This led to his discovery that by taking each sixth, second, and fourth word in succession, they spelt THESE SONNETS BY EVER THE FORTH. 'Ever' is an anagram of Vere; or, as some have said, Ver refers to Ver in France, from where the Vere family name originated, before migrating to England at the time of the Norman Conquest. As for de Vere being the fourth: a document from that time confirms that "E. Oxenforde, 17th Earle of Oxford, was the fourth ranking member of Queen Elizabeth's Privy council at the time of King James accession, and had been for an (as of now) undetermined number of years before" (Folger Shakespeare Library (documents), and R. Horne *Shakespeare Oxford Newsletter* 1970). His signature was therefore always fourth on the council's written decrees.

Although Rollett remained unaware of Vere's association with 'the fourth', it was by dint of examining "well over 20,000" paragraphs, in which he "only found one sentence that even remotely made any sentence at all" ('London was built before'. It occurs in an abridged version of *Boswell's Life of Johnson*). From this, Rollett "calculated the odds of the message being a chance occurrence were roughly one in a hundred million" (Rollett 2004). This figure exactly meets the Friedmans' criterion for acceptance as a genuine cipher.

The success of Rollett's investigation was followed by his second discovery; the name HENRY WRIOTHESLEY had been encrypted into Thorpe's dedication. This was the 3rd Earl of Southampton, the unnamed youth to whom most of the sonnets were addressed. This discovery was to lead to the

present author discovering a further encryption that read, TO DE VERE HIS WS EPIGRAM. Thereafter, Jonathan Bond was able to reveal another encryption written in Latin, PRO PARE VENTIS EMERITER. All three are shown separately to emphasize each plaintext.

The first of these grilles, which names Lord Southampton, Henry Wriothesley, has an ELS of 15 for Henry, and 18 for Wriothesley. These form two keys—LORD SOUTHAMPTON, and SURNAME WRIOTHESLEY. Rollett observed from his research that grilles of a similar nature were used in the recent past by prisoners, who began, 'Dear George', or 'My dear George' to indicate every tenth, or twelfth word or letter in the innocent-looking passage that followed. Rollett therefore recorded the number of vertical words and their length in grilles composed of Thorpe's dedication, ranging from 6 to 30 columns. From these he found "only three 5-letter acrostics—*Henry, waste,* and *tress,* plus the 5-letter segment, *esley.* From these four 5-letter words or segments, he noted that two were used in the full name Henry Wriothesley" (Rollett 2004). And from this, he reckoned "the chances of the whole name turning up in two different arrays is . . . 1 in 300 million, which makes it far more likely that it really is a genuine cipher." To this, he added a subjective probability of "one in a hundred" to account for the name being that of the youth most likely to have been the subject of the sonnets. The probability of chance having been the cause, he said, was "very roughly 1 in 30 billion" (ibid.).

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T O T H E O N L I
E B E G E T T E R
O F T H E S E I N
S V I N G S O N N
E T S M R W H A L
L H A P P I N E S
S E A N D T H A T
E T E R N I T I E
P R O M I S E D B
Y O V R E V E R L
I V I N G P O E T
W I S H E T H T H
E W E L L W I S H
I N G A D V E N T
V R E R I N S E T
T I N G F O R T H
```

To discover the Earl of Southampton's name encrypted in the dedication to a book of sonnets that omits naming him as the subject of the poems, although leading academics agree this is the person named in plaintext, would be extraordinary, if it were coincidental. Fortunately, the inclusion of the codeword RUNE and the Latin plaintext discovered by Jonathan Bond help allay that suggestion. This was achieved by a further cipher that remarks upon the secrecy surrounding Southampton, together with the Earl's later career.

This second grille, consisting of four Latin words—PRO PARE VOTIS EMERITE—translates as a comment addressed to Henry Wriothesley. With

an ELS of 12, the letters of the key are the same in number as that of H. Wriothesley, the subject of this embedded comment.

    A literal translation from the Latin reads: PRO—an interjection for Thou! rather than as a preposition; since pro is not followed by the ablative case; PARE—2nd person, present, active, is the imperative form of the verb, to appear, be present; VOTIS—is the plural form of votum,

T	O	T	H	E	O	N	L	I	E	B	E
G	E	T	T	E	R	O	F	T	H	E	S
E	I	N	S	V	I	N	G	S	O	N	N
E	T	S	M	R	W	H	A	L	L	H	A
P	P	I	N	E	S	S	E	A	N	D	T
H	A	T	E	T	E	R	N	I	T	I	E
P	R	O	M	I	S	E	D	B	Y	O	V
R	E	V	E	R	L	I	V	I	N	G	P
O	E	T	W	I	S	H	E	T	H	T	H
E	W	E	L	L	W	I	S	H	I	N	G
A	D	V	E	N	T	V	R	E	R	I	N
S	E	T	T	T	N	G	F	O	R	T	H

either dative or ablative, directing the meaning 'to vows', or 'to wishes'; EMERITE—is the vocative case for emeritus: a veteran, or retired soldier. Unfortunately, when Bond published his discovery in 2009, he added the available R (present in the ciphertext) to EMERITE; but the word EMERITER in any declension, either as an adjective or as a noun, does not exist in Latin. He also elected for a 'free' translation, thus avoiding the declension rules that are so important in a literal translation. From this, he obtained: "For my dear companion vowing to be well-deserving" (Bond 2009). Understandably, free translations favor personal bias; whereas, the Friedmans insisted that a translation in any language must be grammatically correct.

    When Thorpe published these sonnets, the 3rd Earl of Southampton was aged 36. As a younger man he had joined the Earl of Essex in Queen Elizabeth's military campaign against the Irish rebels, but after his return to England, he became a veteran of Essex's Irish campaign. The plaintext therefore reads: VETERAN, THOU ART VISIBLE TO WISHES. This confirms the validity of Southampton's encrypted name by referring to his concealment from the public eye as the youth in the sonnets. But later, in adult life and as a military veteran, he is made visible by those wishing to see Shakespeare's sonnets made public.

    This second set of plaintext has therefore delivered an apt comment upon the name encrypted in the first grille. It will also be recalled that the plaintext must be meaningful and grammatical in *any* language. A literal translation of the Latin satisfies this commitment perfectly.

Secondly, would the author of the plaintext have known these facts? The suppression of the Sonnets at the time they were written, when Southampton was a teenager, would support this. Thirdly, the encryption must have a purpose conveyed by the plaintext. That purpose is clear; it identifies the unnamed subject of the poems by his family name, and then confirms it by the secrecy surrounding him, and then validating it by referring to his subsequent veteran status after the Irish campaign.

The third grille, with its 19 columns, reveals for whom the dedication was intended. The plaintext states, To Vere His W.S. Gram. These letters stretch in an uninterrupted acrostic from one side of the grille to the other. But observe how the ciphertext letters D and E embrace the initial V in vere, and the letters E P I run adjacently beside W S in a 19-ELS array. The statement then reads:

To De Vere His W.S. Epigram.

Because of the intense concentration of different plaintext statements occupying the grille, using only 144 letters of ciphertext, some letters in the plaintext have been employed more than once. A case in point is the word His, where I and S have been transposed, so that the S can also be used for Wriothesley (see 1st grille). The word epigram, for which the initials: sw, ip, and ma also require transpositions to complete the message, aided by transfer of the isolated R, is a case where the professional cryptologist would be expected to permit these as a minor inconvenience (Friedman & Friedman 1957).

The title of the book, Shake-speares Sonnets, with 19 capital letters, forms the key for an ELS of 19, resulting in 2 arrays of letters. The grille has been inset from 19 columns to 18 for graphic effect. The outcome of

V	E	N	T	E	E	N									S	E
															T	O
T	H	E	O	N	L	I	E	B	E	G	E	T	T	E	R	O	F
T	H	E	S	E	I	N	S	V	I	N	G	S	O	N	N	E	T
S	M	R	W	H	A	L	L	H	A	P	P	I	N	E	S	S	E
A	N	D	T	H	A	T	E	T	E	R	N	I	T	I	E	P	R
O	M	I	S	E	D	B	Y	O	V	R	E	V	E	R	L	I	V
I	N	G	P	O	E	T	W	I	S	H	E	T	H	T	H	E	W
E	L	L	W	I	S	H	I	N	G	A	D	V	E	N	T	V	R
E	R	I	N	S	E	T	T	I	N	G	F	O	R	T	H
key S	H	A	K	E	S	P	E	A	R	E	S	S	O	N	N	E	T	S

this is to form a sequence of letters in the plaintext that run in an alternating letter sequence of 9, 10 . . . The first of which, commences at cell 9, to coincide with the spelling of SEVENTEEN; the second sequence begins at cell 17 along the line as if to confirm this number. These represent a sensible choice, and are entirely in keeping with the basic rules of cryptography. The plaintext also confirms the 6-2-4 word skip, declaring: THESE SONNETS BY E VER THE FORTH. The requirements for satisfying the conditions for a genuine encryption have therefore been met.

It is worth mentioning that when commenting upon acrostics, the Friedmans had further declared:

> Acrostic devices have the advantage . . . they leave no doubt that the author of the open text must also have been responsible for any hidden message—once it is established that one exists. . . . If, therefore, any genuine messages of this kind exist, they must be taken as conclusive. (Friedman & Friedman 1957)

Chance can therefore be ruled out as reason for the plaintext. Instead, it can be seen as a deliberate attempt by Thorpe, or an associate with the skills required for constructing a cryptogram, to alert a more liberal-minded posterity that Edward de Vere was William Shakespeare. And, as we shall now see, Oxford was not averse to establishing this truth for himself.

Shakespeare's Self-Identification

Since the presence of these grilles repeatedly asserts that Edward de Vere was William Shakespeare, it would not be surprising to find the poet exclaiming this truth for himself; the more especially if he was motivated by the threatened extinction of his name as author of works which he foresaw would live on long after his death. It is certainly evident in Sonnet 72, where he has come to realize the fact that very soon he will cease to be named by anyone for his written works.

These words indicate the reason for this. He has become compelled to

My name be buried where my body is,
And liue no more to shame nor me, nor you.
For I am shamd by that which I bring forth,
And so should you, to loue things nothing worth.

relinquish his name as author of his poetry because of the shame it would bring to his family members, and to the rank he held in society. His adoration for the youth he was addressing was known at court, and it was considered unnatural—even unbiblical. As Clinton Heylin remarked in 2009:

> If the sonnets are interpreted in what I think these days would be considered a fairly normal way, which is that they are about a homosexual affair with a peer, [Shakespeare] was committing several criminal offenses. . . . It would have been extremely socially sensitive to have a scandal come out that involved him and a male peer.

In Sonnet 2, the difference in age between the poet and his subject is revealed. When de Vere was 40 years of age, Southampton was 17, and Shaxpere—unpublished, and unknown—was 26. There is also the pertinent fact that in the late Sixteenth Century, the impropriety of someone from Shaxpere's class faulting a young earl, or addressing him as 'lovely boy' and then accusing him of dissoluteness and infidelity, as the sonnet writer does, would have been unthinkable (Ackroyd 2005). But for a senior earl and father-figure to the boy to have done this is understandable.

> When fortie Winters shall beseige thy brow,
> And digge deep trenches in thy beauties field,
> Thy youthes proud liuery so gaz'd on now,
> Wil be a totter'd weed of smal worth held:

In Sonnet 81 the author again bemoans his future loss of recognition. The sentiments he expresses are totally contrary to the fame, glory, and praise by which William Shakespeare is remembered today.

Unsurprisingly, therefore, in Sonnet 76, Dr. James Ferris was able to discover Edward de Vere's name, concealed where it would be most relevant—next to where the author speaks personally about his name.

> Or I shall liue your Epitaph to make,
> Or you suruiue when I in earth am rotten,
> From hence your memory death cannot take,
> Although in me each part will be forgotten.
> Your name from hence immortall life shall haue,
> Though I (once gone) to all the world must dye,
> The earth can yeeld me but a common graue,

The ciphertext in this sonnet begins with some interesting comments by the author. 'Why write I still all one, ever the same', he enquires? Ever the same can be rewritten as 'the same E Ver'. Also, 'ever the same' was Elizabeth I's personal motto: *Semper Idem*. This poem may be one of those occurrences when 'Shakespeare' was addressing the Queen with a sonnet. Elizabeth was far from being adverse to flattery, or to words of poetic love, when declared by members of her Court. She saw herself as the moon goddess of classical literature. And, what is more, the Queen's admiration for Lord Oxford is expressed in a letter she wrote to him (held by Cambridge University Library). It attests to her "favour in no ordinary way" for Oxford, but from "our soul," which

she adduces to his "outstanding intellect and virtue." It is of interest, therefore, to note that the poet actually addresses his subject as 'you', which was then a polite form of the singular (as with the French *vous*), and used when upper classes were conversing with each other;

> Why is my verse so barren of new pride?
> So far from variation or quicke change?
> Why with the time do I not glance aside
> To new found methods, and to compounds strange?
> Why write I still all one, euer the same,
> And keepe inuention in a noted weed,
> That euery word doth almost fel my name,
> Shewing their birth, and where they did proceed?
> O know sweet loue I alwaies write of you,
> And you and loue are still my argument:
> So all my best is dressing old words new,
> Spending againe what is already spent:
> For as the Sun is daily new and old,
> So is my loue still telling what is told,

whereas, the poet addressed the Earl of Southampton, when still a youth, as 'thou'. This, too, was entirely in keeping with the convention of that age: as when a superior addressed an inferior, or when a father or senior figure addressed a youth (Crystal & Crystal 2005).

Further down, the poet exclaims: 'That every word doth almost fel my name.' From this, it is again possible to discern how easily *that word* 'EVERY' does, indeed, almost fel (cause) E VER[E]Y. Fel is spelt with typical Elizabethan freedom; employing one 'l' instead of two, so as to ensure the plaintext retains its position. In Anglo Saxon usage, fell is derived from 'fyllan'—"causal of" (Skeat 1882).

The plaintext, LO, E DE VERE, is therefore meaningful and informative. And, although like other brief announcements, it lacks a verb, its placement between MY NAME and MY ARGUMENT would be expected to compensate for this: Since it is the poet speaking about himself. There is also the inescapable fact that the poet, having named himself, is emphasizing the number 17—the number of his earldom—with which to locate the first cell of his plaintext; that is, in the 9th cell of line 17. An ELS key of 14 also coincides perfectly with the number of lines in a sonnet; to which has been added the codeword RUNE; once again, making it consistent with the other grilles affirming de Vere as Shakespeare.

While it is conceivable that Oxford would have been willing to retain his anonymity, as was traditional among the nobility who wrote verse, it is less believable that he would have been willing to assign his entire literary output to a Warwickshire tinker in perpetuity. He was, after all, the most

```
      S  E  V  E  N  T  E  E  N
      U  E  R  Y  W  O  R  D  D  O  T  H  A  L
  ↓   M  O  S  T  F  E  L  M  Y  N  A  M  E  S
 17   H  E  W  I  N  G  T  H  E  I  R  B  I  R
      T  H  A  N  D  W  H  E  R  E  T  H  E  Y
      D  I  D  P  R  O  C  E  E  D  O  K  N  O
      W  S  W  E  E  T  L  O  U  E  I  A  L  W
      A  I  E  S  W  R  I  T  E  O  F  Y  O  U
      A  N  D  Y  O  U  A  N  D  L  O  U  E  A
      R  E  S  T  I  L  L  M  Y  A  R  G  U  M
      E  N  T  S  O  A  L  L  M  Y  B  E  S  T
      I  S  D  R  E  S  S  I  N  G  O  L  D  W
```

senior ranking nobleman in the Queen's court. It would have required no one less than Elizabeth herself to impress upon him the danger to her realm and to her position, if his expressions of love for the young Earl of Southampton should be construed by the public as improper.

Since Sonnet 76 is just one among 154 of Shakespeare's sonnets, the conclusion cannot be escaped that they were all written by the same person; with the majority addressed to the 3rd Earl of Southampton, with whom the author had become impassioned. This would therefore explain their secrecy, the censorship, and the seldom-mentioned fact that the poets and pamphleteers of that era never dared to refer to them after their brief publication in 1609.

The Faerie Queene Names Ignoto

To Ben Jonson, Leonard Digges, Thomas Thorpe, John Benson, and Edward de Vere, as contributors to William Shakespeare's true identity, Edmund Spenser can also be added. Upon completing his epic *Faerie Queene* in 1590, he prefixed it with several dedicatory sonnets that were addressed to members of the nobility: one of whom was the 17th Earl of Oxford, to whom his words of praise included an endearment, specially bestowed upon him by the Muses—the dwellers on Mount Helicon.

> And also for the love which thou doest beare
> To th' Heliconian ymps, and they to thee,
> They unto thee, and thou to them, most deare.

In response, Spenser received a number of verses, including one from a poet known to him, but who required anonymity: calling himself Ignoto (the Unknown). The verses he produced shine with the quality of Shakespeare in their composition; but, if they were by William Shaxpere, this fails to explain why he would have chosen to remain anonymous. And so the identity of Ignoto has never been established—that is, until recently, when Art Neuendorffer discovered de Vere's name.

Ignoto's poem begins with the opening lines of its first stanza concealing his true name by a rune cipher. This is important; because not only is the name joined to the codeword, RUNE, but it also obeys the cryptographic rule used by the Greek tragedians, in which they chose letters in their first two lines of verse, with which to name the author (see above). Digges and Benson, as we have already seen, were to later employ the same strategy for their own, secret ciphers. In fact, Digges's cipher is almost the same as Ignoto's, but with the vertical and horizontal encrypted information given in the reverse position. Both poets did, however, choose the same cell 17 for the first letter of their cipher.

To looke upon a worke of rare devise

The which a workman setteth out to view,

And not to yield it the deserved prise

That unto such a workmanship is dew,

Doth either prove the judgement to be naught,

or els doth shew a mind with envy fraught.

Ignoto's employment of this method of concealment clearly reveals the name, E. VERE, in plaintext: with RUNE (whisper, talk in secret) attached to it, and occupying the opening lines of his first stanza. It can therefore be tested for

→   **17**

```
T O L O O K E U P O N A W O R K E O F R A R E D E V I S E T H E W H
I C H A W O R K M A N S E T T E T H O U T T O V I E W A N D N O T T
O Y I E L D I T T H E D E S E R V E D P R I S E T H A T U N T O S U
C H A W O R K M A N S H I P I S D E W D O T H E I T H E R P R O V E
T H E J U D G E M E N T T O B E N A U G H T O R E L S D O T H S H E
W A M I N D W I T H E N V Y F R A U G H T
```

a chance effect as a conjoined acrostic of 8 letters, but with the additional condition that the first letter of the cipher must occupy the 17th cell of the first line.

Let it not pass notice, either, that the ELS of 34, used by Ignoto (de

Vere), was subsequently adopted more than thirty years later by Ben Jonson on the Stratford monument. For his key, Jonson purposely *inset* a single line of Latin, with a digraph reducing the number of letters from 35 to 34. Ignoto, however, used the number of letters occurring in the title of Spenser's epistle 'The Faerie Queene A Letter of the Authors', which was circulated prior to the poem's publication. However, Oxford may also have had in mind the double nature of his title, as a reason for doubling 17, the number of his earldom.

The aforementioned epistle sent by Spenser was intended to describe the story of the *Faerie Queene* as "cloudily enwrapped in Allegorical devises" so that it would not be misconstrued. The meaning behind these words is also apposite for the number of letters that provide the key to Ignoto's secret identity.

Strange Newes by Thomas Nashe

The close association between Edward de Vere's name, having emerged as plaintext in Sonnet 76, and its reappearance in Ignoto's commendatory poem to Edmund Spenser, may be attributed to the dates in which both sources were written. It is generally agreed that the sonnets were composed close to 1590. Ignoto's poem was written in 1589/90. This is important, because in 1592, Thomas Nashe became yet another contributor to the Earl of Oxford's right to be known as the playwright and poet, William Shakespeare.

Tom Nashe was prominent among the pamphleteers, poets, and play writers of the Elizabethan Age, and a person with whom Oxford had associated. Evidence for this is inferred by the sharp response Nashe gave Gabriel Harvey for the callous remarks he had written about Robert Greene, following this man's death in September 1592. Nashe told Harvey that he, in company with two others, had dined with Greene shortly before his death. He also reminded Harvey of the gold coins he received from Lord Oxford, when they were both studying at Cambridge.

Before his death, Greene had left scribbled notes referring to the three men with whom he had recently dined, calling them by nicknames: a common practice at the time. First was 'young Juvenal' (Tom Nashe, aged 24); 'Gracer' was Christopher Marlowe, who received his degree from Cambridge by 'special grace'; and 'sweet Saint George' would have been entirely appropriate for the Earl of Oxford as an aptronym in 1592. That is, if he were the author of *Henry VI Part I & III*. Both plays resound with shouts of 'Saint George'; and the same cry is repeated several times more in *Richard III*. It is also heard in *The Taming of the Shrew*, written in the same period. Nashe seems to have been aware of this when he further commented in his letter to Harvey: "I and one of my fellows Will Monox

were with Greene at that fateful banquet." But, knowing that Harvey would recognize no one by that name, he added a clue: "Hast thou never heard of him and his great dagger?" Only then would Harvey have understood. He had already been reminded by Nashe of the gold coins he received from the Earl of Oxford, and he would now remember it was Oxford's public duty, as Lord High Chamberlain, to carry the Sword of State (his great dagger)—hence, Nashe's anagrammatic Will Monox, which is composed of three abbreviations: M. Will. Oxon. (Master William Oxenford); but it would have left Harvey puzzled as to why Nashe had joined Lord Oxford to Master William. It was a typical Nashe jest. Oxford was, at that time, about to assume the pen name of Master William Shakespeare for his forthcoming poems *Venus and Adonis* and *Lucrece.*

Nashe would have learned about the intended transfer of authorship between Oxford and Shaxpere at the banquet he attended in company with fellow writers Marlowe and Greene, for it would have been where they were told about Oxford's pen name Shakespeare; and how Shakespeare was to be identified as William Shaxpere, together with the plays and poems Oxford had written.

The purpose of the banquet is therefore apparent; it was to alert Oxford's three guests of the imminent arrival of this new poet, William Shakespeare: to wit, himself: but with Will Shaxpere acting in his own conceit as Oxford's allonym. These three writers, foremost at that time, were therefore asked to leave Shaxpere alone (which they certainly did) and avoid mentioning in public what was intended. But the plan misfired. After the banquet, Greene suddenly took ill and died. Notes he had made concerning Shaxpere fell into the hands of Henry Chettle, who naturally failed to understand them. He believed Greene's description of Shaxpere referred to Shakespeare, and he alerted his readers to this in Greene's *groats-worth of witte*: making it appear that Greene was envious of Shakespeare, and he had made this known before he died. It caused a minor rumpus at the time, with 'Shakespeare' having to protest his innocence. Much has been written on the subject of Chettle's error ever since.

Nashe, for his part, set about the task of secretly referring to the truth about Shakespeare in *Strange Newes,* which he began by addressing his dedicatee with innuendoes that point to Oxford's' lifestyle: both as a man and a writer.

"To the most copious Carminist of our time" [carminis is Latin for, 'a composition in verse': hence, carminist, a versifier of stories;—most copious would refer to *Venus and Adonis,* with 199 stanzas, and *The Rape of Lucrece*, which has 265; one at least of these two epics, if not both, had been written by this time], "and famous persecutor of Priscian" [the name of the

> To the most copious <u>Carminist</u>
> or our time, and famous persecutor of *Priscian*, his
> verie friend Maister <u>*Apis lapis*</u>: Tho. *Nashe* wish-
> *eth new strings to his old tawnie <u>Purse</u>, and*
> *all honourable increase of acquain-*
> *tance in the Cellar.*

5th century grammarian whose book became the basis for teaching Latin in the Middle Ages: but which Shakespeare used for a comedy sketch in *The Merry Wives of Windsor* (1592)], "his verie friend" [a play on Ver[i]e, his friend's name]. "Maister Apis lapis" [lapis is mentioned in the Priscian comedy scene. Apis refers to the Egyptian equivalent of Jove. Disguised as a bull, Jove carried off Europa. This was parodied by Falstaff in *Merry Wives of Windsor*; when, disguised as a stag, Falstaff tried to carry off Mistresses Page and Ford at a tryst in Windsor forest. Both *Apis* and *lapis* therefore take their meaning from comic scenes in this Shakespeare play, written that same year.]: "Tho. Nashe wisheth new strings to his old tawnie Purse" [Reading tawnie and blue were the colours of Oxford's livery; apart from which, his purse had been emptied by debt after his wife's death in 1588], "and all honourable increase of acquaintance in the Cellar.

This last phrase confirms Nashe's recent acquaintance with 'Apis lapis' as a drinking companion, and he expresses the hope it will continue. De Vere was known to be an entertaining companion and *raconteur* when in his cups. There is also strong evidence that Nash acted as Oxford's secretary in the collegiate atmosphere of Wilton House: the home of Mary Sidney and her sons, the Earls of Pembroke and Montgomery: to whom Shakespeare's *First Folio* was dedicated.

In 1592, the German Count Mümpelgart was due to visit the Queen at Windsor Castle, and to attend the royal garter ceremony. For entertainment, Elizabeth is said to have requested 'Shakespeare' to write a play showing Falstaff in love. Several different reports confirm that the play had to be ready in two weeks. This bears witness to the haste in which it was prepared, since it is written mainly in prose. In which case, a secretary would have been essential. And it would explain Nashe's boast in 1592, when he wrote of his return from "the country" with "my Lord."

The Merry Wives of Windsor, apart from being set in Windsor, includes several accurate references to the German party's visit to England, including the garter ceremony and the German party's misadventure when being

branded as horse thieves. All of which points to the play's composition coinciding with the German visit in 1592.

Nashe then delivered his *coup de grâce* by enciphering in *Strange Newes* the name of the person he had been secretly addressing as Apis lapis—E VERE: together with the codeword RUNE, and the commencement of his cipher in the 7th cell, so as to coincide with the final letter of E de Vere. He also issued a challenge—as Jonson would do later—to put his disclosure to the test.

Nashe's method for concealment was the Cardano grille; ensuring that it conformed to the Attic tradition of the author's name secretly occupying the opening lines of ciphertext.

The implication of his cipher must once have seemed plain to Nashe at the time he arranged it. In 1592, Oxford was about to begin publishing under the name of William Shakespeare, with his first poem, *Venus and Adonis*. It would not be long before the deception became known. For, although Shaxpere might act the poet on Oxford's behalf: Once he was inveigled into setting pen to paper, the truth would surely be revealed.

This possibility had apparently been foreseen. When John Aubrey began collecting facts about Shakespeare for his *Brief Lives*, he made a note that pertains to this. In a personal memorandum, he observed: "he was not a company keeper lived in Shoreditch, wouldn't be debauched, & if invited to writ: he was in paine." Practical advice for anyone with a secret to keep. It also explains why Shaxpere was forced to take shelter in a London friary, under the protection of the nobility, after publication of *Venus & Adonis* and *The Rape of Lucrece*.

Nashe's grille, with its plaintext message: LO SO TEST E VERE, and the codeword RUNE, as first shown by Art Neuendorffer, include 128 letters of ciphertext, 17 of which are plaintext. E VERE has an ELS of 15; and LO SO TEST has an ELS of 12. Because Nashe's title includes 15 typescript characters in enlarged, bold print, it is unlikely to be coincidental that this happens to be the key to 'E VERE'. And since *Strange Newes* has 12 letters set directly above the clue to the first key, this is aptly placed for acceptance as the key to, LO SO TEST. Twelve also has the advantage of being the number of letters in Edward de Vere—the object of the test. Added to this, Nashe has complied with what has now become the convention of selecting the first cell for an intended cipher in either cell 17, or in the cell that spells the family

Strange Newes,

Of the intercept-

ing certaine Letters, and a Con-
uoy of Verfes, as they were going Privilie to
victuall the Low Countries.

Vnda impellitur vnda.

```
V  E  R  E                    E   d   e
                          S   T   R
A  N  G  E  N  E  W  E  S  O  F  T  H
E  I  N  T  E  R  C  E  P  T  I  N  G
C  E  R  T  A  I  N  E  L  E  T  T  E
R  S  A  N  D  A  C  O  N  V  O  Y  O
F  V  E  R  S  E  S  A  S  T  H  E  Y
W  E  R  E  G  O  I  N  G  P  R  I  V
I  L  I  E  T  O  V  I  C  T  U  A  L
L  T  H  E  L  O  W  C  O  U  N  T  R
I  E  S  U  N  D  A  I  M  P  E  L  L
I  T  U  R  U  N  D  A
```

name of the 17th Earl of Oxford.

Nashe's grille contains three acrostics of 8, 5, and 4 letters, totaling 17, in close union. This is of special interest, because they are also complementary. A four-letter acrostic would not normally excite attention. But when that same acrostic occurs, without exception, on all eight grilles that refer to Edward de Vere, it intuitively overcomes the suspicion of a chance occurrence; the more especially because of its archaic meaning of attending a secret. That secret is explained by the other two acrostics—LO SO TEST E VERE as Apis lapis; the carminist to whom Nashe has dedicated *Strange Newes*.

Concluding Remarks

It was William and Elizebeth Friedman who drew attention to the difference between scientific evidence and arguments shared by historians and literary critics concerning Shakespeare. The Friedmans maintained the historical argument can never produce certainty either way; for there is always a counter-argument, always an appeal to the lack of evidence, a counter-interpretation of what evidence there is, much inference and some coincidence. This is now understood as 'confirmation bias'; for which enough research will tend to support a professed theory. Those affected will always seek to interpret new information in a way that confirms preconceptions and avoids information and interpretations that contradict prior beliefs. It was precisely these reasons that caused the Friedmans to seek the "more certain ground of cryptology," so as to overcome personal bias.

It is therefore cryptanalysis that may be said to have resolved the Shakespeare authorship question—courtesy of Ben Jonson, Edmund Spenser, Thomas Nashe, Leonard Digges, Thomas Thorpe, John Benson,

and of course Edward de Vere, himself; whereas, historians and literary critics have only succeeded in raising the dust to obscure the truth.

It was reasons such as these that caused the Friedmans to affirm they would be content, only to ask,

> whether the plaintexts make sense, and the cryptosystem and the specific keys can be, or have been, applied without ambiguity. Then, provided that independent investigation shows an answer to be unique, and to have been reached by valid means, we shall accept it, however much we shock the learned world by doing so. (Friedman & Friedman 1957)

Each one of the eight rune ciphers provides factual evidence concerning Shakespeare's identity in acrostic form. The inscriptions, letters, dedications, and tributes to 'Shakespeare', and even two of the poet's own verses, have either made this known, outright, or they have intimated it as fact—Edward de Vere was William Shakespeare.

If it be asked why so much time and energy was spent in the construction of these ciphers, the answer must be the innate, human desire for justice and truth: if not in their own time, then at some future date. But it was also a task attended by peril to the encoder. As Gerard Kilroy (2005) explained—

> Never have books or writing or letters been as dangerous as they were between 1581 and 1606; proclamation after proclamation forbade seditious writings; books were seized in midnight raids, and men were questioned for copying poems. Stephen Vallenger lost his ears for printing one work, and subsequently died.

Ben Jonson and Thomas Nashe both spent seven weeks in Fleet Prison for their part in writing *The Isle of Dogs.* At another time, Jonson was arrested for the alleged "popery and treason" appearing in his play *Sejanus.* John Marston and George Chapman were also arrested for having written just two paragraphs in *Eastward Ho*, thought to be slanderous. They were then told they would have their ears and noses cut. Edmund Spenser was exiled to Ireland for having caricatured Lord Burghley in an animal fable. In Stowe's *Annals of London* for 1601, Stowe described the public whipping of five citizens, before their ears were cut off. Their crime was to have uttered slanderous words against Lord Burghley. The pamphleteer, John Stubbes, together with his publisher, both had their right hands publicly amputated at the wrist with a butcher's cleaver and a mallet, for having published an opinion about Queen Elizabeth's proposed marriage to the French prince, Hercule duc d'Alençon.

Understandably, against threats of disfigurement, "Writing went

underground, between the lines, into the paper and into code" (Kilroy 2005). Evidence for this can be found in the rune ciphers, where the plaintext exposes the truth of a politically induced coverup by the most powerful man in England, Lord Burghley. His relationship, as father-in-law to Oxford, and his royal appointment as guardian to his youthful ward, Lord Southampton, made it imperative that he disassociate himself from the threat of scandal posed by their loving relationship, expressed in the sonnets. Censorship was immediate, but not long-lasting. And so was born the idea of misdirecting public attention from the author, by imposing it upon a person far removed in status from the ruling class, William Shaxpere. After Burghley's death, this misdirection continued under the governing power of his son, Robert—the protective uncle of his nieces: de Vere's daughters, and their family name. A generation or two further on, the acceptance of Shaxpere's authorship had, by then, already moulded itself into a part of English history, to be accepted by the general public. Thereafter, by the time the theatres reopened in the second half of the Seventeenth Century, following the bloodbath of the English Civil War, the death of Cromwell, and the Restoration of the Monarchy in 1660, Shaxpere's authorship was already accepted as part of the past, and the way forward to join with the Restoration Comedies that welcomed in the more liberal society of Charles II. It was not until the early part of the Eighteenth Century that Nicholas Rowe provided some account of William Shakespeare's life from the hearsay of a past age (Rowe 1709). Since then, nothing whatsoever has been discovered to prove that William of Stratford-upon-Avon ever put pen to paper, unless one includes the 6 blotted failures to complete the letters of his signature. Yet, even with these, except for the two on his will, it is impossible to prove they were written by the same hand, since nearly all the letters are formed differently; so said Jane Cox of the Public Records Office in London (1964).

History's account of the Shaxpere family, "Willelmum Shaxpere"— marriage license in 1582—husband of "Anne Shaxpere"—debt of £2 in 1601—and parents of "Susanna Shaxpere"—marriage register in 1607) and Judeth (who signed with a cross)—is entirely without witness to William's education. The name is exempt from any reference to literature or to a single writer in the city where he worked; and it records not one word of recognition to identify Shaxpere as William Shakespeare: especially at the time of his death. Legal documents identify him for tax evasion, for restraint against violence, for recovery of debts, as a witness in court, and for the rights and purchase of real estate. In short, his life was unexceptional: just mundane. The tradition that he was Shakespeare is as empty of factual evidence as the grave in which he was laid to rest is depleted of human remains.

This is important, because arguments for Shaxpere having been

Shakespeare are always made in one direction; from the works of Shakespeare to an author known by that name who is identified as Shaxpere. His empty life therefore becomes an easy receptacle for allowing anyone to construct ideas of their own, unfettered by the inconvenience of recorded fact. However, these arguments do not work in reverse. One cannot commence with Shaxpere's life, devoid of a single connexion to literature, scholarship, or education, and then use this as a foundation stone for writing the works of Shakespeare, because the same could be said of almost anyone with his background. But with Edward de Vere having now been named seven times acrostically, especially in an age when acrostics were in fashion, it is with the consistent use of these acrostics appearing in well-published dedications to Shakespeare that arguments for his authorship, and the reason for secrecy, can at the very least be shown to work in both directions.

Notes

Dr. John Rollett's discovery of the 6-2-4 word skip, together with his discovery of Henry Wriothesley's name enciphered into Thomas Thorpe's letter of Dedication to Shakespeare was examined by three cryptologists from the U.S. National Security Agency, who subsequently recommended it for publication. William Friedman and Elizebeth Friedman's book *The Shakespearean Ciphers Examined* was limited to codes thought to confirm Francis Bacon as Shakespeare. Cardano Grilles were never considered; neither was the Stratford monument, nor Thomas Thorpe's Dedication to the Sonnets, despite the eye-catching challenges they present to cryptanalysts.

Acknowledgments

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