

‘Thy Stratford Monument’ – Revisited

Holistic Interpretation by Alexander Waugh

(from a talk given at the DVS meeting on 27 September 2014)

That the Shakespeare Monument has been significantly altered since it was first fixed to the wall in the Holy Trinity Church at Stratford-upon-Avon is beyond reasonable doubt. It was made by a London-based Dutch sculptor, Gerard Janssens, sometime between 1618 and 1623 and surviving documentary evidence proves that the quill-pen and paper, which identify Shakspeare as a writer on the monument today, formed no part of the original design while the distinctive style of Cavalier moustache now worn on the face of the bust, can be confidently dated to the late 1640s or early 1650s (Fig. 1).



Fig. 1 Shakespeare’s monument today

The edifice seems to have been repaired, modified, beautified, whitewashed, repainted or, in various ways, tampered with on at least eight

occasions between 1649 and 1861. Our earliest image is a sketch, drawn by the antiquary and Warwickshire historian William Dugdale that dates, it is believed, from July 1634 (Fig. 2).

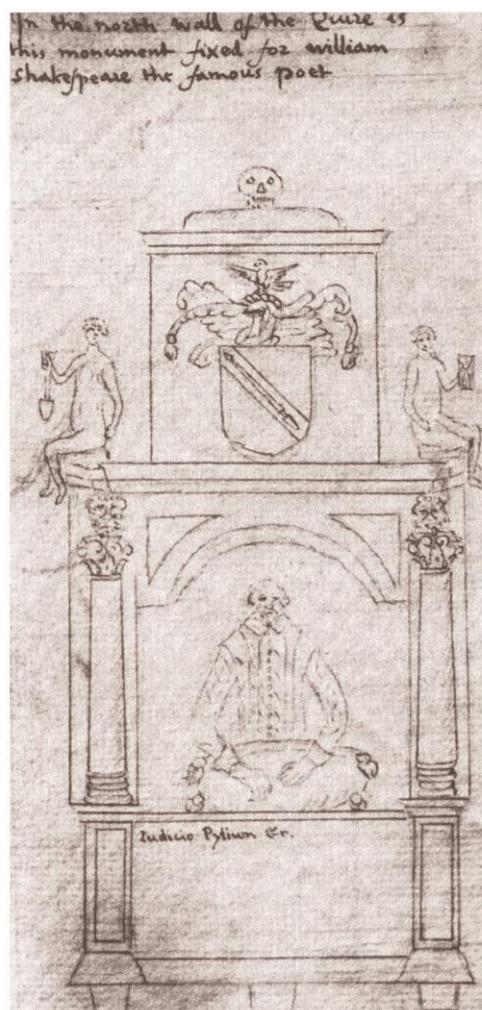


Fig. 2 Dugdale’s drawing c. 1634

Now in the possession of Dugdale’s lineal descendant, Sir William Dugdale of Merevale Hall, Warwickshire, this important document is the only surviving image of the Stratford monument that predates the first modifications undertaken to repair

Civil War damage to the chancel at Holy Trinity Church between November 1649 and late summer 1650 – the precise period in which the cut of moustache that is today seen on the face of the bust was considered most fashionable.ⁱ

Although Dugdale's drawing is captioned 'In the north wall of the Quire is this monument fixed for William Shakespeare the famous poet,' it is seldom vaunted in the Stratfordian cause, for the simple reason that its central figure is depicted clutching a wool-pack, suggesting a commercial broker, and not (as per the present quill-and-paper effigy) a 'famous poet.'ⁱⁱ The artist's impression of the architecture is accurately scaled and includes some precise, even fine, detail, but the central figure appears to be out of proportion. Shakspeare's head is too small for a normal human being, he has no neck, his shoulders are grossly sloped, his arms elongated and his left hand resembles a bestial claw.



Fig. 3 Detail of Dugdale's drawing, c. 1634

That these monkeys' heads were intentionally drawn, and not some freak accident, is further supported by the fact that each is designed with obvious care to detail, using identical line structure; that each represents a 'capital' (from the Latin *caput* meaning 'head') and that either may be connected (without rescaling) to the ape-like torso to complete the picture of a clothed monkey (Fig. 4).

The two leopards' heads above the monkey-capitals seem to have been deliberately positioned to alert the viewer to the fact that the head of Shakspeare has been misplaced, thus suggesting one of the two monkey heads as a satirical alternative.ⁱⁱⁱ (Fig. 6 & note iii).

The figure is hardly human, but maybe it was not supposed to be. Since Dugdale was a revered heraldic draughtsman is it not possible that this apparently flawed image of a person is in fact an accurate picture, not of man, but of a clothed ape, and that these five 'distortions' (head, neck, shoulders, arms and hands), that do not appear on the monument today, gave a deliberate and accurate impression of the monument as it appeared to Dugdale in July 1634?

For corroboration I urge the reader to examine the tops of each pillar, which, at a cursory glance, look like the traditional acanthus leaves of typical Corinthian capitals but, on closer inspection, each capital reveals the gaping face of an ape as shown in Fig. 3.

But why should the Stratford monument need to make cryptic comparisons between William Shakespeare and a jacketed wool-pack clutching ape? A search for the answer leads directly to Ben Jonson's witty epigram 'On Poet Ape' first published in 1616, which is believed by many to be a sonnet about the player-broker William Shakspeare.

The epigram is not difficult to understand but it may be helpful to consider the following five definitions before reading it:

1. 'Poet-Ape' was used by Sidney, Greene, Jonson and others to mean a player or actor. 'To ape' means to imitate or mimic, hence a 'poet-ape' means an actor (not a writer) who is seen as a mimic of the poet or playwright;

2. To 'buy the reversion of old plays' means to buy up rights to plays whose copyright has lapsed;
3. 'Whose works' means 'the things that he does' – not to be confused with works of art or literature;
4. 'After-times' means Posterity;
5. The word 'fleece' puns on 'sheepskin' and 'to fleece' (meaning to rip off by overcharging) - hence 'Foole, as if halfe eyes will not know the fleece' means 'Fool, as if people will not spot the scam with their eyes half shut.'

*Poore Poet-Ape, that would be thought our chiefe,
Whose works are eene the fripperie of wit,
From brockage is become so bold a thiefe,
As we, the rob'd, leave rage, and pittie it.
At first he makes low shifts, would picke and gleane,
Buy the reversion of old playes; now growne
To a little wealth, and credit in the scene,
He takes up all, makes each man's wit his own.
And told of this, he slights it. Tut, such crimes,
The sluggish gaping auditor deuoures;
He markes not whose twas first; and after-times
May judge it to be his, as well as ours.
Foole, as if halfe eyes will not know the fleece
From locks of wool, or shreds from the whole piece.*



Fig. 4

Jonson explains that 'Poet-Ape' has been buying up rights to old plays, making money out of them, aggrandising himself in society, while allowing the unenlightened and unlettered ('the sluggish gaping auditor') to assume that he is the author of plays actually written by others. That Jonson's epigram takes the form of a Shakespearean sonnet may be a subtle hint that 'Poet-Ape,' in passing off others' plays as his own, bears a similar name to that used by the real author of many well-known plays and poems.

Jonson's explanation of Poet-Ape's activities may also help to explain how the so-called 'apocryphal' Shakespearean plays - *The Life of Sir John Old-castle* (1600), *The London Prodigal* (1605), *The Yorkshire Tragedy* (1608) etc - appeared as printed quartos under the name 'William Shakespeare', often bearing performance histories connecting them to the King's Men and the Globe Theatre in which Shakspere of Stratford was known to be respectively a fellow and shareholder.^{iv}

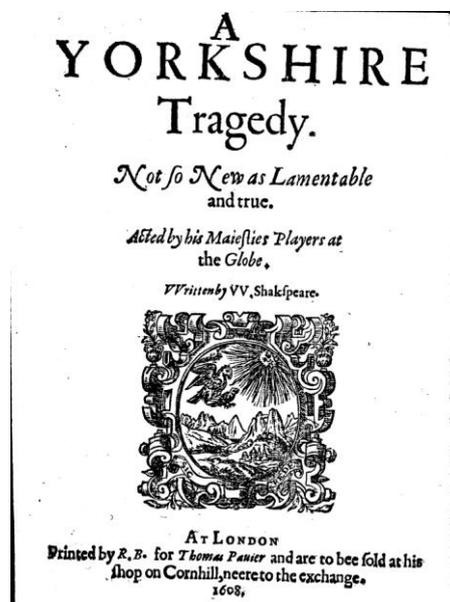


Fig. 5 'Shakespeare' a pseudonym

Evidence suggests that Shakspere was illiterate, or at best, semi-literate. Buying the rights to a play is a business deal, not a literary activity, and there is no need to assume that purchasing these rights required literacy on behalf of the broker.

He had, presumably, seen the plays staged and had possibly even performed in them himself with the King's Men. He may have suggested cuts or embellishments. Once he had secured the rights he could take the manuscripts to the printers and ensure that he was credited on the title page. That his own name was similar, if not identical, to a pseudonym that had been used by the poet and playwright, Edward de Vere, worked especially to his advantage. Many of these plays had nothing whatsoever to do with de Vere (Fig. 5).

Further comparison between Dugdale's drawing of the Shakespeare monument and Jonson's 'On Poet-Ape' reveals a surprising number of parallels:

- (1) Both advert to a broker (*poem*: 'brockage' – *drawing*: a commodity sack);
- (2) Both suggest the central figure is trading wool (*poem*: 'locks of wool' – *drawing*: a wool-pack);
- (3) Both suggest that his activities have made him rich (*poem*: 'grown to a little wealth' – *drawing*: a lavish monument);
- (4) Both imply that he has risen in society (*poem*: 'grown credit in the scene' – *drawing*: Shakspere's crest and coat of arms);
- (5) Both combine the concept of 'poet' and 'ape' to describe an actor or 'player' (*poem*: 'On Poet-Ape' – *drawing*: 'famous poet' in caption and ape torso in sketch);
- (6) Both suggest the deception of future generations (*poem*: 'after-times may judge it to be his' – *monument*: a lasting stone that depicts a so-called 'poet' holding a wool-pack).^v

Not all of these 'Poet-Ape' parallels are preserved in Wenceslas Hollar's representation, first published in Dugdale's *Antiquities of Warwickshire* of 1656 and believed to have been engraved from Dugdale's drawing (Fig. 4); but the apelike shape of Shakspere's torso (now more gorilla than gibbon) is unmistakable.

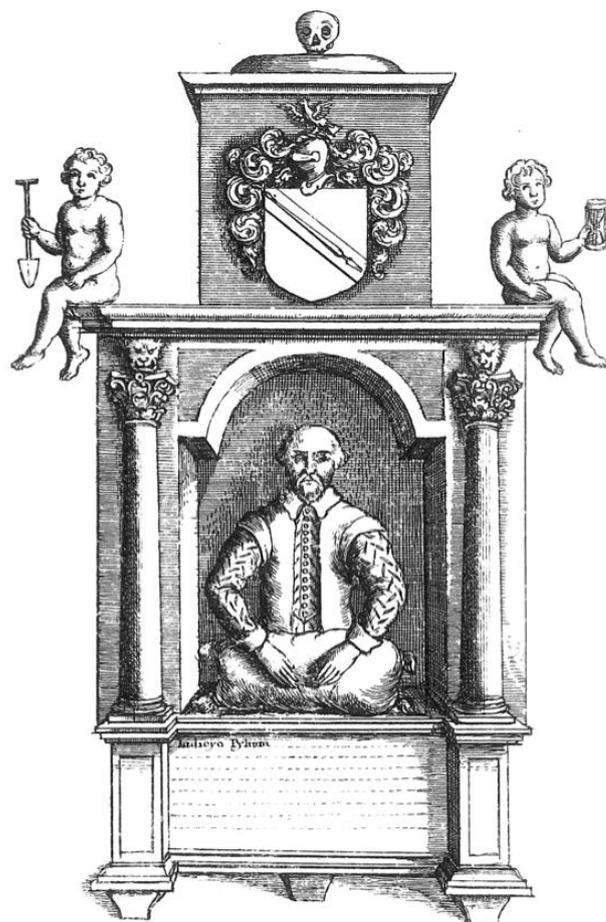


Fig. 6. Hollar's Drawing, c. 1656

The faces on the capitals are gone, but the pards' heads (not on the monument today) remain. The apes' faces may have been replaced during the 1649-50 reparations, when the new 'human' bust with quill, paper and fashionable moustache replaced the old image.

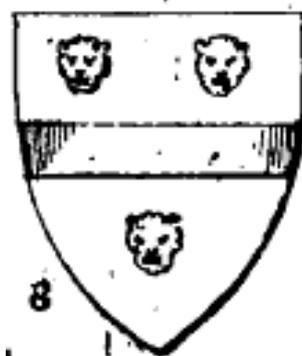


Fig. 7 Stratford pards (see note iii)

Let us turn now to the inscription, which (as may be deduced from the first two words shown on Dugdale's 1634 sketch) must have been very similar, if not identical, to the wording as it appears on the monument today (Fig. 8).

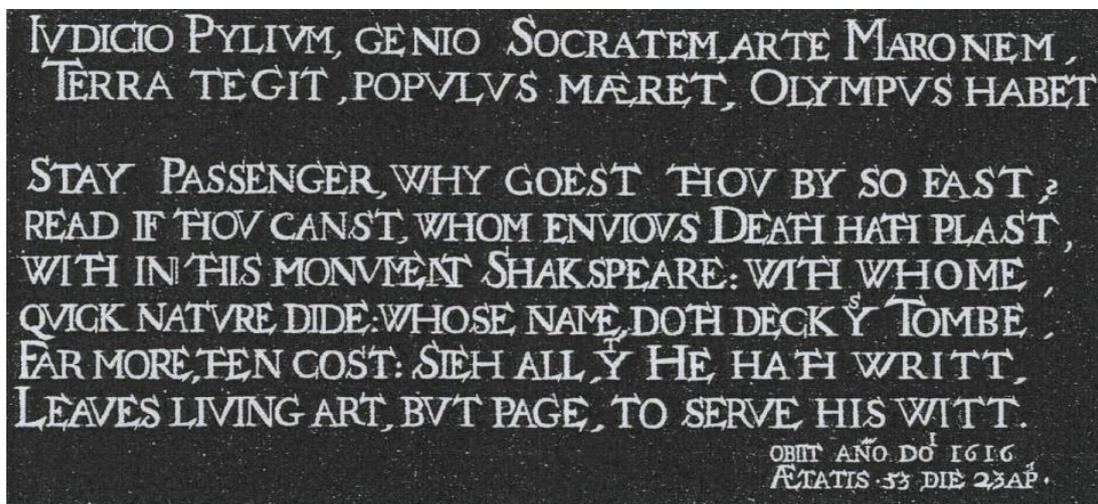


Fig. 8 Inscription on Monument

*Judicio Pylum, genio Socratem, arte Maronem
Terra tegit, populus maeret, Olympus habet*

*Stay Passenger, why goest thou by so fast?
Read if thou canst, whom envious Death hath placed,
With in this monument Shakspeare: with whom,
Quick nature died: whose name doth deck this Tomb,
Far more than cost: since all that he hath writ,
Leaves living art, but page, to serve his wit.*

These seemingly simple verses, consisting of two Latin lines set above three rhyming English couplets, have defied convincing analysis for nearly four centuries. Stratfordians, frustrated at the epitaph's failure to mention that Shakspeare was an actor, a poet or a playwright, generally avoid discussion of these words while anti-Stratfordians have made exorbitant attempts to detect hidden cyphers revealing the true identity of the author. The real name of 'William Shakespeare' may well be encrypted in the inscription, but, if this is the case, it has so far eluded detection.^{vi}

The Latin couplet is usually translated into English as follows:

*A Pylus in judgement, a Socrates in genius and a Maro in art,
Earth covers him, people mourn him and Olympus holds him.*

But this translation is both clumsy and inaccurate for as much as we may wish to squeeze 'him' (ie Shakespeare) into the lines, this cannot be done. In simple terms the Latin consists of three ablatives (*judicio*, *genio* and *arte*), three accusatives (*Pylum*, *Socratem* and *Maronem*), three nominatives (*Terra*, *populus* and *Olympus*) and three verbs (*tegit*, *maeret* and *habet*). A correct English translation should therefore read:

*Earth covers, people mourn and Olympus holds
A Pylus in judgement, a Socrates in genius and a Maro in art.*

Adding 'him' (Shakespeare) as the object of the sentence leaves the true objects (Pylus, Socrates and Maro), incomprehensibly disconnected from the subjects and verbs of the sentence. Since Shakespeare cannot be grammatically fitted into the sentence, we must accept this Latin couplet either as a decorative headpiece that is divorced from the English verse that follows it, or as an *indirect* reference to Shakespeare who is compared, *by inference*, to 'a Pylus in wisdom, a Socrates in genius and a Maro in art.' Given that these lines appear on the Shakespeare monument this is by no means an absurd assumption – but is it correct? Shakespeare was never especially praised for his judgement, nor was he, by anyone else, reckoned a 'Socrates in

genius,' and although Maro (Virgil) was a poet, Shakespeare was not noticeably influenced by Virgil, nor was he often compared with him. I shall address the question as to whether Shakespeare was meant by 'a Pylius in wisdom, a Socrates in genius and a Maro in art,' in the course of my exegesis of the whole epitaph.

1. STAY PASSENGER, WHY GOES THOU BY SO FAST?

Ancient Romans set inscribed stones along roadsides to remind passing traffic of their dead. '*Siste Viator*' ('stay passenger') was a common injunction carved upon them. Ben Jonson frequently alluded to this. In his *Epitaph on Henry Delaware* he echoed the Stratford monument's 'Stay Passenger...read if thou canst' with 'If, Passenger, thou canst but read: Stay, drop a tear for him that's dead.' This and other similarities with Jonson's verse have led several scholars to the conclusion that Jonson was the author of this epitaph.^{vii}

2. READ IF THOU CANST, WHOM ENVIOUS DEATH HATH PLAC'T WITH IN THIS MONUMENT SHAKSPEARE:

Dugdale's sketch and Hollar's engraving (Figs 2 & 6) confirm that the original monument was mounted by two cherubs - one carrying a spade, the other an hour-glass. A drawing by George Vertue, now in the British Museum reveals that both cherubs were in their original positions holding their original artifacts in 1737, but the figures have since been changed so that it is no longer possible either to appreciate the original symbol of Truth or to behold its obvious meaning that 'Truth is unearthed with Time.' But what truth, we may ask, was the monument alluding to? What are we supposed to be unearthing?

'Read' can be interpreted in the sense of 'figure out'. The *OED* gives among primary definitions 'to interpret or discern'. 'Read if thou canst' suggests that something cryptic or difficult might be hidden here.

At first glance 'with in this monument' is a problem. How can Shakespeare be enshrined *within* a monument that is clearly a wall plaque with insufficient space to accommodate a corpse? But note how 'within' is carved as two words. This allows the reader to separate 'with' from the phrase 'in this monument' which, in turn, endows the latter with the meaning: 'written on this monument.' Remember that messages are 'writ *in* stone' not '*on* stone' and it was normal for Jacobean authors to describe writing as 'carved in' or 'engraved in' rather than 'on' a monument.^{viii} The sequence of words 'with in this monument Shakspeare' makes no syntactical sense and thus prompts the reader to rearrange the sentence so that 'Read if thou canst, whom envious Death hath placed with in this monument Shakspeare' becomes (by paraphrase): 'Work out from this monument (if you can) with whom envious Death hath placed Shakspeare.' In other words the inscription is challenging the reader to figure out beside whom Shakespeare has been buried. Those who suppose him to have been placed on his own under a carved stone in the chancel of Holy Trinity Church will have difficulty proceeding beyond this point, but let the rest of us advance.

To answer to the Monument's riddle we must return to the question that has puzzled Shakespearean scholars for centuries: 'What has William Shakespeare to do with the 'judgment of Pylius, the genius of Socrates and the art of Maro?' Pylius was reputedly a wise king who never wrote anything in his life; Socrates a philosopher who also wrote nothing (his thoughts were merely reported by others) and although it is true that Maro (Virgil) was a poet, he was not one to whom Shakespeare was especially indebted or with whom he was conventionally compared.

The English poet most often likened to Virgil was Edmund Spenser. Spenser extolled Virgil as a 'God' among the poets and confessed his indebtedness to him both in the *Shepheardes Calender* (1579) and *Colin Clouts come home again* (1595). Spenser was compared at length with Virgil by William Webbe in his *Discourse of English Poetrie* (1586) and in Francis Meres' *Palladis Tamia* (1598)

he was praised as the ‘imitatour’ of Virgil. He was acclaimed by Thomas Nashe (1592) as ‘the Virgil of England’ and by William Covell in *Polimanteia* (1595) as ‘my Virgil’; William Vaughan (1598) described Spenser singing ‘in full Virgilian voice.’ Spenser was compared by Thomas Freeman to Virgil in 1614, labeled ‘our modern Maro’ by Robert Burton in 1624 and ‘our English Virgil’ by Sir Kenelm Digby in 1628.^{ix}

Likewise, if Shakespeare was never associated with the ‘genius of Socrates’ (*genio Socratem*), which English poet was? Geoffrey Chaucer was described by his contemporary, Thomas Usk as a philosopher, and John Leland (c. 1545) called him ‘*gravis philosophus*’ (a grave philosopher). According to Robert Vaughan (1652) ‘Chaucer is ranked amongst the Hermetick Philosophers.’ When Francis Thynne (1544-1608) compared Chaucer’s genius to ‘the heavenly mind of prudent Socrates’ in his poem ‘Upon the picture of Chaucer’ he was echoing a sentiment that can be traced back to the 14th Century. In 1385 the French poet, Eustache Deschamps (1340?-1410?) wrote a ballad addressed to Chaucer extolling his writing and morals that begins with the line ‘*O Socrates plains de philosophie*’ ‘O Socrates, filled with philosophy.’ Deschamps’ eulogy continues: ‘a Seneca in morals, an Aulus Gellius in practice, and a mighty Ovid in your poetry...Great translator, noble Geoffrey Chaucer.’ The popular 1542 edition of the *Works of Geoffrey Chaucer* contains the most famous association of Chaucer with the ‘genius of Socrates’ - a Latin epitaph, commissioned from Stephanus Surigonus by the printer, William Caxton, that was once engraved upon a white stone tablet erected on a pillar by Chaucer’s grave.^x It reads (in part):

...*Hunc latuisse virum nil, si tot opuscula vertes,
Dixeris, egregijs quae decorata modis,
Socratis ingenium, vel fontes Philosophiae,
Quicquid & arcani dogmata sacra ferunt.
Et quascumque velis, tenuit dignissimus artes:
Hic vates parvo conditus hoc tumulo.*

[Translation: There is nothing in which this man [Chaucer] was not distinguished, whose illustrious works are embellished with excellent modes of expression, with the genius of Socrates [*Socratis ingenium*], the springs of philosophy, with all the secrets which holy doctrine contains and all the worthy arts you could wish for: all here buried with this most worthy poet in this small grave.]

What then of ‘*Judicio Pylum*’? When was it ever suggested that Shakespeare was ‘judicious’ or a ‘Pylus in judgement’?^{xi} Since no sensible explanation as to how ‘*Judicio Pylum*’ relates to William Shakespeare has been forthcoming, which poet and playwright, we may ask, is most likely to have been invoked by this allusion? Francis Beaumont (1584-1616) came from a legal background (his father was a judge); he studied law at the Inner Temple and in his collaborations with fellow playwright John Fletcher, Beaumont was regarded as the partner of ‘judgement.’ Fletcher, according to John Dryden, ‘submitted all his writings to Beaumont’s censure and ‘tis thought, used his judgement, in correcting if not contriving his plots.’ In Langbaine’s *Account of the English Dramatic Poets* (1691) Beaumont is three times referred to as ‘Judicious Beaumont,’ and once as Fletcher’s ‘Judicious Partner...a Master of a good Wit and a better Judgement.’

We learn that ‘Fletcher’s Wit was equal to Beaumont’s judgement’ and later that ‘Fletcher’s Fancy and Beaumont’s Judgement combin’d, produc’d such Plays, as will remain Monuments of their Wit to all Posterity.’ In Thomas Fuller’s posthumously published *Worthies* (1662) Beaumont is referred to as the ‘ballast of Judgement.’ In *Anglorum speculum* (1684) the author (‘G.S’) also comments that Beaumont and Fletcher ‘raised the English to equal the Athenian, Beaumont being the *ballast of judgment*, Fletcher the *sail of Phantasie*.’ Beaumont is labelled ‘Judicious Beaumont’ by playwright and poet, Aston Cockayne (1653), as well as by Robert Anton in his *Philosophers Satyrs* published in 1616 - possibly during Beaumont’s lifetime – in which the following couplet occurs:

*Mongst which most massive Mettals I admire
The most Judicious Beaumont and his fire...*

Thomas Pestel in *An Elegie I made on Mr Francis Beaumont, dying 1615-16 at Westminster* wrote 'thou by a clean strength of witt and judgement wert well able to confound, if not convert.' In a poem by William Cartwright appended to the great Fletcher-Beaumont folio of 1647 'knowing Beaumont' is described as 'his [Fletcher's] judge.'

It would appear then that the first line of the Stratford Monument's epitaph – '*Judicio Pylium, Genio Socratem, Arte Maronem*' – alludes, not to Shakespeare, but to three great English poets, respectively Beaumont, Chaucer and Spenser whom 'Earth covers, people mourn and Olympus holds.'^{xiii} So to the challenge set by the Stratford inscription – 'Work out from this monument (if you can) with whom envious Death hath placed Shakspeare' – we appear to have an answer: Shakespeare is buried, together with Beaumont, Chaucer and Spenser in what is now known as 'Poets' Corner,' in Westminster Abbey.

Solving this riddle supports the Oxfordian contention that Edward de Vere was buried in 1604 at Hackney without a monument (or under an 'uncarved marble') and that, after the death of his wife in 1612, his body was surreptitiously reinterred in an unmarked grave in Westminster Abbey. This theory has been used to explain a discrepancy between the Hackney Parish records of 1604, the Countess of Oxford's will and a later manuscript in the hand of Oxford's uncle, Percival Golding.^{xiiii} The Golding manuscript states that Edward de Vere was 'a man in minde and body absolutely accomplished with honourable endowments. He died at his house in Hackney in the month of June Anno 1604 and lieth buried at Westminster.' The Stratford Monument therefore corroborates Percival Golding.

The Monument's original associations with Jonson's 'Poet-Ape' and the resonances of language and style between the epitaph and Jonson's other verse, and Jonson's known involvement with the *First Folio* make it highly likely that Ben Jonson was both deviser and author of the Stratford

Monument.^{xiv} If this is so, he must have known that Shakespeare was buried beside Beaumont, Chaucer and Spenser at Westminster Abbey. This helps to explain the meaning of his otherwise mystifying lines from his 1623 eulogy to Shakespeare:

*My Shakespeare, rise; I will not lodge thee by
Chaucer, or Spenser, or bid Beaumont lye
A little farther, to make thee a roome:
Thou art a Monument without a tombe.*

The reason Jonson would not bid Beaumont to 'lye a little farther' so that Shakespeare could be buried next to him with Chaucer and Spenser was because he knew that Shakespeare was already *in situ* – there was no need. These lines serve only as a mischievous and indiscrete public nod toward a secret known to Jonson. They also appear to be responding to an earlier epitaph composed sometime after Beaumont's death and before Percival Golding's revelation that Oxford was interred at Westminster (ie between 1616 and 1619), when Oxford's remains were still lying beneath an uncarved stone at Hackney. The poet, William Basse (one-time secretary to Edward de Vere's son-in-law, Francis Norris of Rycote), appeals for 'Shakespeare' to be re-interred next to Chaucer, Beaumont and Spenser at Westminster Abbey.^{xv}

*Renowned Spenser, lie a thought more nigh
To learned Chaucer, and rare Beaumont lie
A little nearer Spenser to make room
For Shakespeare in your threefold, fourfold tomb.
To lodge all four in one bed make a shift
Until Doomsday, for hardly will a fifth
Betwixt this day and that by fate be slain
For whom your curtains may be drawn again.
If Precedencie in death doe bar
A fourth place in your sacred Sepulcher,
Under this uncarved marble of thine owne
Sleepe brave Tragedian Shakespeare, sleepe alone,
Thy unmolested rest, unshared cave,
Possesse as Lord, not Tenant, to thy Grave.*

Jonson's involvement with the Stratford Monument and knowledge of Shakespeare's burial at Westminster also helps to clarify the otherwise perplexing line 'thou art a Moniment without a Tombe.' Note that the word is spelled 'moniment' with an 'i' not 'monument' with a 'u'. Stratfordians have tried to argue that these are merely variant spellings of the same word, but Edmund Spenser used 'moniment' to mean an 'inscription' and elsewhere to mean 'memorial.' Moniment, spelled with an 'i', is given a separate entry in Mason's *Supplement to Jonson's Dictionary* (1801) where it is defined as 'inscription' or 'memorial.'^{xvi} 'Thou art a Moniment without a Tombe' means that Shakespeare is remembered by an 'inscription' or 'memorial' at Stratford while the whereabouts of his tomb at Westminster Abbey remains uncertain.^{xvii}

3. SHAKSPEARE: WITH WHOM QUICK NATURE DIED: WHOSE NAME DOTHTH DECK THIS TOMBE FAR MORE THAN COST

These lines are self-explanatory. 'With whom Quick nature died' means simply that he is dead ('quick' meaning 'living' rather than 'fast'). 'Whose name doth deck this tomb far more than cost' means that the name 'Shakespeare' adorns the monument far more than the outlay for the marble and carving. This may be Jonson's response to what appears to have been a vicious attack on 'Great Oxford' by Satirist Joseph Hall, who had sneered at 'Great Osmond' (still living) by suggesting that he might attempt to save his 'rotten name' with 'purses cost' by having himself entombed in some stately and expensive monument. Hall's poem begins:

*Great Osmond knows not how he shall be known
When once great Osmond shall be dead and gone.*

And continues by advising 'Great Osmond' to forget 'costly pilements of some curious stone' and instead be 'inditched in great secrecie' so that 'no passenger might curse [his] dust.'^{xviii} Shake-speare's 72nd sonnet appeals: 'After my death forget me

quite...My name be buried where my body is, and live no more to shame nor me nor you.'

4. SIEH ALL THAT HE HATH WRITT LEAVES LIVING ART BUT PAGE TO SERVE HIS WITT.

'SIEH' is confusing. It is not an English word; it means 'Behold' in the Saxon languages, hence the English word 'see.' The Monument's creators may have intended a visual pun with the word 'sith' meaning 'since'. All early transcriptions of the monument text (including Dugdale's) replace see with 'sith.' By 'Living Art' is meant 'current art' or art (plays, poetry etc) that is currently enjoyed. It has nothing to do with '*ars vitae*' the philosophy of living according to the Stoics, as proposed by J. S. Reid in 1922. 'Page' is an attendant or serving youth. This sentence then, may be understood as meaning: 'Since all that he has written renders living art a mere servant to his wit.'

Leonard Digges was correct in his *First Folio* homage to the author, William Shakespeare' when he wrote: 'when Time dissolves thy Stratford Moniment, here we alive shall view thee still.' He, like Jonson, carefully chose the word 'moniment' with an 'i' as he too was referring not to the monument at Stratford, which was erected for semi-literate 'Poet-Ape' Shakspere, but to the inscription upon it which serves to honour the playwright and poet William Shakespeare as the following paraphrase shows:

The Earth covers, the people mourn and Olympus holds [Francis Beaumont, Geoffrey Chaucer and Edmund Spenser]

Stay Passenger, why rush by? Work out from this monument (if you can) with whom envious Death has placed Shakespeare: no longer among the living, whose name adorns this tomb far more than precious marble since all that he has written renders living art a mere servant to his wit.

This makes sense as a ‘moniment’ (‘inscription’ or ‘memorial’) to the playwright ‘William Shakespeare’ buried at Westminster, but let us not forget that the Stratford Monument was erected in the church at Stratford-upon-Avon for the play broker ‘Poet-Ape’ William Shakspere, that it displays *his* coat of arms and gives *his* date of death. Ben Jonson was a supreme master of double-meanings and even if he were not the author of the Stratford epitaph, he would surely have applauded it. I have shown how discerning ‘passengers’ are invited to recognise the ‘bold thief’ of Jonson’s epigram ‘On Poet-Ape’ in the ape-like appearance of the Stratford bust, now let us see how the ‘Poet-Ape’ is addressed by the epitaph. Let us assume in this context that the Latin couplet serves as a stand-alone, decorative headpiece. If the word ‘monument’ is interpreted to mean the ‘church’ itself and ‘page’ to mean, not servant, but ‘sheet of paper’ the epitaph may be shown to contain the a satirical message that any discerning reader might recognise as an allusion to Stratford Shakspere:

Stay Passenger, why rush by? Read if you can, whom envious Death has placed within this church Shakspeare: no longer among the living, whose name [because it is also the pseudonym adopted by a great playwright] adorns this tomb far more than precious marble: for behold, the sum total of what he has written bestows on living art but a single page as evidence of his acumen.

The ‘single page’ referred to here is surely Stratford Shakspere’s sole contribution to ‘living art’ - a title page adorned with his name – a name ‘worth far more than cost’ because of its association with the pseudonym of a celebrated author. This brings us neatly back to ‘Poet-Ape,’ the monkey bust of Ben Jonson’s epigram and the play-broker who allowed posterity to suppose that plays by other authors were his own work.

Ben Jonson’s Afterword

In *Timber or Discoveries*, a series of literary *pensées* published four years after his death, Ben Jonson wrote that ‘the power of liberal studies lies more hid, than that it can be wrought out by profane wits.’ He asked ‘Is it a crime in me that I know that, which others had not yet knowne, but from me? Or that I am the Author of many things, which never would have come in thy thought but that I taught them?’ and in an intriguing rant about literary ignorance he wrote: ‘The multitude commend Writers, as they do Fencers, or Wrestlers. But in these things the unskilfull are deceived; nor think this only to be true in the sordid multitude, but the neater sort of our Gallants: for all are the multitude; only they differ in cloaths, not in judgement or understanding.’

Following this Jonson turned to Shakespeare with a paragraph captioned by a marginal note ‘*de Shakespeare nostratim*’ – [*apropos Shakespeare (in our fashion)*].^{xix} He is referring not to the playwright but to the Stratford player whom he accuses of unchecked garrulity and stupidity, but whom he praises for his honesty and open nature. In typically ambiguous fashion, Jonson allows, ‘the multitude’, those of ‘silliest ignorance’ the ‘sluggish, gaping auditor’ to suppose that he is referring to the great playwright William Shakespeare:

I remember, the Players have often mentioned it as an honour to Shakespeare, that in his writing, (whatsoever he penn'd) hee never blotted out line. My answer hath beene, Would he had blotted a thousand. Which they thought a malevolent speech. I had not told posterity this, but for their ignorance, who choose that circumstance to commend their friend by, wherein he most faulted. And to justifie mine owne candor, (for I lov'd the man, and doe honour his memory (on this side Idolatry) as much as any.) Hee was (indeed) honest, and of an open, and free nature: had an excellent Phantsie;

Jonson was here referring to the 'blind affection' and 'ignorance' of the players, Heminges and Condell, concerning Shakespeare in their dedicatory letter (actually penned by Jonson himself but ascribed to them) from the 1623 *First Folio*. The parenthetical exclamation '(whatsoever he penn'd)' carries the meaning 'whatever it is that he was supposed to have written!' (ie. nothing), but the line of greatest relevance to this study is: 'I lov'd the man, and doe honour his memory (on this side Idolatry).' *Chamber's Dictionary* defines 'on this side idolatry' as 'stopping short of excessive adulation' but this is incorrect. In Jonson's day the term 'on this side' meant 'in the present life' as in such expressions as 'on this side the grave' and 'on this side Heaven.'^{xx} By saying that he was honouring

Stratford Shakspeare's memory 'on this side Idolatry' Jonson was confessing to idolatry, which is the mortal sin of setting up false idols or graven images. Jonson's idolatrous honouring of a red-herring's memory is recalled in the phrase he attributed to Heminges-Condell about printing the plays 'to keepe the memory of so worthy a friend & fellow alive as was our Shakespeare,' in the eulogy title 'To the memory of my beloved' and in the marble monument at Stratford. He was commissioned to edit the *First Folio* and devise a monument that would praise the true author without revealing his identity, but the scent of his red-herrings was too strong and thus he created a preposterous myth and a false idol that the 'sluggish gaping auditor' still devours today – tut!

NOTES

ⁱ Katherine Chiljan: *Shakespeare Suppressed* (2011), pp. 184-187.

ⁱⁱ A definition of 'wool-pack' from 1688 is given in *OED*: 'a great number of fleeces made up together in a cloth tied at the four ends.' For reasons why the original monument sack can be specifically identified as a 'wool-pack' see: Richard Kennedy: 'The Woolpack Man' online at <http://webpages.charter.net/stairway/WOOLPACKMAN.htm>.

Kennedy proposes that the original monument was created for Shakspeare's father, John Shakspere (wool-dealer), a thesis with which the present author does not agree.

ⁱⁱⁱ The space directly above the capitals, is decorated with two matching pards' heads. Those entering the Holy Trinity Church would notice a coat of arms with three identical pards' heads in triangular formation, two above and one below carved above the porch. This has been identified as the arms of the Stratford Corporation by Jiri Louda in *European Civic Coats of Arms* (1966), p.227, and appears (unidentified) directly opposite Wenceslas Hollar's engraving of the Shakspeare Monument on p. 525 of Dugdale's *Antiquities of Warwickshire* (Fig. 5). Two of the three matching pards' heads seem to have been placed upon the monument to remind the viewer of the Stratford arms and thus alert him the missing third head which, in relation to the Corporation's arms, should appear precisely where Shakspeare's head is located on the bust. By this clever device the viewer is invited to consider the one of the apes' heads on the capitals as an alternative to Shakspeare's.

^{iv} For the history of William Shakspeare as factotum, theatre businessman and play-broker see Diana Price: *Shakespeare's Unorthodox Biography – New Evidence of an Authorship Problem* (rev. ed. 2012)

^v It is noted that the Carolingian moustache seen on the Monument today is not represented on Hollar's engraving. In his introduction to *Antiquities* (1656), in which the Hollar engraving first appeared, Dugdale wrote that his book was written to preserve 'those Monuments from that fate, which *Time*, if not contingent

mischief might expose them to.’ This means that the new moustache (and possibly also the quill and paper) may have been in place on the Stratford bust before 1656.

- vi For a decryption that purports to reveal Edward de Vere’s name see David Roper: *Proving Shakespeare* (2009); for one revealing Francis Bacon see ‘Mudie’s Method’ in *Baconiana*, vol. 24 (Jan 1939) online at <http://www.francisbaconsociety.co.uk/baconiana/volume-1-number-4/mudies-method/>
- vii For further evidence supporting Ben Jonson’s authorship of the Stratford epitaph see Nina Green: ‘Did Ben Jonson write the inscription for the Shakespeare monument in the church at Stratford upon Avon?’ in *Edward de Vere Newsletter*, No 9 (Nov 1989, rev. 2001) and online at:
www.oxford-shakespeare.com/Newsletters/Stratford_Monument-09.pdf
- viii See for example Edmund Bolton in *Nero Caesar* (1624) p. 253: “...it should I think be D.D, that is to say ‘dedicated’ the rest of the words also in the monument favour that interpretation.”
- ix Sources for most of these Spenser-Virgil associations may be found in David Scott-Wilson Okamura: *Spenser’s International Style* (2013) p. 24. Thomas Freeman compares Spenser to Virgil in *Rubbe, and a great cast – Epigrams* (1614) and Covell writes of ‘My Virgil divine Spenser’ on the same page (facing R3) as a marginal note ‘Sweet Shak-speare’ identifies Shakespeare as the concealed poet, Edward de Vere, with the contrivance ‘courte-deare-verse’ incorporating ‘our de Vere – a secret.’ In *Shepherd’s Calender* Spenser writes: ‘That Colin [Spenser] hight, which wel could pype and singe, for he of Tityrus [Virgil] his songs did lere’ and in *Colin Clouts come home again*: ‘The Shepherds boy (best known by that name [‘Colin’ eg Spenser] that after Tityrus [Virgil] first sung his lay.’
- x This story and the full text of Surigoni’s epitaph are given in *Boecius de Consolacione philosophie* (1478) printed by Caxton, and subsequently re-circulated by John Leland and others. It is not known when the carved verses were removed from Chaucer’s grave at Westminster.
- xi In *Troilus and Cressida* the Pylion King, Nestor, is portrayed as a senile buffoon described by Thersites as ‘a stale old mouse-eaten dry cheese.’
- xii ‘High Olympus’ was the home of the Greek Gods which was poetically conceived also as the place where the souls of writers, philosophers and other great men resided, eg. ‘The Soul of Plato to Olympus lies, Whose Body here in native Athens lies.’ Diogenes Laertius (English ed., 1688), p. 228; Nathaniel Baxter locates Philip Sydney’s soul on ‘Olympus hill’ in *Sir Philip Sidney’s Ourania* (1606). As a purely poetical device this pagan notion was acceptable to Christians and would not have seemed out of place in the Holy Trinity Church at Stratford. John Abbot’s meditation, *Jesus Praefigured* (1623), contains the couplet: ‘To keepe your bodies incorrupt you die / And with pure soules to high Olympus flie.’
- xiii The records of St John’s Church, Hackney state that ‘Edward de Vere, Erle of Oxenford was buried the 6th daye of Julye Anno 1604.’ The Countess of Oxford’s will (1612) requests that she be ‘buried in the Church of Hackney, within the County of Middlesex, as near unto the body of my said late dear noble Lord and husband as may be.’ An uncarved marble tomb erased arms and no epitaph located in Hackney Church before its demolition in 1797 was tentatively identified as Edward de Vere’s in 1795. See *Great Oxford* (ed. Richard Malim), p 281.
- xiv While Jonson appears both to have designed the monument and composed its epitaph, he cannot have acted alone. The work undertaken by Janssens was perhaps paid for by the Herbert brothers, Lord Montgomery and Lord Pembroke, being the two dedicatees of Shakespeare’s *First Folio* (1623). The former was Edward de Vere’s son-in-law and the latter, Ben Jonson’s patron. Erecting the monument at Stratford may have required the assistance of another of Jonson’s patrons, the poet and courtier, Fulke Greville, who was, at that time the Recorder of Stratford-upon-Avon.

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- xv Three dozen variant manuscript copies of this poem exist and it was printed five times in the 17th century, the first in 1633 as by John Donne. The title 'On Mr Wm Shakespeare' appears on many and three of them bear the additional phrase 'He died April 1616'. Since none of the copies with 'he dyed April 1616' can be dated prior to 1640, it is not considered significant except by Stratfordians. Note also the allusions 'uncarved marble', 'Precedencie' and 'Lord' confirming the allusion to Edward de Vere, at that time buried in an unmarked grave at Hackney.
- xvi George Mason's *Supplement to Johnson's English Dictionary* (1801) *sub.* 'MONIMENT' sites Spenser's 'round plates withouten moniment' as an example of the word being used to mean an 'inscription.' Mason states that the word can mean 'inscription' or any other form of 'memorial' or 'remembrance.' While it is true that the word 'monument' was occasionally spelled with an 'i' it is equally the case that 'moniment' meaning an 'inscription' or 'memorial' may be found spelled with a 'u', eg: John Foxe (1583): 'I found an olde written monument'; William Fulke (1579): 'Take this as a monument or remembrance of my bodie crucified of you.' (ibid), p. 231 etc.
- xvii References in *Shake-speares Sonnets* (1609) eg: 'My name be buried where my body is and live no more to shame nor me nor you' (Sonnet 72) may one day provide an explanation as to why Shakespeare/de Vere lies buried in an un-marked grave.
- xviii Joseph Hall: *Virgidemiarum First Three Bookes of Tooth-lesse Satyres* (1602), Lib 3, Sat. 2
- xix The printed marginal note reads '*de Shakespeare nostrat.*' Many commentators have taken '*nostrat.*' to be an abbreviation of '*nostrati*' meaning 'of our country' or 'our countryman' but an abbreviation that used a dot to replace a single letter seems highly unlikely. That the author means '*nostratim*' ('in our fashion') is confirmed by the opening sentence '*I remember, the Players have often mentioned it as an honour to Shakespeare...*' He is writing about the players' 'Shakespeare' eg. Stratford Shakspere the friend and fellow of Heminges and Condell; not the writer, 'My Shakespeare', or 'My beloved the AUTHOR' as Jonson puts it in the *First Folio*.
- xx It is clear, for instance, in the following passage from Joseph Caryl's *Answer to the Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce* (1644) that 'on this side adultery' means 'adulterous' and not 'stopping short' thereof: 'To preserve the strength of the Marriage-bond and the Honour of that estate, against those sad breaches and dangerous abuses of it, which common discontents (on this side Adultery) are likely to make in unstaied minds.'