

# William Shakspere – The Irrelevant Life

by Richard Malim, De Vere Society ([www.deveresociety.co.uk](http://www.deveresociety.co.uk))

‘Any man who believes that William Shakespeare of Stratford wrote *Hamlet* or *Lear* is a fool.’

- John Bright (d. 1889), radical politician and orator

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## 1. INTRODUCTION : THE PROTESTANT FAMILY

In a study of Shakespeare, William Shakspere of Stratford-upon-Avon 1564-1616 should barely merit a five line footnote. However because literary ‘orthodoxy’ persists in giving him pride of a somewhat reduced place (compared to that properly due to Oxford/Shakespeare) in the history of English and universal literature, it is necessary to review his rôle in rather more detail. However comprehensive such review is, he remains devoid of any cultural connection with ‘Shakespeare’, apart from the use of a version of his name (sometimes hyphenated, sometimes not; when hyphenated, sometimes the second part starts with a capital – Shake-Speare). The proposition that a hyphen in the name denotes the use of it as a pseudonym is sometimes countered by the proffering of examples of other non-pseudonymous hyphenated names. This idea does not refute the original proposition, it merely sets out the battle lines of the contention. Similar debate about the spelling of the name Shakespeare when printed are usually inconclusive, although there are times when the arguments that both the spelling and the hyphenation are just the usual printers’ vagaries (and indeed over the superscript question marks instead of exclamation marks under the portrait in the 1640 edition of the poems) seem tenuous, especially as Shakspere and the locals of Stratford used the spelling Shakspere and variations exclusively, all without a medial E.

In addition the comparatively secular attitude of the plays is unlikely to have been mirrored by that of the inhabitants of a small town in the middle of the sixteenth century, who are likely to have been bigots to a man and woman, of one sectarian religious persuasion or another. It would be a surprise if any one inhabitant was in accord with the liberal views of the author of ‘Shakespeare’s’ plays.

He was baptised on the 26th April 1564 at Stratford-upon-Avon.

Perhaps because the family was illiterate, nothing is known of his childhood, education or early career. Sometime between late November 1582 and the birth of his daughter Susanna in May 1583 he married the child’s mother Anne Hathaway. They had twins in February 1585 named Hamnet and Judith, apparently named after some neighbours Hamnet and Judith Sadler. Hamnet Shakspere dies in August 1596. Those family details take William Shakspere up to the age of thirty-two. In addition his name appears in two sets of local legal proceedings in 1586 and 1587.

John Shakspere absented [from Church attendance] himself probably as a mark of his disapproval of the insufficiently Puritan tendencies of the priest (rather than per the incorrect suggestion in fear of process of debt). Susanna, William’s daughter, likewise absented herself in 1606, and subsequently married the Puritan Dr. Hall. William had the right to be buried in the Church, which would not be available to anyone suspected of Catholic tendencies. In effect **the clear evidence of William’s Protestantism, even Puritanism, buries irretrievably any connection with the playwright**, who throughout the plays and in the Sonnets demonstrates a clear sympathy with England’s Catholic heritage and practices.

A critic writes, “In 1589 (William) Shakespeare was 25 years old, just the right age to apply himself to the stage.” **So we are to think of him applying himself, say, to *Love’s Labours Lost*, that effete comedy parodying a dated theme in a style long out of date, and presumably expecting to make a living.**<sup>1</sup>

## 2. EDUCATION

By 1596, we are given to understand that William is the leading cultural light of the nation. What is the evidence?

There was a grammar school at Stratford, but **no evidence that William attended** exists. Indeed with William subsequently failing to ensure any real standard of education for his daughters, one concludes that along with the vast majority of the population education was not a primary concern of the Shakspere family. Great things are claimed for William’s unevidenced education at the school. Books have been written extrapolating from generally larger schools what the curriculum might have been for a school serving those who wanted education for their children in a population of say fifteen hundred. The proof is in the fruits of that education: only one pupil (not William) went on to either of the universities between the years 1570 and 1610, and that only after attendance at Winchester College, then as now a leading academic establishment for prospective university entrants.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Allardyce Nicoll: *Shakespeare* (Methuen 1952) p.16

<sup>2</sup> S.Schoenbaum :*William Shakespeare: Records and Images* (Oxford U.P. 1981) p.71

On balance William probably did attend the school, perhaps only for a short time. The evidence for that opinion is not in the documentation but in the appearances of caricatures of William in contemporary plays. First, in *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, there is William Page in Act IV scene i, who is tested on his rudimentary Latin skills by his Welsh schoolmaster Sir Hugh Evans. He is reasonably competent over hic, haec, hoc, the declension of the Latin pronoun. This scene should be played by a subteenage lout (referred to as a “child”) – after all William is the brother of the juvenile lead Anne Page, and the joke about William’s incompetence allied to the interjections by Mistress Quickly must have hilarious to a frequently-caned literate Elizabethan audience, especially when the view of Mrs. Page, William’s mother, (“He is a better scholar than I thought he was” – l. 75) is taken into account. The point of the scene is that it is dragged in. William plays no part in the development of the plot: he is dragged in **to bring to our notice an extraneous element which the playwright wishes us to know – namely that a William has culturally not much standing**. He is however known to the theatrical fraternity, otherwise there would not be much point in lampooning him.

**Secondly we have the appearance of William in the forest in *As You Like It* Act V Scene 1.** William’s role in the plot is peripheral, he is there to be made a fool of by Touchstone, but although he thinks he is wise and has a pretty wit, he agrees he is not learned, and presumably plays gormless in the light of Touchstone’s “you are not ipse, for I am he” speech .

There are however other references in Shakespeare to the Clown (i.e. provincial or countryman) type. We will meet the Clown and His Father in *The Winter’s Tale*, and Sly in *The Taming of A/The Shrew*.

The point about these references is that they are mostly extraneous or quite peripheral to the plot, they could most likely be added to the play at any stage: **they are all detrimental, mainly to the academic standard reached by the character, showing him and therefore William Shakspeare as totally unequipped to be Shakespeare. They are dragged in to make a point to the audience about William’s inadequacies.**

However by far the most important evidence of William’s intellectual attainments is produced by Ben Jonson in his play *Every Man Out of His Humour* 1599. Jonson produces a double caricature in the two brothers Sordido and Sogliardo. We will return to this play again and again, but for the moment will concentrate on the educational and cultural sledgehammer hints that these caricatures impart concerning William. Jonson kindly supplies us with programme notes in the shape of thumbnail sketches of the Characters. Thus Sogliardo:

an essential clown, brother to Sordido, yet **so enamoured of the name of gentleman, that he will have it, though he buys it**. He comes every term to learn to take tobacco, and see new motions [puppet shows]. He is in his kingdom, when in company he may well be laughed at.

And Sordido:

a wretched hob-nailed chuff, whose recreation is reading of almanacs; and felicity, foul weather. One that never prayed but for a lean dearth, and ever wept in a fat harvest.

On his first appearance in the first scene of the play, Sogliardo refers to himself as “Signor Insulso Sogliardo”: “Insulso” being the Italian for ‘gormless’.

Commentators accept that the seeking after arms and the rank of gentleman, and the grain speculation are clear digs at William. With an absence of logic they do not take on board the accompanying cultural achievements of the pair as reflecting on William, while Jonson seems to have been very good at being rude intentionally, even if for the sake of a good picture, his caricatures will be soundly based, if ‘over the top.’ Sogliardo’s cultural achievements are limited to an appreciation of puppet shows: his acting reduces the rest of the cast to complete mockery. Sordido can at least read his almanacs – aloud, and probably, a producer might surmise, with the help of his forefinger.

The question remains as to where did William Shakspere obtain his education to a standard to fit him out as the foremost playwright of our civilisation? Answer: he simply never did. Equally **there is no evidence that William had access to, let alone possessed any of, that stunning library which the dramatist would need, or ever visited Italy which would have been essential for him to attain the command of that country’s ambience.**

There is a group of critics who think Shakspere was endowed with such natural genius that he did not need so marvellous an education. Without a high standard of education, a writer can only aspire to be some “mute, inglorious Milton” lying un-worshipped in his graveyard. Where did William if he were the playwright obtain Shakespeare’s peerless knowledge of Law, Theology, Medicine, Astronomy, Philosophy, Military and Naval Sciences, History, European Geography, Botany, Literary Scholarship, Music, Classical Studies, French, Italian, Italian social life and mores, Court life, heraldry, aristocratic pursuits, etcetera? But “in the wonder of his genius he was able to grasp in lightning speed what could be obtained only after dull years of work by ordinary minds;”<sup>3</sup> no question of ninety nine per cent perspiration and one per cent genius for him. **The absence of any connection between William and the clear account by a visitor on the spot all aspects of Italian geography, culture, politics and mores generally is enough to damn the Stratford claim on its own.**

To sum up, if we discount the references in any of the works on the title pages or the dedications to “Shakespeare” (sic) there is **no evidence of William’s education, no University, nothing written by, to or about him, let alone anything on cultural matters, and no evidence of books owned or borrowed.** Indeed after 1604, when Oxford died, a number of dubious works, are attributed to Shakespeare, sometimes using the full name, and sometimes by initials: there is no evidence that William ever objected.

For this period, covering the first thirty years or so of William’s life, (and after some two hundred years of unremitting toil on the part of hundreds of scholars) the last word must be that of E. K. Chambers :

Whatever imprint Shakespeare’s Warwickshire contemporaries may have left upon his imagination inevitably eludes us. .... As in so many other historical investigations, after all the careful scrutiny of clues and all the patient balancing of possibilities, **the last word of self-respecting scholarship must be that of nescience.**<sup>4</sup>

If Chambers had said, ‘no evidence of relationship, therefore no relationship’, it might have been germane. ‘Self-respecting scholarship’ might have decided that there was no link or relevance – however unpalatable that might be.

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<sup>3</sup> Nicoll p.68

<sup>4</sup> E.K. Chambers : *William Shakespeare: A Study of Facts and Problems* (Clarendon 1930) volume I p.26.

### 3. THE SIGNATURES

We ought to consider William Shakspeare's six signatures of his which have come down to us. Compared to his contemporaries, these are astonishingly poor efforts, and they are the only apparent examples (with the exception of the phrase "by me" preceding the last of the six) of his handwriting. **Some have supposed that the signatures of a man not quite illiterate, but unfamiliar with the exercise of writing his own name:** they even suggest that Aubrey's account 1681 is sufficiently reliable in the matter: "...and, if invited to writ, he was in pain." – the classic illiterate's excuse.

What Aubrey meant using the past participle as part of the infinitive "to write," we may never know: the modern scholar's penchant for 'correcting' Aubrey's grammar by placing the comma between "to" and "writ" seems logical until the context is included:

the more to be admired he was not a company keeper lived in Shoreditch, would not be debauched, and if invited to, writ he was in pain.

All six signatures date from the period 1612-6, when (especially the last three on the Will) William may have been ill. **Certainly the last one in full "by me William Shaksper" seems to show that the first three words are written by a more competent hand.** In summary the orthodox case for the signatures being those of the alleged playwright, considered in isolation, is very weak, but not quite impossible.

Jane Cox of the Public Record Office anyway thought that four of the signatures were written by lawyer's scribes.<sup>5</sup>

A case is made for saying that the signatory and the writer of Hand D of part of the manuscript of *Sir Thomas More* are in Shakspeare's hand and has been taken up with more enthusiasm than scholarship by 'orthodox' critics: on its own the point may be unresolvable – but if one imports the dating and the ambience of the play into the equation, then it is clear that Hand D is merely that of another of Oxford's secretaries taking his dictation.<sup>6</sup>

### 4. SHAKSPERE GOES TO LONDON

In terms of chronological biography we have reached 1592. Two irrelevant documents are called as evidence of William's progress to cultural stardom, based on a few phrases in the first of them :

"Upstart crow;"

"Supposes he is well able to bombast a blank verse as the best of you;"

"The only Shake-scene in a country."

And these are, it is contended, referring to William Shakspeare. If (as is the case) they do not, then there is no nexus between him and the works of Shakespeare, and the Stratford biography scenario begins to melt completely.

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<sup>5</sup> J. Cox: *Shakespeare's Will and Signatures* (Public Record Office 1985)

<sup>6</sup> F. Gidley: *Oxfordian* 4 -2001

**Without the three phrases (and especially the half-word “Shake-”) and the two pieces called for short *Groatsworth* and *Chettle’s Apology*, there are no contemporary references said to be applicable to William at all in London before 1594.**

On the 3rd September 1592 the poet and dramatist Robert Greene dies. On the 20th September a pamphlet entitled *Greene’s Groatsworth of Wit Bought With A Million of Repentance* is registered at Stationer’s Hall. In outline of the relevant part, it is a plea to three dramatists not to give employment to actors and in particular to an ‘upstart crow’ with a ‘tiger’s heart’, who thinks he ia a writer. Many critics think that a stationer called Henry Chettle was responsible for this pamphlet. On the 8th December 1592 Chettle registered *Kind Hearts Dream* which contains a fulsome yet elegant apology to one of the three dramatists. He by then understood that the actor whom he had called ‘upstart crow’ and one of the dramatists were the same very powerful personage i.e. “Shakespeare”. **That actor and writer had by any test achieved a very considerable status in theatrical status by 1592: there is not a single fact or document to record the progress of Shakspeare to that point.**

Nobody knows why William Shakspeare came to London or what his family circumstances were back at Stratford. However he was presumably helping his father in the business of whittawer, stripping rotting flesh off the skins off dead sheep, and then we are assured that “from the very beginning he brought from Stratford a delicate nose, which found the effluvia of London, human or otherwise, highly distasteful.”<sup>7</sup>

Sometime in the 1590s he became quite suddenly well-off. The cause is mysterious - some have even suggested the proceeds of crime -, but a slightly more innocent explanation comes from Ben Jonson and his caricature Sogliardo in *Every Man Out of His Humour* 1599. Sogliardo’s first words in the play are: “Nay, look you, Carlo; this is my humor now! **I have lands and money, my friends LEFT ME WELL, and I will be a gentleman whatsoever it cost me.**” It is worth pointing out that this happy state is not attained through inheritance, the sweat of his brow, inheritance, crime or artifice, **but as a result of direct gifts in unrevealed circumstances.** By this time William had already purchased New Place back in Stratford.

There is clearly a direct link with the theatre, and it may be that William, either through sheer luck or possibly because he had heard of the successful playwright Shakespeare, came to London at precisely the moment he was needed as a cover for the real Shakespeare who in 1593 had just published *Venus and Adonis* and *The Rape of Lucrece*: for which service whatever it was, William seems to have received a substantial payment, and/or a share in Shakespeare’s theatrical company. There is no known connection between Southampton the dedicatee of the poems and Shakspeare.

So we must now consider what William did during his stays in London. We note that he is not on the list of actors given licence to tour in 1594. The Treasury to the Court Chamber’s accounts records in 1595 the payment of twenty pounds to “Will Kempe, Will Shakespeare & Richard Burbage servants to the Lord Chamb(er)lain for two several comedies or interludes shewed by them before her Ma(jesty)... upon St. Stephens day and Innocents day [i.e. December 27<sup>th</sup> and 28<sup>th</sup> 1594].” Precisely who is meant by “Will Shakespeare” is not clear. There is another problem with the record : the Treasurer to the Chamber responsible for the accounts at the time was Sir Thomas

<sup>7</sup> J. Dover Wilson: *The Essential Shakespeare* (Cambridge University Press 1932) p.35

Heneage, who died on 17<sup>th</sup> October 1595, leaving his widow with the accounts in a mess. The Queen became involved: she was passed the record of payment for the putative performance which is patently false. The records for December 28<sup>th</sup> 1594 show that it was the Admiral's Company that was playing before the Queen at Greenwich, while the Lord Chamberlain's Company was performing at Gray's Inn that day. The other point to note that this payment was the first and only payment stated to have been received by "Will Shakespeare". The widow of Sir Thomas was the dowager Countess of Southampton, the mother of the third Earl, the dedicatee of *Venus and Adonis* and *The Rape of Lucrece*: she would have every reason to know who the author was. On balance "Will Shakespeare" refers to Oxford's pseudonym. The Queen and anyone auditing the accounts would be 'in the know' as to the real identity of the pseudonymous author, whose status would be thought enough (as it apparently proved – no further investigation into the accounts seems to have taken place) to protect her ladyship.<sup>8</sup>

William does not appear to have done much actual acting (see below). He was clearly not the author, as the printer of Shakespeare's *Venus and Adonis* and *The Rape of Lucrece*, Richard Field, came from Stratford and would have known the Shakspere family well enough to be able to spell the author's name if it had been Shakspere.

So what was William's career in London? He was not above consorting with low life: in 1596 a writ is issued against him and others to keep the peace.

In 1597 "William Shakspere" is listed as owing taxes for the taxable period 1593-7 subsidy in Bishopsgate, but cannot be traced. In 1598 and 1600 he is listed as delinquent again. These records are backed by Jonson's reference to Sogliardo in *Every Man Out of His Humour*, "He comes up every term to learn to take tobacco, and to see new motions [puppet-shows]." **In other words William was never a permanent resident in London.**

## 5. CONTEMPORARY RIDICULE

The first apparent mention of William in London is not directly in a document, but by way of caricature, this time in the play *The Taming of A Shrew*. This play as well as being produced in 1594 was published in that year. It was probably written about 1579, and the 1594 version is probably only a rewrite. The 1623 Folio contains the sophisticated final version, *The Taming of The Shrew*. The 1594 version does however incorporate the fuller Induction scenes, whereby the drunken peasant Christopher Sly (William's alter ego) is rescued by the Lord (Oxford) and his retainers, and endowed by all the poet's expertise with all the attribute of lordship including the enjoyment of his treasures (an allegory for the canon), provides the answer to the critic, who wondered "Why does the poet lavish such lyrical beauty on this queer theme?"<sup>9</sup> In the 1594 version, there are interruptions by Sly to the play, one of which gives too much away as to the identity of the real Shakespeare ("Vary" is close to Vere (the family name of the Earls of Oxford), and probably even closer when spoken aloud in 1594) :

(Bianca wishes characters sent to jail)

*Sly*        I say we'll have no sending to prison

<sup>8</sup> C.Ogburn : *The Mystery of William Shakespeare* (Cardinal 1988) p.56

<sup>9</sup> G.W.Knight: *The Shakespearean Tempest* (Oxford U.P. 1932) p.104;

*Lord* My lord, this is but the play. They're but jest.

*Sly* I'll tell thee, Sim, we'll have no sending to prison, that's flat. Why, Sim, am I not Don Christovary? Therefore I say they shall not go to prison.

*Taming of A Shrew* Induction C, ll. 3-5

In the later version this scene and the scene at the end, where Sly is returned to the gutter, are cut. This sounds as if Oxford was leant on, but he took a subtle revenge in deleting the last scene, and so he leaves **the sleeping Sly on stage in charge of all the Lord's riches**, thus strengthening the answer to the critic's question. In effect William becomes the keeper of the 'Shakespeare' treasure. Furthermore there is this caricature in the mouth of Sly: "The Slys are no rogues; look in the Chronicles: we came in with Richard Conqueror" (Induction ll. 3,4), which is also a swipe at William's academic and social aspirations.

**Perdita presents the same allegory in *The Winter's Tale***, where the Clown and his father the Old Shepherd suffer the playwright's ridicule, but this time they play a fuller role in the plot: they rescue the baby Perdita (Latin for 'she who has been lost', i.e. the canon) and bring her up. The Old Shepherd's first speech contains unmistakable family allusions:

I would there were no age between ten and three and twenty, or that youth would sleep out the rest, for there is nothing (in the between) but getting wenches with child, wronging the ancientry, stealing, fighting....

*Winter's Tale*, III, iii, 57–61

Which would seem as apt a description of William's career up to the age of twenty- three in 1587 as any, with its authentication of his alleged problems with Sir Thomas Lucy over poaching – 'alleged', as there is considerable scholarly debate over them.

When all is revealed and the sixteen year old Perdita is reunited with her parents, the Clown and his father are richly rewarded.

In 1598 John Weever made a sarcastic reference to William and authorship of *Venus and Adonis* in one of his Epigrams entitled "**In Spurium Quendam Scriptorem** ['Against one Spurius a writer'].

In 1602, John Manningham a barrister recalls in his diary an incident (perhaps some years earlier) :

Upon a time [i.e. some time well before 1602] when Burbage played Richard III there was a citizen who grew so far in liking with him that before she went from the play she appointed him to come that night unto her by the name Richard the Third. Shakespeare, overhearing their conclusion, went before and was entertained, and at his game ere Burbage came. The message being brought that Richard the Third was at the door, Shakespeare caused return to be made that William the Conqueror *was* before Richard the Third. Shakespeare's name was William.

Earlier indications from the diary indicate that Manningham who was something of a theatre buff did not connect the plays with "Shakespeare" and had to remind himself that the Christian name of the say-so great actor/dramatist and impresario was "William," and to tell the world that by "Shakespeare" he meant the now (quite long) absent William, back in Stratford – Upon – Avon.

Nothing else further is heard of him residing or visiting London until 1604. While his educational, cultural and social-climbing as evidenced by the caricature Sogliardo in Jonson's *Every Man Out Of His Humour* may have made him a laughing stock, his brother caricature Sordido may have put him in physical danger. The three previous summers up to 1599 had seen poor harvests, and the Government took steps against hoarders and speculators, by first collecting a list of amounts held. For Stratford William is the second largest holder of ten quarters or two and a half ton of corn or "malte" (barley). A 'quarter' is usually 28 pounds weight, i.e. a quarter of a hundredweight; but when grain is weighed it is a fraction measurement of a ton. Stratford itself was in uproar, starving men were complaining in no uncertain terms: one "hoped within a week to lead some of them in a halter, meaning the maltsters," and a local weaver trusted "to see them hanged on gibbets at their own doors."<sup>10</sup>

That however is only the half of it. In a scene in Act I of the play, Sordido's servant brings him a government precept :

...Here's a device

To charge me bring my grain unto the markets;

Ay, much ! when I have neither barn or garner,

Nor earth to hide it in, I'll bring 't: till then,....

Sordido then launches on a contemptuous description of the starving poor and then sets out in detail how he proposes to defeat the government order by fraud.

In the role of chorus, as it were, another character describes Sordido as a "wolf in the commonwealth;" "wolves" is in the phrase used by the Privy Council in considering its Order. With this detailed description of the cheating and exploitation that William was thought at least capable of, being or about to be declaimed on the public stage and with the possibility that William might be readily identified, even if only a small part of the allegations were true, he is clearly in peril, so what is he to do? As he is not heard of again in London till 1604, it is reasonable to suppose that he decamped to Stratford, where no-one would know of the play, and the possibility of being lynched would disappear, if the fraud exposed by Jonson remained unexposed there. Then Oxford/Shakespeare seems to note his absence: In *Hamlet*, Rosencrantz tells us:

"But here is sir an eyrie of children little eyases that cry out on the top of question and are most tyrannically clapped for 't. They are now the fashion and so berattle the common stages – so they call them – that **many with rapiers** [e.g. William the ersatz gentleman] **are afraid of goose quills and dare scarce come thither.**"

The same scene provides evidence that the writer of *Hamlet* was giving a 'plug' for the '*children*' as competition for The Lord Chamberlain's Men with whom William was associated, and therefore Wuilliam cannot have been the writer of *Hamlet*.

The record of the Court Revels 1604-5 spells the name of the author of some of the plays 'Shaxberd', no doubt a subtle clerkly joke (deliberately made - the record is in the manuscript) on the attainments of the alleged author: it

<sup>10</sup> P.Honan: *Shakespeare: A Life* (Oxford U.P. 2005) pp.241-2;

may be readily linked with the exchange from *Guy of Warwick* (a play thought to have been written after 1593 - but not after 1600 as there would be no point in a reference to Stratford-upon-Avon, by which time William would be gone from London):

**Sparrow** I 'faith, Sir, I was born in England at Stratford upon Avon, Warwickshire.

*Rainborne* Wer't born in England? What's thy name?

*Sparrow* I have a fine finical name, I can tell ye, for my name is Sparrow, nor no hedge sparrow, nor no peaking Sparrow, nor no sneaking Sparrow, but I am a high-mounting lofty minded Sparrow.

*Guy of Warwick* V, ii

The volume of ridicule of Shakspeare by Oxford, Jonson, and the author (if not Jonson) of the relevant 'Sparrow' parts of *Guy of Warwick* by say 1600, might well have been enough to drive him back to Stratford-upon-Avon. The references to Oxford as Puntarvolo in *Every Man Out Of His Humour* (with the parodies of *The Taming Of The Shrew* and *Romeo and Juliet*) may be intended to be mildly and unexceptionally amusing, but they can be seen as a serious attack on William Shakspeare as the dramatist: for instance, suggesting that *Guy of Warwick* with its reference to the stealing by Sparrow's dog of a leg of pork from Sparrow's back pocket (which Sparrow had helped himself to earlier) may be compared to (and likewise borrowed from) *Two Gentlemen of Verona* and Lance's dog Crab's theft of a capon's leg from Sylvia's plate (Act IV, iv). However the references seem to be further denigration of William Shakesper, and suggest that they and Lance's general uselessness are a further reflection on William Shakspeare inserted at a later stage by Oxford. Sparrow concludes his account of his embarrassment, by saying, "I was fain to go out edgling like a crab", while Lance took the blame for the smell of the dog Crab's urine and was whipped out of the dining room. The use by Jonson of incidents in the first two plays (*The Taming of the Shrew* and *Romeo and Juliet*) in *Every Man Out Of His Humour* is directly comparable with that from *Two Gentlemen of Verona* in *Guy of Warwick* (whoever was the author).

Two other apparent references have to be considered:

1) It is a matter of comment that some critics chose to cut the full manuscript quotation from a copy of the title page of *George A'Green, The Pinner Of Wakefield* (published 1600) which reads "Written by ..... a minister [sic], who ac[ted] the pinner's part himself. Teste W. Shakespe[re]. [then on a new line]. Ed Juby saith the play was made by Ro. Gree[ne]". Edward Juby was a long-serving member of the Admiral's players from 1594 to his death in 1618, and as such a reliable source. Juby (who was one of the original Shareholders in the Admiral's Company as reconstituted in 1594, and therefore an actor with a prior track record) had been on the scene in Greene's lifetime: Greene died in 1592 before there is any evidence that William Shakspeare had even come to London. Buc who wrote the comment may have suspected that his leg was being pulled by "Shakespeare" over the matter of a minister (of religion) both writing and acting in a play, and checked his 'testis' (witness) by consulting Juby.

The inclusion of the second sentence omitted by some authorities does further damage to one of the principal pieces of 'evidence' for the cultural standing of William Shakspeare, who would hardly dare to mislead the well-connected Buck, especially after he became deputy Master of the Revels in 1606. One critic concludes his review of

the first manuscript sentence: “This is hard evidence that Shakespeare was known to be a central figure in the London theatre world, intimately acquainted with the dramatic repertoire.....It is inconceivable that Buc would have sought out Shakespeare for information concerning authorship had he been the mere bit-player of the Oxfordian fantasy.”<sup>11</sup> (nearly right, Professor – save that the probabilities are that William Shakspere was not present in London at the time and did not do any serious acting at any stage.)

2) The discovery of the Mountjoy association has created much speculation, which ignores the prime historico-literary facts of that year 1604, namely the death of Oxford in June, the publication of the ‘good’ Quarto of *Hamlet* with the Royal Arms as a note of approval at the top of page two, and the production of eight Shakespeare plays out of ten before the new King and the Court for the Court Christmas revels of 1604/5 by way of memorial-fest for Oxford. **William’s services were not required, nor did he, notwithstanding the clear signs of his wealth and ‘gentlemanliness’, stay with any of his acting or literary ‘fellows’, let alone with the great and good at or near Court, and this at the time of what should have been (we are led to believe) the apogee of his career.**

One of the other plays performed at this memorial-fest was *Every Man Out Of His Humour* – now five years out of date, but no doubt **to remind its audience of the total inconsequence of William Shakspere.**

There are of course a large number of references to “William Shakespeare” (however spelled) on the title pages of plays and elsewhere but without any biographical connection to William Shakspere. Professor Stanley Wells concedes that **up to Shakspere’s death in 1616 there is not one reference to the author which “explicitly and incontrovertibly identifies him with Stratford-upon-Avon”**<sup>12</sup> [and this after some two hundred years of unremitting toil by hundreds of scholars]. He is correct, and his conclusion blows an irreparable hole in the Stratford ‘orthodox’ façade.

## 6. SHAKSPERE THE (NOT) ACTOR

While Oxford was indeed one, there is virtually **no evidence that William was an actor.** However on the misreading of ‘Groatsworth’ dealt with above and this payment record, the case for Shakespeare being an established actor and theatrical luminary is based.

Almost the only reference to William’s acting is contained in Jonson’s *Every Man Out Of His Humour*, this time in Act V Scene 2, where the ‘friends’ have arranged for the airhead socialite Saviolina to meet on a blind date Sogliardo (whose travels “have changed his complexion”), then :

*Puntarvolo* But that which transcends all, lady; he doth so peerlessly imitate any manner of person for gesture, action, passion, or whatever

*Fastidious Brisk* Ay, especially a rustic or a clown, madam, that it is not possible for the sharpest-sighted wit to discern any sparks of the gentleman in him, when he does it.

<sup>11</sup> . J.Bate: *The Genius of Shakespeare* (Picador 1997) p.71

<sup>12</sup> S. Wells: *Shakespeare Beyond Doubt* ( Cambridge U.P. 2013) p.71.

Sogliardo enters and puts on a display of clown playing gentleman nicely mixed up with misunderstood rudery, and totally convinces Saviolina that he is a gentleman playing a clown (perhaps playing a gentleman). The cast unable to stand any more gets Sogliardo to show the lady his hand, and Sogliardo confesses the palms became rough with holding the plough. Scales fall from even Saviolina's eyes and she departs forthwith in anger. Sogliardo does not realise it: "I did my part in courting," he complains in the next scene.

Some might consider the reference in Act II to Sogliardo and his father dancing in his hobby horse :

*Sogliardo* I have danced in it myself.

*Carlo* Not since the humour of gentility was upon you, did you?

*Sogliardo* Yes, once; marry, that was but to show what gentleman might do in a humour.

He then launches into a description of the various wheezes of hobbyhorse dancing.

There is an amusing reference to Shakspeare in Beaumont's *The Woman-Hater* 1606 Act 1 sc.3:

*Count* (to his sister): I'll tell what you shall see, you shall see many faces of man making, for you will see very few as God left them: and behold, you will see many legs; among the rest **you behold one pair, the feet of which, were in times past, sockless** [i.e. not even up to being an actor], but are now through the change of time (that alters all things) very strangely become the legs of a Knight and a Courtier; another pair you shall see, **that were heir apparent to a Glover, these legs hope shortly to be honourable**: when they pass by they will bow, and the mouth to these legs, will seem to offer you some Courtship: it [will] swear, but [it] will lye, hear it not.

William's competence and technique as an actor is evidenced only by these caricatures. It is reasonable to assume that he had and kept a strong regional accent, which might well have been a handicap. His name appears in certain lists of players in the front of Ben Jonson's Works which he published in 1616 (with the name hyphenated) and also of the 1623 Folio, but these clearly relate to Oxford as we have seen from the previous chapter. In the light of the caricatures, the thought of William having to attend rehearsals of e.g. *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, *The Winter's Tale* and *Every Man Out Of His Humour* no doubt is well comprehended by 'orthodox' critics, if by no one else. Interestingly the University of Glasgow folio on the page in the preface listing the actors has in manuscript "Leass for making" doubly underlined: this suggests that the annotator thought William an actor, and less of a poet or writer: why was William put at the head of the list?

In addition William's name is not in a list of actors at Blackfriars in 1608. One critic relies on the marginal manuscript note of a vicar (born 1596 and likely to have been writing at least ten years after William's death) on his copy of Camden's *Britannica* 1590, which states that Stratford is famous for two local worthies, "et Gugliemo Shakespear planè [ostensibly] nostro Roscio" – Roscius being the most famous actor of classical Roman times: hardly a persuasive reference for William acting let alone as author. This is the quality of the evidence on which 'orthodoxy' relies to show William as an actor, and apparently therefore the dramatist.

**The performance of *Richard II* at the time of Essex's attempted coup in 1601 did NOT cause William as its putative author to be hauled before the Privy Council in spite of the dreadful insult implied to the**

**Queen:** he must have been irrelevant. The Company was represented by the actor/shareholder Augustine Phillips. Extraordinarily, nothing happened: perhaps Oxford's status saw to that.

## 7. SHAKSPERE THE SOCIAL CLIMBER

At the end of *The Winter's Tale* we see the Clown and his father the Old Shepherd rewarded: Shakspeare and his father are wickedly 'sent up' in Act V scene ii where Autolycus (a run-down ex-courtier, as Oxford would see himself, living on the fringes of society, who in an earlier scene picks the Clown's pocket – an allegory it is suggested of the collection by the playwright from William of local Stratford 'colour' – as required for *A/The Taming of The Shrew* Induction scenes):

*Autolycus*        Here come those who I have done good to **against my WILL** [we are being told something relevant], and already appear in the blossoms of their fortune.

*Old Shepherd*    Come boy: I am past more children, but thy sons and daughters will all be gentlemen born.

The reference to the Old Shepherd would seem to date the rewriting of this scene the play to between after 1596 when at William's instance, his father John Shakspeare applied for, initially unsuccessfully, a coat of arms, and his death in 1601. William would on his father's death inherit the arms, and would therefore be more highly rated than his arriviste father, the original grantee, and subtly the playwright has incorporated a farcical allusion to the prospective superior status of the son ("gentleman... before my father").

This leads us naturally on to consider the grant, apparently on a second application - the first having failed in 1596 - , of the coat of arms itself. The silver falcon crest is taken from the Earl of Southampton, and may be an attempt to link the owner with the Earl of Southampton the dedicatee of *Venus and Adonis*. The falcon is in a pre-take off state, known in falconry as 'shaking'; that and the golden spear in its claw give out a punning 'shake-spear'. Gold is the colour of aristocratic and military achievement, both of which are not evidenced in anything known of William's antecedents. It looks as though the herald was at first minded to refuse the application for the first version has the superscription in lower case, "non, sanz droict" ('No, without right'), written twice and twice crossed out, and then replaced by "NON SANZ DROICT" in capitals without a comma, i.e. 'Not without right', William's slightly downplayed motto. William (on behalf of his father) tried in 1599 to combine the arms by exemplification with the arms of the Arden, a family of Warwickshire gentry, as Arden was his mother's maiden name. She does not appear (at best) to have been any sort of relative, and the application appears not to have been pursued. The behaviour of Sir William Dethick Garter King of Arms subsequently came under review in respect of some twenty three 'mean persons' to whom he had granted arms – the name 'SHAKSPERE' comes fourth in the list. Although William's only son had died in 1596, there was no reason to believe in 1600 that the great name would not survive for more generations, as William's three younger brothers were still alive. In point of fact all three predeceased William, without descendants.

The grant of arms to the Shakspere family name attracted the attention of young Ben Jonson and his caricature Sogliardo comes in for a merciless hammering in *Every Man Out Of His Humour* 1599 from Puntarvolo, a caricature of Oxford as Shakespeare the playwright :

*Puntarvolo* A very fair coat, well charged, and full of armory.

*Sogliardo* Nay, it has much variety of colors in it, as you have seen a coat have, how like you the crest, sir?

*Puntarvolo* I understand it not well, what is't?

*Sogliardo* Marry, sir, it is **your** boar [in fact the crest of Oxford] without a head rampant. A boar without a head, that's very rare !

*Carlo* Ay, and rampant, too! . . . troth, I commend the herald's wit, he hath deciphered him well: **a swine. without a head, without brain, wit, anything indeed, ramping to . gentility**

These are splendid qualifications for any cultural rôle! And on the motto "Non sans droit":

*Puntarvolo* Let the word be 'Not without mustard'; your crest is very rare, sir.

*Carlo* A frying pan to the crest, had had no fellow.

While it may be that after the success of *Every Man In His Humour*, his first play 1598, he may have been put up to writing *Every Man Out Of His Humour* by Oxford or his admirers: **we must be reminded that Jonson was a young playwright, making vicious fun at the expense of William, the Company's allegedly all-important playwright, actor and impresario, who presumably would, if were it so, have had power of life or death over at least his career.** Jonson took an extraordinary step to preserve his own copyright - one biography states, "A printer named William Holmes entered *Every Man Out Of His Humour* in the Stationers' Register on April 8<sup>th</sup> 1600. Jonson's sale of his manuscript to Holmes was highly unorthodox. Elizabethan playwrights normally transferred exclusive control over their manuscripts to the acting companies that purchased them."<sup>13</sup> Jonson seems to have retained control if only perhaps to prevent rewriting favourable to William Shakspere. As for William's interest in the play, "In the third folio of the play (1616, which dates the play to 1599) the players listed are 'R. Burbage, John Hemmings, Aug Phillips, Hen Condell, Will Sly and Tho Pope.' (William) Shakespeare evidently stood aside."<sup>14</sup>

See also Shakspere's Will – below, where William claims acquaintance with Thomas Russell the most powerful landowner in the area.

## 8. THE SHAREHOLDER

Apart from the dubious record of the payment in 1594/5 above (pages 9 and 10) **there is no record of William having any financial dealings or shareholding in the Lord Chamberlain's Company until 1599.** Certainly on the evidence of *Every Man Out of His Humour*, **no one would have entrusted a person of his manifest limitations with any thing responsible on the artistic side of the enterprise.** However by 1597 the Company was in

<sup>13</sup> M. Chute: *Ben Jonson of Westminster* (Souvenir 1953) p.90

<sup>14</sup> Chambers *William Shakespeare: A Study of Facts and Problems* Volume II p.231/361

financial trouble. So in 1598 the shareholders had to decamp from the North side of the river to the South Bank taking on the 28<sup>th</sup> December their theatre with them, which in February 1598/9 they re-erected as the Globe. The finances were reconstructed, and a thirty-one year Lease taken on. Under this reconstruction the two Burbage sons took on five tenths share and the remaining half was allotted a one tenth share each to William Shakespeare, Hemmings, Condell, Kempe and Phillips. We do not know the circumstances but Kempe soon left the partnership. Because changes in the particulars of the tenants of a Lease did not at that time have to be evidenced in writing we have no direct evidence of any transfers and have to rely on the inevitable litigation that ensues.

Soon after his accession by letters patent dated 19<sup>th</sup> May 1603 the new King James reconstituted the Lord Chamberlain's Company as the King's Men, authorising and licensing "these our servants Lawrence Fletcher [apparently the King's favourite Scottish actor], William Shakespeare, Richard Burbage, Augustine Phillips, John Heminges, Henry Condell, William Sly, Robert Armin, Richard Cowley and the rest of their associates freely to use and exercise the art and faculty of playing comedies, tragedies, histories, interludes, morals, pastorals, stage plays and such like..." For his official entry into London 15<sup>th</sup> March 1604, a vast pageantry was devised, and apparently "skarlet red cloth" allotted for the coronation (the celebrations for which were curtailed because of plague) was reallocated to the 'Players', so that the first-named in the list of 'Players', 'William Shakespeare' receives four and a half yards. Whether William personally or Oxford in disguise are intended by these references is not clear. Although the second reference seems to be evidence that William was a player, it may have only been included because William was a leading shareholder in the Globe and named as one of the King's Men.

One of the actors and fellow sharers Augustine Phillips died in 1605. By his Will dated 4th May 1605:

item, I give and bequeath to my fellow William Shakespeare a thirty shilling piece in gold; to my fellow Henry Condell one other thirty shilling piece in gold; to my servant Christopher Beeston thirty shillings in gold; to my fellow Lawrence Fletcher twenty shillings in gold; to my fellow Robert Armin twenty shillings in gold; to my fellow Richard Cowley twenty shillings in gold; to my fellow Alexander Cook twenty shillings in gold; to my fellow Nicholas Tooley twenty shillings in gold.....

It is noticeable that the fellow actors are given twenty shillings in gold. The fellow shareholders in the Globe come first and are given thirty shillings in gold. Hemmings was also like Phillips an actor, as well as a shareholder, but it seems a comparatively weak statement to base any kind of acting career for William.

Prior to Phillips' death on 13<sup>th</sup> February 1604, Pope had also died, and his widow desired to encash his interest. A sale was negotiated before the death of Sly whereby each shareholder sold out a one third interest to Condell and Sly. It is reasonable to suppose that William at this time came to London to take part in the negotiations and possibly receive his sale proceeds: he appears to have lodged apparently keeping a low profile in Silver Street, a back street in the north of the City with the Mountjoys, an immigrant hat maker of dubious reputation and his family. Here he became involved as a witness in a case involving the daughter's dowry whereby the son-in-law Bellott sued his father-in-law Mountjoy: William remembered nothing of great consequence, and, perhaps by design, both in 1604 and at the time of the case, drew the minimum of attention to himself. In his affidavit, he does say "(he) the deponent ..... hath known [*not* 'resided with'] them [the Paintiff Bellott and the Defendant Mountjoy]... for the

space of ten years or thereabouts” i.e. from 1602 or thereabouts. That is scarcely evidence of continuous residence with the Mountjoys in the period. Furthermore there is the affidavit of Joan Johnson, who remembered, “(Mountjoy) did send and persuade one M. Shakespear that *lay* in the house to persuade the Plaintiff to the same marriage.” The verb “lay” connotes a temporary stay.

To conclude the Globe shareholding interest story, according to a statement made by Hemmings in the claim, *Witter v Hemmings* 1619, on the 20<sup>th</sup> February 1612 William Witter (Mrs. Phillips’ new husband), Pope’s Executors, William Shakspere and Witter himself each owning a one sixth share plus Hemmings and Condell owning three sixths in partnership (having apparently bought out Sly’s executors) assigned a one seventh interest to Ostler. In the same statement Hemmings says that after that Witter’s share was one sixth, a statement made, according to Chambers, “by a slip as one sixth instead of a one seventh of the moiety:” but if Hemmings’ “one sixth” was right, then William Shakspere will have already dropped out. Certainly he takes no step and is not recorded in the calls on shares at the time of the Globe rebuilding after the fire in 1613, when the lessees would have been responsible for the rebuilding of the theatre under the terms of their leases. Resident in Stratford with Oxford dead in 1604, he would have no interest in maintaining a commercial interest a hundred miles away in London.

Biographers make a desperate effort (rejected by some critics<sup>15</sup>) to show William to have connections to the new indoor Blackfriars Theatre, both in terms of theatre history and of business interest. The one place where we might expect to see his name if he were interested in that enterprise, is as a defendant in an action *Keysar v. Burbage and others*, where Keysar the successor in title to the original nominee shareholder in the Blackfriars Lease sued Richard and Cuthbert Burbage and the three other sharers for a one sixth share of the profits. William is not mentioned nor is one of the defendants, so he was not a partner or profit-sharer and so not concerned. The case was heard on the 8<sup>th</sup> – 12<sup>th</sup> February 1610/11 and concerned the immediate early profit of the syndicate since the opening of the theatre in 1609. A subsequent affidavit of 1615 in another case named him as a partner in Blackfriars as at the commencement of the enterprise in August 1608: either this is an error of the deponent’s memory, or William either never had an interest or disposed of his interest before the commencement of the *Keysar* suit: even so if he had received any profit at all he would have been made an additional defendant.

It may be of significance that Cuthbert Burbage’s reference in the *Sharers’ Papers* of 1635 mentions the problems of the Company when the boy players grew up: the reference does not actually say that shares were transferred to William SHAKSPERE: “...the transfer of Blackfriars placed [i.e. enabled to be placed] men players which were Hemmings, Condell, Shakespeare etc.(sic).”

## 9. THE STRATFORD BUSINESS MAN: HIS WILL

William is portrayed as on the bread-line in *The Taming of A/The Shrew*; a “so-so rich” forester in *As You Like It* and finally as a newly wealthy (by a fluke) man in *The Winter’s Tale*: an interesting progression. While William’s cultural impact on London seems zero, his business impact on Stratford is considerable. From 1597 when he was

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<sup>15</sup> A Nicoll: essay in *Shakespeare’s Later Comedies* (Penguin 1971) p.160; and H. Granville-Barker: Preface to *Romeo and Juliet*’ *Coriolanus*, *Hamlet* (Batsford 1972) pp.36-7

able to purchase New Place at Stratford for some £60, apparently as an investment, there is a steady record of business dealings in Stratford-upon-Avon, some quite large, up to 1614.

Those who contend that William continued to be involved with the Lord Chamberlain's King's Men have a problem. In 1597-8 the acting companies were continuously busy either in London or touring; William would have to absent himself to deal with his purchase of New Place in early 1597, and his grain hoarding in February 1597/8, and effectively have to commute. In 1604 he was apparently to receive the four and a half yards of scarlet red cloth for the King's official entry into London, but two weeks later he is in Stratford selling malt in commercial quantities to a Philip Rogers, with further transactions recorded on 27<sup>th</sup> March, 10<sup>th</sup> and 24<sup>th</sup> April, 3<sup>rd</sup>, 16<sup>th</sup> and 30<sup>th</sup> May and 25<sup>th</sup> June 1604. He could not possibly have been in London continuously during those months. After the plague ban was lifted from the 9<sup>th</sup> April the Company (King's Men) were performing continuously well into the second half of 1604.

In 1613 with others William buys the Blackfriars Gate House for £140 with the help of a £60 mortgage. These deeds survive: the interesting point is that William signed his name on slips of parchment which were then inserted in slits on the Deeds: a most unlaywerlike proceeding, but evidently proving that he was not in London at the time of the execution of the Deeds. There is a record that in the same year a "Mr. Shakespeare" received a commission (with Richard Burbage as painter) to prepare an impresa for the Earl of Rutland. By this time there was a professional John Shakespeare at Court for this type of work.

Unlike his father in the early part of his career, William never held any public appointments. So it is surmised, William, being a distance from London was a suitable choice to be an absentee trustee of the Blackfriars Gate House, which is now known (but probably not then to William) to be a substantial Roman Catholic safe house, on its purchase in 1613.

On the 25<sup>th</sup> March 1616, he makes his Will, a document totally devoid of literary merit – some would think however ill William was, the say-so playwright would have injected some life into the work, which contains rational enough (cold and bloodless, some think) provisions. The will makes no reference to William's books or 'his' plays. He seems to have taken no interest or care at any stage of 'his' plays or for their survival. It includes by way of interlineation a bequest of 26s 8d each to buy themselves rings "to my fellows John Hemyng, Richard Burbage and Henry Condell," the interlineation presumably by way of (prompted ?) afterthought. He also appoints the most prestigious gentleman in the area Thomas Russell as overseer of his Will, another instance of his social climbing.

On the 23<sup>rd</sup> April he dies; **his death provokes no reaction in London at all. Devoid of any evidential or cultural connection to the works, William died as he had lived, a cultural irrelevance. Ipse he was not.**

## 10. AFTER 1616: REACTIONs AND REFERENCES

There are two major items of evidence of the reaction to the death of William Shakspeare of Stratford-upon-Avon: the monument in the Church at Stratford and the great First Folio in 1623. There is no evidence as to which should be dated first.

The only evidence we have as to what the monument actually looked like is supplied by the antiquarian Sir William Dugdale who published his *Antiquities of Warwickshire* in 1656, in which he incorporated a drawing of the monument including the representation of Shakspeare. This drawing has come in for a great deal of ‘orthodox’ comment: either it is an appalling reproduction or it is a fake: if the former it cannot be so inaccurate [Betterton the actor commissioned by the biographer Nicholas Rowe c. 1709 to research in Stratford apparently made no comment on it: it was redrawn and copied without comment into Rowe’s work]. **What would be the point any way of either faking by way of deliberate inaccuracy or producing a degraded version?** The answer is that the drawing was probably accurate and a reflection on William’s claim to the status of cultural icon of the age. Dugdale tucked in at the end of his section on Stratford almost as an afterthought a remark that the monument was to “our late famous poet Will. Shakespere”.

Study of the Latin couplet on the Monument is almost certainly the work of Jonson, being yet another effort by him to point up the difference between William Shakespeare and Oxford. Translated, the first line reads in translation: “In judgment a Nestor [whose unreliable advice resulted in Patroclus, Achilles’ lover, being killed at Troy], in genius a Socrates [whose opinion of playwriting Plato shows to be derogatory], and in art a Maro [probably not Virgil, but to a similarly named grammarian parodist of c.650 AD]”.<sup>16</sup> The couplet contains other nuances and references not compatible with Jonson’s praise to the deceased as the greatest literary figure “not for an age, but for all time!”

There is little doubt that Jonson was the editor of the 1623 Folio (and writer of the Hemmings and Condell letters) and while the prefatory portrait, letters and poems have ever since established the idea that the author of the canon was William Shakspeare, Jonson saw to it that as little connection with William Shakspeare as possible was included, and that the case against had to be put not too blatantly, both to please “The most Noble and Incomparable Pair’ of promoters and prevent the project from being aborted for over-exposure of things they would wish concealed. However to provide clues to the identity to the real author he was able to insert the following :

“But since your lordships have been pleased to think these trifles something heretofore, and have prosecuted them and their author living, with so much favour [not much evidence of that, but nil, towards William Shakspeare], we hope that, they outliving him, and **he not having the fate, common to some, to be executor to his own writings**, you will use the like indulgence [careful choice of word] toward them as you have done unto their parent.”

The phrase “He not having the fate...to be executor of his own writings” contradicts the clear opportunity that Shakspeare had, if he had been the author, by way of the ample time at his disposal, to edit and perfect the canon himself, but he seems not to have cared less. The volume of spurious works accredited after 1604 evidences that, published as they were without his objection, along with the all too revelatory Sonnets. Here and there in the Folio there is a whisker of connection between “Shakespeare”, “Swan of Avon (a mute bird)” and the canon. One

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<sup>16</sup> . J.Goldstone: *De Vere Newsletter*. July 2012

‘orthodox’ critic sums up: **“the prefatory material gathered to open the First Folio.....acts in a completely contrary way to anonymise the author of the plays.”**<sup>17</sup>

Jonson incorporated I.M.’s poem, which begins with a direct contradiction of Shakspeare’s received biography:

We wondered, (Shake-speare), that thou **went’st so soon** [hyphenated]

**From the world’s stage to the grave’s tiring room** [actors’ dressing room]

We thought thee dead, but this thy printed worth.....”

And also Hugh Holland’s:

“His days are done that made the dainty plays

Which made the globe of heav’n and earth to ring.

Dried is that vein, dried is the thespian spring.

[ i.e. the writing and the acting end at the same time]

In the 1623 folio, there appears the ‘portrait’ with the right front of his jacket made up from the left back of it – which must be telling at its lowest not to rely on it, a view re-inforced by the poem on the opposite page and in it we are commanded:

**“Reader, look Not on his picture, but his book.”**

i.e. do not bother with the picture, read the book if you want to know the calibre of person the author was.

As we study pre-1642 drama, when the theatres were shut and the Roundhead cultural Taleban enforced its views, the more the conviction grows that the literary and theatrical establishment up to that date well knew that William Shakspeare of Stratford-upon-Avon had nothing to do with the writing of the plays. By way of example there are from Brome’s *Antipodes* 1638 these lines:-

I will tell thee that

These lads can act the Emperors’ lives all over

And Shakespeare’s Chronicled histories, to boot,

And were that Caesar, or [otherwise] that English earl, [Oxford is the only candidate]

That loved a Play and players, now living,

I would not be outvysed in my delight.” (Recto C2 ll.32-37).

Then there is Leonard Digges, whose poems in praise of “Shake-speare” are much relied on in ‘orthodox’ circles, who in 1632 visits his friend some five miles out of Stratford and goes into the town without apparently

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<sup>17</sup> .G.Holderness: *The Nine Lives of William Shakespeare* (Bloomsbury Academic 2013) p.184

visiting the Church or its monument to Shakspeare, and writes to his room-mate at Cambridge: **“I could write you mad relations of the Town of Stratford where I was last week, but they are too tedious...”**<sup>18</sup> Indeed.

Professor Wells has had to admit that **for the period to 1616, there is not one reference to the author which “explicitly and incontrovertibly identifies him with Stratford-upon-Avon”**<sup>11</sup>: indeed most of the post-1616 references continue to be of no biographical value, and indeed some lend no support to his claims to authorship.

Thus in ambiguous terms Sir William Davenant : *In Remembrance of Master William Shakespeare* 1637 warns poets not to “...tread /The banks of Avon” for:

The piteous river wept itself away  
 Long since, alas to such swift decay  
 That, reach the map and look  
 If you a river there can spy,  
 And **for a river your mocked eye**  
**Will find a shallow brook.**

In 1640 John Benson produced a collection of *Poems Written by Wil. Shake-speare, Gent.* with an odd looking portrait and a ‘poem’ of praise interlarded with three small question marks, casting doubt on the praise given.

Both Thomas Fuller (d.1661) and Milton’s nephew Edward Phillips (in 1675) record Shsperes’s Birth in Stratford upon Avon without comment. By the time they wrote the information seems to be the received uncritiqued general knowledge.

An amateur critic adduces seven items of ‘evidence’ connected to the monument in Stratford-upon-Avon Church. The first is from a copy of the 1623 Folio wherein in manuscript are these two of pieces of doggerel in English already in stone in the Church, accompanied by a third, which is double-edged:

Heere Shakespeare lyes whome none but death could Shake  
 And here shall ly till judgment all awake;  
 When the last trumpet doth unclose his eyes  
 The wittiest poet in the world shall rise.

The last two lines can readily be construed disjunctively from the first two, to refer not to “Shakespeare”, but to the “*wittiest poel*” and his eyes with everyone else’s shall be unclosed at the last judgment. Someone was pulling the copyist’s leg.

The second reference is to Jest no.259 in *A Banquet of Jeasts*, there is a leg-pull in that same vein as Digges probably did not countenance on his 1632 visit referred to above: a three hundred year old tombstone inscription was however “worthy observation”.

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<sup>18</sup> British Museum Mss. Lansdowne 841ff 29,30

The third reference is to Weever's account of the monument is clearly a forgery (on non-contemporary paper) probably by the notorious J.P. Collier in the 1840s.

The fourth reference is to the visit of a Lt. Hammond of a military company from Norwich in 1634, where he apparently saw "A neat monument of that famous English poet, Mr. William Shakspeare who born here. And an old Gentleman A Batchelor, Mr. Combe, upon whose name, the sayd poet did merrily fann up some witty, and facetious verses, which time did not give us leave to sacke up." The military man to whom no further reference is known, let alone any academic achievement, was easily entertained by old Mr. Combe, who no doubt had his tongue in his cheek.

The fifth reference discusses Dugdale's own account dealt with in paragraph three above.

The sixth reference comes from a poem to Sir William Dugdale by Sir Aston Cokain dated 1658, by which time that older generation of scholars was very thin on the ground:

Now Stratford upon Avon, we would choose  
Thy gentle and ingenious Shakespeare Muse,  
(were he among the living yet) to raise  
T' our Antiquary's merit some just praise...

Thin stuff as biographical evidence, and likewise here we may insert another poem of limited (and again, questionable and even ambiguous) biographical value which does provide some link with *The Taming of the Shrew*:

Shakspeare (sic) you Wincot – Ale hath much renown  
That foxed a beggar so (by chance was found  
Sleeping) that there needed not many a word  
To make him believe he was a lord  
But you affirm (and in it seem most eager)  
'Twill make a Lord as drunk as any Beggar  
But Norton brew such ale as Shakspeare fancies  
Did put Kit Sly into such Lordly trances;  
And let us meet there (for a fit of gladness)  
And drink ourselves merry in sober sadness.

The seventh reference is the record in 1693 of a visitor who saw "the effigies of our English tragedian mr. Shakspeare". With that late date our critic must be scraping hard at the bottom of a very empty barrel.

After 1642, the literary generation that comes next but not into any prominence until the Restoration in 1660 (having only the prima facie meaning of the introductory items in the 1623 Folio to give it fuller biographical instruction) has no mentors to remind it of Oxford. Finally along comes the Nicholas Rowe biography in 1709 which has enshrined the Stratford Shakspere myth ever since.

‘Orthodox’ critics have no biographical help from the later literary references of the period such as those by Drayton and Dryden, or even Fuller, Flecknoe, the Duchess of Newcastle and Edward Phillips; and Oxfordians may well believe that those references only strengthen the Oxford case, both in literary and biographic history, since it is clear from many of them that all critics for nearly two centuries up to and including Malone c. 1790 thought that **“Shakespeare” was not only pre-eminent, but also the first in time, without exemplars or tutors** (such as Lily, Marlowe, Peele and Greene as the ‘orthodox’ critics suggest), let alone any alleged collaborators, to afford any sort of guidance to him.

The Stratfordian assumption, that the literary and theatrical establishment up to, say, 1642 agreed that William Shakspere of Stratford was the author known as William Shakespeare, ought no longer to be sustained, **especially as two centuries of academic research by hundreds of scholars has produced nothing of consequence.** The Shakespeare Birthplace Trust is reduced to sponsoring digs at Stratford expecting to find – what?

## 11. ENVOI

Any critic, remembering that hundreds of scholars have vainly toiled for the last two hundred years, who holds the traditional “William Shakespeare 1564-1616” authorship contention has to overcome his/her colleague’s comment: **“Perhaps we should despair of ever bridging the vertiginous expanse between the sublimity of the subject and the mundane inconsequence of the documentary record.”** Samuel Schoenbaum : *Shakespeare’s Lives* (Oxford U.P. 1970) p.767.

As we have shown, the evidence for William Shakspere rests on single throw-away instances, incomplete readings etc., which on examination are revealed as totally non-supportive of the vast inverted pyramids of scholastic speculation on which traditional accounts depend. From another perspective some modern critics, known as stylometricists, purport to identify alleged collaborators from the counting and comparing of usages made by them found inside Shakespeare’s plays. For these to gain any rationality, they have first to depend on ignoring Shakespeare’s priority in time and then to adopt the defective dating scheme for the original composition of the plays – not publication – first advanced by Malone, shutting their eyes to the clear evidence of revisionism, i.e. his rewriting, touching up, etc. of the earlier drafts, as well as the imitation by some of the ‘collaborators’ in their own works of the styles contained in those earlier drafts.

For a clear-eyed review of the deplorable state of Shakesperean biography, ‘orthodox’ Professor David Ellis’ book *The Truth About William Shakespeare* (Edinburgh U. P. 2012) is recommended. A review will be found on The De Vere Society website ([www.deveresociety.co.uk](http://www.deveresociety.co.uk)) under DVS REVIEWS 2013.

You do not have to be an Oxfordian to entertain doubts about Shakspere authorship of the canon. In particular you are encouraged to add your signature to the **Declaration of Reasonable Doubt** to be found at [www.doubtaboutwill.org](http://www.doubtaboutwill.org).