THE FACTUAL DESERT OF STANLEY WELLS

William J. Ray

Professor Stanley Wells is Honorary President and a Life Trustee of the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust, Emeritus Professor of Shakespeare Studies of the University of Birmingham, Honorary Emeritus Governor of the Royal Shakespeare Theatre, General Editor of the Oxford Shakespeare series, and of the Oxford Complete Works. He has written forty-four books. Reviewer Ramon Jimenez noted in 2003 that Wells has written or edited a book a year for the previous 30 years, nearly all of them about Shakespeare.¹

With such prestige and prolificacy, Wells is considered the doyen of Shakespeare studies. In the last decade he has taken a leadership role representing the assumptions, evidentiary precepts, and general consensus of the established guild and publication houses regarding the biographical origins of the Shakespeare canon. He assumed this responsibility again in June 2011 at the English Speaking Union in a debate occasioned by the release of Roland Emmerich’s film about Shakespeare, ‘Anonymous’.

The text before us is Stanley Wells’s five-minute talk outlining his reasoning that Shakespeare the Bard was the same person born in the trading center Stratford-upon-Avon in 1564, who departed that locale, then returned, retired, and died there in 1616. I explicate the text, admirable in its brevity, for lessons about the state of Shakespeare studies.

Ladies and gentlemen, I am here to explain in brief the grounds for my conviction that, give or take a few collaborations with other professional dramatists, the works currently attributed to William Shakespeare are the work of the townsman of Stratford-upon-Avon whose baptism on 26 April 1564 is recorded in the town’s parish registers and who is memorialized in the parish church with a bust and with tributary verses written in both Latin and English.²

We should note first that Professor Wells expressed his conviction, not his absolute certainty, which is proper scholarly protocol, since biography is subject to change based on the discovery of new probative fact. He also does not make much of the current flurry to conflate the writings of the Shakespeare author with a number of his contemporaries, thereby muddying the use of the literature to reference back to a single author. But he identifies our author William Shakespeare with William Shakspere, whose family records are in the Stratford parish register, along with his lineage under the Shakspere name, with one errant exception among twenty-seven entries spanning sixty years.

Wells assumes Shakspere’s literary identity, a critical point remaining to be demonstrated. Supposition, no matter how reasonable, extended over time can become accepted customary truth, as opposed to authenticated fact. This is a field debased by its peremptory acceptance of a rags-to-riches literary biography unsupported by data.

The Stratfordian challenge to doubters of that story is along the lines of ‘extraordinary claims require extraordinary evidence’. Knock the giant off the hillside if you can. Evidence is not ordinary or extraordinary though, only relevant and irrelevant. The Stratford parish record constitutes relevant secondary evidence that contradicts the family name Shakspere and the author name Shakespeare being
identical. The academic elites have not digested this fact. Like the central question itself, who wrote the Shakespeare canon, the Stratford parish evidence became glossed over traditionally and psychologically. It is covered-over knowledge remaining to be dis-covered, though physically visible for centuries. If discovered, it will contribute to the truth of the matter.

Chambers, Schoenbaum, and most recently Pointon acknowledged the Shakspere family-name record as fact. Recent trends in academia, unlike scholars a hundred years ago, ignore the spelling in the belief that the Stratfordian ‘Shakespeare’ is established fact. Yet there was no hyphenation in the Shakspere listings. Shakspere is not the union of two words, a verb and noun, nor symbolic of the union of the Stratford Shakes and Speares. It most probably derives from Norman French, Jacques Pierre, and provides no precedent for the fifteen instances of the hyphenated name Shake-speare in the publishing record nor for the remaining eighteen literary instances as a verb-noun compound.

We cannot pursue in detail another important feature of the name issue, that according to Marcy North’s The Anonymous Renaissance, “More than 800 known authors were published anonymously between 1475 and 1640, and to this figure one must add pseudonymous authors, those authors who are still unidentified, and those who penned the many anonymous poems and smaller items that appear in anthologies and miscellanies of the period.” She did not include drama, the allegorical isthmus between the literari and their aristocratic patrons, vis-a-vis the authoritarian power figures of the Elizabethan Age.

A further neglected area of study concerns the bias towards secrecy in Elizabethan authors’ still medieval concept of knowledge, as something to be protected from the ignorant. The literature features ambiguity, indirection, allusiveness rather than explicit reference. The inclination of the knowing, literate few also tended in the direction of using the power of words for subcultural communication, thus cultivating the skills of puns, puzzles, anagrams, and other tricks to indirectly convey meanings and identity. It was a kind of power their superiors didn’t care about, except insofar as it aided diplomatic secrecy, and of which the mass of the population had no knowledge.

Professor Wells’s ‘Shakspere equals Shakespeare’ assumption is an elementary error in logic. The neglect of the era’s name-concealment practices reflects a contextual ignorance, of the perilous conditions and restrictive customs under three volatile English monarchies that give reason why the Shakespeare canon’s author might use pseudonymity and thus be one of those hundreds of unknown and pseudonymous English poets and playwrights.

Wells continues:

First, the publication evidence. During his lifetime many plays were attributed to William Shakespeare in the registers of the Stationers’ Company of London and on 37 title pages of first editions and reprints of published versions of these plays. The dedications to the poems Venus and Adonis and The Rape of Lucrece bear the signature ‘William Shakespeare’, and the volume of Sonnets published in 1609 describes these poems as ‘Shakespeare’s Sonnets, never before imprinted.’ That is the primary evidence.

As Charlie Chan said, “Correction please.” The title-page reads Shake-Speares Sonnets with a conspicuously blank author line. (See Appendices—Sonnets) I have no argument that the canon’s title-
pages are evidence, as this title-page most certainly is. But I question the characterization, primary evidence. Borrowing the legal definition of primary evidence, we seek “that kind of evidence which, under every possible circumstance, affords the greatest certainty of the fact in question.” The author name printed on a title-page affords NO certainty of the fact in question: the identity of the writer. Just the opposite. It may be intentional concealment of identity. The title-page on *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* is evidence that Mark Twain is the attributed author name. It is not evidence that a person Mark Twain existed . . . or John LeCarre or Anthony Burgess or Zane Grey or Lewis Carroll, or George Orwell, or Karen Blixen. They are pseudonyms, with intent to flout, deflect, shadow, or conceal identity.

Let us take a moment and count the number of characters on the Sonnets title-page. The title has twenty characters followed by a closing period. The sub-title has twenty characters followed by an identical closure. This totals 40. The last full line also has a 20-count. The Elizabethans liked to hide messaging in plain sight. What does ‘20’ or ‘40’ mean to knowing readers? Both Shakespeare and Puttenham (so-called) used ‘20’ to mean indefinite many. Sonnet Two says, “When forty winters besiege thy brow”. More of this later.

Further correction please. The poems *Venus and Adonis* and *The Rape of Lucrece* do NOT “bear the signature ‘William Shakespeare’”. (See Appendices—V&A/Lucrece) A printed attribution is not a signature. Especially regarding unestablished authorship, it is misleading to claim the author’s signature on a published work. In *Contested Will*, James Shapiro similarly claimed that William Shakespeare SIGNED his name to the dedicatory epistles of these works. He insinuated fact in a book whose precise function was to establish fact to a trusting and unknowing public. There are no signatures connected to these poems. Stradfordians have anthropomorphized the name, by projecting backwards terms and circumstances of publishing authenticity that did not exist at the time.

On their own the markedly different names cannot invalidate Shakspere’s putative authorship. He could have respelled his name at the publishers. Possible. Plausible. But not probable because there is also the corroborating dearth of evidence of literacy, literary interest, cultivated training, artistic sponsorship or patronage, anecdotal literary remembrance, eulogies upon dying, and personally-held written or published documents by or about him of any kind. The record of Elizabethan wills does not support Professor Wells’s contention during questions that Shakspeare’s lost inventory listed his books and manuscripts. The overwhelming number of extant wills with inventories from the Elizabethan era listed books in the will proper. Speculation presented as fact is of course irresponsible practice and misuse of authority to the public.

So far we are dealing here with, not low, but no evidentiary standards or good faith effort to meet them. The reader is witness instead to presumption and what Daniel Swift termed ‘confident bluster’. Wells’s assertions lack documentary support. He postures the counterfeit is gold. True, English professors are only peripherally skilled in standards of evidence, perhaps the reason that lawyers, who are trained for deduction and analysis, take a holiday crossing professional crafts to find the missing author who had the motive, means, and opportunity to commit the crime of the loftiest literature in the language. But in the English departments, customary belief has overshadowed the imperatives of inquiry.

Failing to establish Shakspere’s identity with Shakespeare, Professor Wells is in jeopardy of inoculating error into anything else he says.
Second is the evidence afforded by references in works surviving either in print or in manuscript. During his lifetime Shakespeare is mentioned by name as a writer, sometimes in general terms, at other times explicitly as the author of works now attributed to him, by writers including Henry Willobie, William Covell, Richard Barnfield, John Weever, Thomas Freeman, Anthony Scoloker, the anonymous author of the Parnassus plays (in which a character wants a portrait of him as a pin-up), Henry Chettle, William Camden, William Barksted, Leonard Digges, and the dramatist John Webster.

Professor Wells states that contemporaneous testimony—literary, general, or specific—from twelve authors confirm that Shakspere of Stratford was a writer and wrote the Shakespeare canon. The examples do not corroborate the claim. The first author, Henry Willobie, Wells treats as a real person, but he was never provenanced as the author of Willobie His Avisa. The title-page states no author. A book title including Willobie is not its own author. The book’s specific ‘Shakespeare’ passage is the line: “Yet Tarquyne pluckt his glistering grape/ And Shake-speare [hyphenated], paints poore Lucrece rape.” This verse praises a work of the author-name Shake-speare the year Lucrece was published. It does not establish anyone’s identity. That it is an author-name rather than a lived identity is indicated by the hyphen, the inexplicably larger font of Tarquyne, Shake-speare, and Lucrece, and the ungrammatical use of a comma after the hyphenated name, as a kind of punctuational signal. There is record of hyphenated names in the Elizabethan era, but the Stratford Shaksperes were not among them.

The book’s prefatory matter includes a poem entitled, “Abell Emet in commendation of Willobies Avisa”. (See Appendices—Abell Emet) Emet is Hebrew for truth, an apparent allusion to Edward de Vere since Emet is an equivalent to the Latin for truth, VERitas. ‘Abell’ may simply mean a bell. Bell in Italian is anello. A bell knells or rings and is the shape of an ‘O’. Since vera in Italian also alludes to a ring, a round well ring, the interplaying series of allusions suggests ‘The Ring of Truth’ (=Vere).

Let us take a look at the number of letters in these title-page lines. The first line has seventeen characters. The second line has 31, summing to 4. The fourth line has 22, summing to 4. The German term for four is vier, a homonym of Vere. The fifth line has four, before the closing period. The next grouping has 40 characters. One is atypical, the ‘I’ in ‘in’. It is the tenth character. This is a critical number in the poetry of Edward de Vere, 17th Earl of Oxford, which we will get to in a moment.

A closing salutation in the book is attributed to the early de Vere pen-name, Ever or Never, published in A Hundreth Sundrie Flowres, Canto 47 in the text, by W.S., has the same structure and courtly context as “Whenas thine eyes hath chose the dame”, an early de Vere ballad lyric, which I have described as “Shakespearian in its distinct musicality and depth of understanding courtly ritual, joined to ease at the ballad form, and in an underplayed Paideiac commitment to human perfectibility. This combination manifested very early in de Vere’s literary career…” Wells’s very first example turns on him and contains material which suggests that Willobie His Avisa was either written by Edward de Vere or at least intimated his style. The title may be read as Will-O’-be, Will O(xford) be. ‘His Avisa’ appears to contract the French phrase, La Rayne s’avisera, the queen keeps her counsel, the book’s theme. The omitted ‘er’ after the contraction are the initials for Elizabeth Regina, Queen Elizabeth.

Wells’s next plank for Shakspere as author of the canon is William Covell’s Polimanteia (1595). [See illustration] The side-panel notes read: “All praise worthy, Lucrecia, Sweet Shak-speare, eloquent Gaveston, Wanton Adonis, Watsons heyre.” These are literary references to “Shak-speare” and perhaps
Marlowe, and nothing definite in terms of personal identity of the Stratfordian Shakspere, at least in the surface text.

Looking at the side panels in italics, we see Thomas Watson, Oxford’s former secretary listed. Samuel Daniel, mentioned farther down in the quotation from Polimanteia was another Oxford secretary. On the diagram shown here, “Lucretia” is a direct reference to Lucrece, the 1594 epyllion released under the ad hoc name William Shakespeare, as is the regal “Wanton Adonis” a reference to Venus and Adonis of the year before.

The hyphenated “Sweet Shak-speare” is yet another reference to this previously unknown author, no one being known to hyphenate his name in literary London. Cleopatra refers perhaps to Elizabeth and to the play Antony and Cleopatra, which Mark K. Anderson has argued was released as The History of Serpedon, around the time of the Spanish Armada, 1588, before which date there was no record of William Shakspere of Stratford in London.

These plus the University reference “Oxford”, named for the 17th Earl’s family line, surround an extraordinary phrase: “courte-deare-verse”. It has no apparent meaning until we realize that the Vere family name is embedded within. Alexander Waugh in the De Vere Society Newsletter, October, 2013, revealed that “our de vere” is the implanted name in “courte-deare-verse” and that the remaining letters are the anagram: “a secret”.

Bodleian Library, London
Hence the odd spelling and odder phrase. Wells’s association of “Sweet Shak-speare” with Shakspere of Stratford is presumptuous post facto thinking without any recognition that practically from the first knowledge of the name Shakespeare, Polimanteia documents that the name intimately applied to Edward de Vere, 17th Earl of Oxford.

The third author Richard Barnfield wrote "A Remembrance of some English Poets" in 1598, containing the verse,

And Shakespeare thou, whose hony-flowing Vaine,
(Pleasing the World) thy praises doth obtaine.
Whose Venus, and whose Lucrece (sweete, and chaste)
Thy name in names immortall Booke have plac't.
Live ever you, at least in Fame live ever: [34 characters, 2 x 17]
Well may the Bodye dye, but Fame dies never.

The last three lines mention ‘Fame’ and ‘ever’ three times. Three forms of ‘you’ are stated: thou, thy, you. Repetitive frequency in Elizabethan verse suggests a sub-textual signal. In Aristotle’s numerical adage, tria sunt omnia, all things come in threes. Waldron added, “It is [commonplace] how thrice and four times express a superlative.” (Fowler, p. 70)

Next to one ‘ever’, which is an anagram of Vere, is the pronoun ‘you’ which has particular meaning in de Verean verse. Namely, “Sitting alone upon my thought in melancholy mood”, (see Appendices—Sitting Alone Echo Verses) an accepted de Vere poem, features ‘you(th)’ four times in four lines as a pun on the vocalized ‘Ee-ooo’ initials, self-identifying the Earl of Oxford. The four Vere’s are transparent. But the ‘you(th)’s’ are not as plain. We cannot vocalize ‘you’ without initiating the phantom long-eee sound in the palate, approximating the ‘EO’ initials of his title. Then there are two ‘ay’s’, prompting the educated Elizabethan reader to the Italian equivalent of I, I’O, first person singular, which sounds like Oxford’s initials, ‘E-O’. So there are ten Vere cues in the early poem, which in turn cue us to the printed integer 10, which looks like the Italian word for ‘I’, ‘I’O’, again like ‘you’ a vocalization of the Earl of Oxford initials, ‘EO’.

Finally, implicit to the last rhyme “live ever” and “dies never” is its use of the Vere anagram, ever, and the compound de Vere pen-name, ‘Ever or Never’. (See Appendices—Ever or Never Headline) This ‘ever-never’ phrase famously reappears in the dedicatory epistle to Troilus and Cressida—“A Never Writer, to an Ever Reader, Newes.” (See Appendices—Ever or Never Headline) In the headline, Vere’s anagram ‘Ever’ begins at the seventeenth character. 17th Earl of Oxford. The entire sentence is thirty-four characters, twice seventeen. The first thirty-three characters placed in a Cardano three-line grid of eleven characters each reveal the initials, ‘EO’, and the family name Vere twice.

The Ever or Never headline in Troilus and Cressida answers and explains the missing author-line question for us on the title-page of Shake-Speares Sonnets, published three months later. (See Appendices—Sonnets/Never Writer Headline) Who is this Never Writer? Turning to the Sonnets title-page, “Never Be Fore”. Four is the equivalent of vier, therefore Vere. And we know now from de Vere’s early poem that ‘I’ in ‘imprinted’, just changing the accent, can be construed to connote, “I= IO/EO am printed.” It explains why the author line is blank. The author and his title have already been stated.

Once again, Wells’s reference has betrayed his ambition. Barnfield extoled Shakespeare’s right to immortal glory. But since Wells does not know what the lines are saying contextually, regarding the
recondite subject’s life and fame, he seeks in them a personal endorsement of someone else, Shakspere, contrary to the glaring syntactical cues.

Thus far Wells is projecting certainty about Shakspere to the uninformed, but even the briefest analysis re-directs us toward Edward de Vere, 17th Earl of Oxford. The failed proof continues with John Weever’s encomium, “Ad Gulielum Shakespear”.

Ad Gulielum Shakespear [20 characters]
Honie-tong'd Shakespeare when I saw thae issue
I swore Apollo got them and none other,
Their rosie-tainted features cloth'd in tissue,
Some heaven born goddesse said to be their mother:
Rose checkt Adonis with his amber tresses,
Faire fire-hot Venus charming him to love her,
Chaste Lucretia virgine-like her dresses,
Prowd lust-stung Tarquine seeking still to prove her:
Romea [sic] Richard, more whose names I know not,
Their sugred tongues, and power attractive beuty
Say they are Saints althogh that Sts they shew not
For thousands vowes [sic] to them subjective dutie:
They burn in love thy children Shakespear het them,
Go, wo [?with] thy Muse more Nymphish brood beget them.

Weever indicates in it he has read Venus and Adonis, Lucrece, and seen Romeo and Juliet, and he exhorts ‘Shakespear’ to beget more such children. Wells is no closer here to a proof that Shakspere wrote Shakespeare.

Thomas Freeman’s praise for Shakespeare begins: “Shakespeare, that nimble Mercury thy brain, / Lulls many hundred Argus-eyes asleep…” Like its antecedents, this encomium shows admiration for the artist but presents no support for his identity as Shakspere of Stratford. Gabriel Harvey had praised de Vere as “eyed like to Argus, nos'd like to Naso”. He saw and sensed all. (Naso referencing Publius Ovidius Naso, to whom de Vere was compared in poetic style.) One of de Vere’s poems reads in part: “Which hath Sir Argus' hundred eyes wherewith to watch and pry.” Freeman implies the author hypnotizes eagle eyes. The particular irony here is that Thomas Freeman was half-brother to Sir Edward Veer, Edward de Vere’s son by Anne Vavasour. According to Ruth Loyd Miller’s genealogical research, their family feeling was strong, and Thomas Vavasour/Freeman was accepted into the larger Vere family circle.13 So this Shakespeare accolade by a member of de Vere’s extended family is a self-defeating reference for the proposition that William Shakspere of Stratford wrote the Shakespeare canon.

In Daiphantus, (1604), Anthony Scoloker referred to “friendly Shakespeare's tragedies, where the comedian rides when the tragedian stands on tip-toe: faith it should please all, like Prince Hamlet.” Why the ad hoc adjective “friendly”? de Vere was known by his Latin name Edwardus Comes Oxoniensis, Edward our friend from Oxford. Those initials, ECO, approximate the word echo, which appears as a signal both in de Vere’s poetry and in the Jonson eulogy. de Vere had adopted ‘echo’ to his linguistic blazons of identity. This passage verifies that Scoloker had seen Shakespeare’s Hamlet and no more.
Wells then makes much of “the anonymous author of the *Parnassus* plays (in which a character wants a portrait of him as a pin-up)”. He does not acknowledge that the Parnassus plays before Cambridge student audiences were satires. Kempe as Ingenioso played the fool when he spoke admiringly of “our fellow Shakespeare”. He had just foolishly misnamed the Ovidian poem *Metamorphoses* as a person. Part I of the play series had identified ‘William’ as Gullio, a gull, a pretentious fool faking he was a gentleman, just as Jonson ridiculed Shakspere in *Every Man Out of His Humor* as Sogliardo, fool in Italian in Florio’s dictionary. William in Latin is Gulielmus. Any statement by him would be risible not factual: Gullio sighs, “O sweet (meaning Ovid-like) Mr Shakespeare! [20 characters here.] I’ll have his picture in my study at the court.” This is a laugh line. No picture would be possible and one so ignorant would not be at University. But Wells does not smile. He takes the satirical words at face value. His interpretation seems intended to bolster a pre-determined conclusion rather than to comprehend the text and context.

Robert Greene’s complaints against an ‘upstart crow’ and ‘shake-scene’ in *A Groatsworth of Wit* are critical Stratfordian supports about the budding young playwright Shakspere. But Katherine Chiljan has shown in *Shakespeare Suppressed* that Greene’s reported last words actually complained of Edward Alleyn, whose manner and actions fit each complaint. Nor does Henry Chettle’s *Kind Hart’s Dream*’s preface support Shakspere as Shakespeare or otherwise identify the author. Alleyn was a stage hound making a shake-scene or bombast on stage. He was a do-all, Johannes Factotem. He had a theatrical wardrobe for rent. He stole Greene’s writing and claimed it as his, i.e., prettified himself in another’s feathers. He came from the country. Most critically the pun, “a tiger’s heart wrapp’t in a player’s hide” puns on Alleyn’s own lines in *Henry VI, part 3*, 1.iv.137: “O tiger’s heart wrapp’d in a woman’s hide!” The Stratfordian hypothesis has relied overlong on loosely considered clichés like ‘shake-scene’ that gradually rationalize insupportable assumptions into pseudo-facts. ‘Shake-scene’ has nothing to do with a name. As Henry Adams wrote, “Nothing is so astonishing in education as the amount of ignorance it accumulates in the form of inert facts.”

William Camden was the court historian during Elizabeth’s and James’s reigns. He knew both Shakspere as an applicant for a coat of arms and de Vere as a fellow courtier. He had no illusions about his superiors, describing the authorities as “those who think the memory of succeeding ages may be extinguished by present power.”

But he did not comply with contriving history in his own work. *Remains* (1605) duly notes that ‘Shakespeare’ was among the English poets “whom succeeding ages may justly admire.” (See Appendices—Camden) By contrast, in his *Britannia*, (1607 and in further editions), he wrote nothing about Stratford as the home of the great writer Shakespeare, nor Shakspere as the town’s most famous resident. By logical exclusion, we conclude he rode the bureaucrat’s razor’s edge, preserving the truth by careful dissembling.


*The Annales or Generall Chronicle of England* by John Stow, (See Appendices—Stow) continued by Edmond Howes. [1615], repeats this pattern of a curious preliminary list of ten before introducing the name of ‘Shakespere’. (Numbering added for clarity.)
Our moderne and present excellent poets, which worthely florish in their owne workes, and all of them in my owne knowledge, lived togaeather in this Queenes raigne; according to their priorities, as neere as I could, I have orderly set down, viz.—(1) George Gascoine, (2) esquire. Thomas Church-yard, esquire' (3) Sir Philp Sidney, knight' (4) Sir John Harrington, knight; (5) Sir Thomas Challoner, knight; (6) Sir Frauncis Bacon, knight; and (7) Sir John Davie, knight; (8) Master John Lillie, gentleman; (9) Maister George Champman, gentleman; (10) M. W. Warfner, gentleman; (11) M. Willi. Shakespeare, gentleman; (12) Samuel Daniell, esquire; (13) Michael Draiton, esquire of the bath; (14) M. Christopher Marlo, gen.; (15) M. Benjamaine Johnson, gentleman; (16) John Marston, esquier; (17) M. Abraham Frauncis, gen.; (18) master Frauncis Meers, gentле.; (19) master (20) Josu Silvester, gentle; (21) master Thomas Deckers, (22) gentleman; M. John Fletcher, gentle.; (23) M. John Webaster, gentleman; (24) M. Thomas Heywood, gentleman; (25) M. Thomas Middleton, gentleman; (26) M. George Wither.

Next, William Barksted wrote a tribute to Shakespeare in 1607 as follows:

His song was worthie merrit (Shakspeare hee) sung the faire blossome, thou the withered tree Laurell is due to him, his art and wit hath purchast it, Cypres thy brow will fit.

The critical question here is the past tense of “his song”. Barksted wrote Shakspeare’s song WAS worthie merrit, which is ungrammatical and implies the author died. The Stratfordian scholar could argue that lofty poetic license allows past tense praise to be written about someone still alive, a possible strategy to exclude de Vere as Shakespeare, since he died in 1604. But even assuming the great author Shakespeare were still alive in 1607, why the cypres wreath, a symbol of mourning? And why the laurell, which Roman kings wore as they drove through Rome in a chariot with four horses? The German word for four is vier, a homonym of Vere. For Roman studies sticklers, there were also sacrificial OXen in the procession, and the King carried a trident with an eagle at the tip. In the end the verse is equivocal, with hints toward a high personage and no reference to Shakspere’s person at all.

We have seen indications that ostensible praise of Shakespeare is embroidered with clues and cues to Edward de Vere, a level of communication vacated before consideration by Stratfordian believers, to protect their claim for the Stratfordian Shakspere. Their tradition has omitted attention to the covert messaging, in favor of a nominal assertion that a guise, a nom de plume, represented the person they were looking for, assumed to be Shakspere of Stratford.

However, they consider Leonard Digges’s tribute to Master W. Shakespeare in the First Folio undeniable evidence for the Stratford Bard. (See Appendices—Digges) Contradictorily, after the compounded Shakespeare title, Digges hyphenates the name. Then he makes reference to “thy Stratford moniment”, an archaic term taken to be geographical and monumental hard evidence for Shakspere. Most editions change ‘moniment’ to ‘monument’, discarding the ‘I’ as though the two words were interchangeable. This is another post facto distortion, like conflating Shakspere and Shakespeare. In Elizabethan nomenclature, moniment meant a portent or significant sign. Digges anticipates that Shake-speare will “out-live thy tomb”, (there was no tomb), that time will
dissolve the Stratford marking. He follows this with the adjective, fresh, saying “This book…
shall make thee look/ Fresh to all ages.” Strange adjective for a dead man. Why use it?—because
fresh in Dutch is vers, a pun on the Vere name. It occurs frequently in the sonnets, describing the
fair youth. It originated in the sonnet “Sweet Cytherea”, a poem with extensive de Verean
features. (See Appendices—Sweet Cytherea)

We note that the poem is as significant in its repetitions as in its words, with FOUR
Shakespeare’s, FOUR ‘thee’s’, meaning you, and TEN ‘thy’s’; meaning your, in 22 lines, an
integer summing to FOUR. All Vere or Earl of Oxford cues. The first four lines alone contain six
‘thy’s’, as though a six-letter message resides in a four-line boundary. This configuration
supports the possibility that the six ‘your’s’ imply EO’s six-letter counterpart Oxford or de Vere,
in vier, four, lines.

Jonson’s First Folio ‘moniment’ mirrors Digges’s usage, but declares the opposite reality, “Thou
art a moniment WITHOUT a tombe.” The same phrase rebuts the unpublished Basse statement.
These alleged Shakespeare tributes are separated by three pages. They are double-talk, cuing the
vigilant reader to a verbal subterfuge.

Let us look just at line 9: “That is not Shake-speares; ev’ry Line, each Verse.” There are two
possible allusions to Vere, ev’ry and verse. The first section has 20 characters, then a semi-colon
for a stop, then 22 more, and the total number of characters is 42. Why is 42 a significant
number. We know that in this nomenclature 4 can refer to Vere, but what is the identifying value
of the numeral two? Two is deux in French. Plausibly we have vier-deux, indicating de Vere. It
isn’t evidence without corroboration elsewhere in the texts.

The little bold-face pronoun ‘i’ in Jonson’s ‘moniment’ can be a specific hint for de Vere,
because I in Italian is IO, pronounced E’O, the Earl of Oxford’s initials. (see Appendices—
Eulogy Magnification-2) Is there a meaningful number of them? There are ten ‘I’s’ woven into
the Jonson eulogy’s first page, as well as ten exclamation points overall—which resemble the
English letter ‘I’. Then, the punning use of ten ‘I’s’ yokes the linguistic allusion to the numerical,
since 10 is the one integer that looks like IO, the Earl of Oxford cue. Totalling to a meaningful
number confirms intentionality in the designer.

Wells is of course unaware of the numerical cues, no doubt hostile to their significance if
explained. But the First Folio eulogy by Jonson is replete with them. I will make a short
summary of the history here. In the Ashland, Oregon conference in 2010 both Martin Hyatt and I
described patterns of identification that could only lead to de Vere. Hyatt said there are seventeen
words in the Jonson eulogy title, significant if you posit that the 17th Earl of Oxford was the great
author: seventeen words in the title; seventeen great authors, Shakespeare twice; the curious
device of beginning the tribute on the seventeenth line. This posits the number seventeen as a
possible identifying device in the poem. He will publish his research in due course. I offer mine
here without pre-judging his conclusions. At the same conference I had introduced early
Oxfordian name-puns I=IO=EO, the numeral ten (10) as its adjunct, as well as the pronoun ‘you’
and its cognates, English and Italian, as plays on the Earl of Oxford’s initials, EO. Jonson
displayed all of them.
Hyatt noted Jonson’s panegyric formally begins on the seventeenth line. He had noted seventeen words in the title. In addition to that, there are seventeen characters in the sub-title. The last of these is the word ‘vs’ for us. But that connotes ‘against’ and the Latin is ‘versus’, an allusion perhaps to Vere. I realized that the seventeenth line begins with the FOUR words: “I, therefore will begin.” (See Appendices—Jonson Eulogy-Magnification -1) It contains thirty-four characters, followed by an exclamation point, representing an emphatic ‘I’, that alludes to EO. The first ‘I’ with the comma signals the rest. The ad hoc comma also alludes to ‘comes’, part of Oxford’s Latin name, Edwardus Comes Oxoniensis. Next is the simple ‘therefore’. ‘There’, rhyming with Vere, points to the next word. ‘Fore’ puns on German vier or Vere. The verb ‘will’ puns on the pseudonym ‘Will’. The correct usage would have been imperative ‘shall’.

The last word, ‘begin’, refers back to the headline Author, in Latin auctor, in French l’auteur, meaning progenitor or originator. Richard Malim, in The Earl of Oxford and the Making of Shakespeare, noted that Pierre Ronsard in the 1580’s referred to an unnamed “l’auteur of poetry”, who would transform the language and surpass Greece. (pp. 20-21)

To embroider the whole, that couplet contains four exclamation points approximating the ‘I’, like four firecrackers, in the space of two lines, with the same punning reference to ‘EO’ that ‘I’ has. The significant number FOUR of one signal combined with another signal, in this case, TWO lines, establishes a pattern to be repeated immediately. Setting aside the techniques, this is one of the saddest puns ever devised. It transfers authorship from the creator to a counterfeit. “‘I–EO’ therefore (Vere), WILL begin”. This occurs on the SEVENTEENTH line, which is TWENTY-TWO lines from the end of the page.

In the next section, (see Jonson Eulogy, Magnification-2 and page 1-2 of text) Hyatt found Jonson had listed seventeen venerable authors, Shakespeare twice as though he were two personages. I counted four ‘I’s in the first seventeen lines, five standard ‘I’s in the next passage of seventeen authors, plus a bold-faced ‘I’ nearby them, communicating a sum of six associated ‘I’s in one sub-section—ten ‘I’s total on the first page. Why ensconced in the seventeen authors list? The two bold-faced I’s (the first lower-case on line 22, the second tilted on line 32) sum to the French word for two, deux, which sounds like the honorific ‘de’ in de Vere’s family name. The four contiguous ‘I’s’ cue us to the German word for four, vier, a homonym of Vere. de-Vere. This covert naming occurs within lines 22-32. The outsized fonts in the eulogy, now unsurprisingly, are a factor. They total 40, 4 for Vere, and 0 for Oxford in 80 lines over two pages.

Hyatt found four ‘Shakespeares’. There are four ‘forths’, the last of which is FOUR lines from the end. Fourth in Dutch is deVierde, an anagram of de Vere. But look at Ben Jonson’s sign-off for the last declaration of authorship. First there is Ben with a full colon, a possible signal, as though to say nota bene. Then the familiar ‘IO-EO’. Then slanted letters, ‘N’ and ‘S’, demarcating a separate signal. What is the signal? ‘Son’ is used in Shakespeare and in Jonson’s writing to align with friend. We also know ‘friend’ alludes to comes, “our friend from Oxford”. Gloucester in King Lear referred to his son Edgar as ‘friend’. Jonson in Epigram 106 wrote “son and my friend” in a line that ends with “freedom and truth”. It is conceivable that a political point was hidden—the Great Oxford was dead but not the son.

Copyright © 2013 W.J. Ray
These devices are simple verbal and numerical identifying puns. They are confirmed by their pictorial counterpart, the Droeshout etching. It has four embroidered spears on the figure’s left collar, and two small ones on the right. (See appendices—Droeshout etching) We see *deux* (de) *vier* (Vere), just as in the Eulogy’s line 22 to 32 name clue, and the 42 character-count in the dedication page to the Herbert brothers, (See appendices—Incomparable Brethren) or the ninth line of Digges’ tribute. (See Appendices—Digges) We can also trace a block-shaped ‘EO’ in the left collar, with a four-barred ‘E’; a ‘V’ illumination on the face, right next to an ‘ear’, making the combination ‘V-ear’, although the ear is a nose, pointing down into the crack on the figure’s neck; and finally a protuberant ‘O’ on the FORE-head, suggesting 40. Robert Brazil first noted the illuminations. His thought lives on in Edward de Vere and the Shakespeare Printers. These subterfuges documented the actual author at the same time they manufactured a diverting pretext for credulous consumption. In terms of our Wells discussion, the very crux of the Stratfordian evidence endorses someone else.

We have seen that the lines’ numerical sequences on the title-page consistently contrive Oxfordian references. We have seen also that the Droeshout etching itself is a gold-mine of evidence contrary to the surface, almost frivolous, claim for the figure.

We could go further than the optical tricks and simply check the number of buttons on the figure’s tunic, all pointing to his left or sinistra, the secret side. There are fourteen, although they button nothing. They suspend between the two edges of fabric, a seamless design. The tunic and the person are one unit. The fourteen buttons match fourteen similar buttons on the Welbeck portrait of Edward de Vere. [See illustration]
There are also two sets of fourteen characters in Droeshout’s attribution to our left of the buttons. Three repetitions of a signal demonstrate intentionality. What does the collection of fourteen’s mean if anything? For one parallel, the sonnet has fourteen lines and Oxford was known for his sonnets. Meres referred to ‘Shakespeare’ circulating his sonnets among his private friends. TEN paragraphs after the twin announcements of “Shakespeare’s” sonnets and plays in paragraphs 23 and 24 (paragraph number 34, twice seventeen), Meres included the numerical pun, 9+1. Shakespeare was listed nine and Oxford is one, totaling TEN or the orthographic equivalent of one of Oxford’s badges. The Italian article for “I”, IO (sounding as EO) was the Earl of Oxford’s titular initials. Since there are three fourteens, no more or less, we might find out why by testing their total. ‘42’ constitutes the “vier-deux” combination that signifies “Vere de” in this puzzle context.
And by now we realize that the V-shape design connecting the buttons with the artist’s peculiar subscript hints (V)ere as well. Note that the two legs of the V do not meet in the picture itself but reach down to include the “O” in London. The V, the O, and the ‘42’ would serve as tell-tale signs of the Oxford authorship if there had been no other clue in the frontispiece. There appears to be no possibility of isolated co-incidence since the clues are manifold, both numerically and pictorially. More literary and linguistic cues are embedded in the First Folio which we don’t have time to list here, but one we must. The dedication to de Vere’s two wealthy in-laws is a glaring identification device.

There are FOUR lines honoring them together, SEVENTEEN characters in the first two lines, SEVENTEEN in the third, and TEN in the fourth. William, Earle of Pembroke receives 40 characters in his first line, SEVENTEEN in the second, leading to other correspondences in lines dedicated to his brother. The given name ‘William’ receives a place all to itself—why? Because ‘Will-I [EO]-am’, is an identifying device for the author. (I, EO, am Will). Of course later publishers removed the typographical evidence, not comprehending its critical import. But the original First Folio retains corroborating evidence that Edward de Vere was “The AUTHOR”.

The planting of these devices is too simple to call them ciphers or codes, serious scare-words in any discussion doubting ‘Shakespeare’ and trying to avoid Baconian comparisons. They convert parlor amusement into the most serious literary identification context.

Professor Wells’s final witness is John Webster, one of the least known Elizabethan playwrights. He was Mary Sidney Herbert, Lady Pembroke’s coach-maker’s son, trained as a mercer and not known to have written anything on his own but The White Devil and The Duchess of Malfi. They are written from a woman’s point of view—with the exception of certain heroines in Shakespeare—the only plays of the type in early modern English drama. Stephanie Hopkins Hughes has made a persuasive case17 in The Oxfordian/VI, 2003, that Mary Sidney employed Webster as a proxy author for her plays. He was a member of her Wilton House circle. Professor Wells evidently refers to Webster’s inclusion of the name “Mr. Shakespeare” and others in the induction portion of The White Devil—“wishing what I write may be read by their light.” Again, this cannot support the identity of Shaksper as the author Shakespeare, just because the name ‘Shakespeare’ appears in the tribute. A name is not a person. In terms of numbers, we may note that there are seventeen words between the previously listed author, Fletcher, and Shakespeare. And that the clause that begins with ‘wishing’ has ten words. Wells continued,

Most significantly in the current context, Francis Meres, in 1598, not merely [no pun intended?] named 12 plays as having been written by William Shakespeare but did so in the same paragraph as a separate allusion to the Earl of Oxford as a writer of comedies.

Correction please. In one paragraph Shakespeare is compared to Seneca and Plautus as “most excellent in both kinds for the stage”, followed by six tragedies and six comedies. In another, Oxford is rated not as a “writer of comedies” but “best for comedies among us”. A bald contradiction. And another: OXFORD was called the English Seneca in Nashe’s Preface to Greene’s Menaphon. Chapman later called him a “Senecall Man, he may with heaven’s immortal powers compare”, in the character of Clermont in Revenge of Bussy d’Ambois. Again, intentional confusion with the implication that Shakespeare and Oxford were one.
Since the Shakespeare orthodoxy does not recognize discretion and duplicity in Elizabethan literature, it will not credit that Francis Meres, or whoever presented him with the Shakespeare entries in his almanac, wrote ulteriorly about ‘Shakespeare’ and Oxford. Yes, Shakespeare is arbitrarily credited with having written twelve previously anonymous plays, an astounding *non sequitur* in itself, and yes, Shakespeare is listed among English playwrights along with Oxford. But that listing was a puzzle to communicate that they were one and the same individual. (See Appendices—Meres) Robert Detobel credited Enoch Powell with discovering that the ancient playwrights listed in the puzzle numbered sixteen, one fewer than the seventeen moderns list that included the 17th Earl of Oxford. This indicated to Detobel that one modern playwright was featured in progressive clues that identified him as both Oxford and Shakespeare. But the answer is explicit in the text. Oxford is listed number one. Shakespeare is listed number nine. The total is the now telltale signal, ‘10’, that conveys the Earl of Oxford’s initials. Variations would follow with Camden’s (1605) and Stow’s (1615) usage of the same device.

Wells’s seemingly unassailable evidence for Shakspeare of Stratford in *Palladis Tamia* by Francis Meres, fooled him and all Shakespeare orthodoxy, which accepts the Elizabethan puzzle gambit as fact. Here again, we see knowledge covered over that, were it dis-covered, would be elemental to the full story. We could begin to straighten out a tangled and corrupted weave in our literary and political history. Returning to Professor Wells’s speech,

> The fact that the names of most of these writers are little known today does nothing to devalue their evidence. After Shakespeare’s death there are most conspicuously the remarks about him made by Ben Jonson in conversations with William Drummond of Hawthornden.

I concur with Professor Wells in his proviso that the obscurity of the authors he named does not devalue the probity of their words. “Truth is truth to the end of reckoning.” We have found though that their words do not support Wells’s claims and interpretations. Accordingly, his next statement cannot follow.

> These facts alone, I submit, are enough to demonstrate beyond doubt that, on evidence supplied by many of his contemporaries and in theatrical records, William Shakespeare was a poet, a dramatist, and an actor, and that works currently attributed to him were written by a man of that name.

If he had said that the author called Shakespeare “was a poet, a dramatist, and an actor, and that works currently attributed to” that pen-name “were written by a man of that” pen-name, Wells would be approaching an accurate summary of the matter. I would note that to this point, he did not even try to produce evidence to support the actor claim. He alluded to theatrical records. But there is no theatrical record for Shakspeare, where there should be a copious one. There is one record that in 1595 Shakspeare along with two actor-stockholders collected money from the Queen’s disbursor. There is another record that as a member of the Lord Chamberlain’s Men, he received red cloth for participation in King James’s coronation. Augustine Phillips’s will mentions him as a player and the 1615 Ostler law-suit mentions him as a player, an occupational reference for those involved in theater. But Edward Alleyn’s diaries, that listed all persons who had transactions relating to plays at the Fortune, Blackfriars, and other venues never mentioned Shakspeare. And Philip Henslowe listed virtually every playwright of the time in his diary, and he never mentioned Shakspeare. Henslowe cites plays we now know as Shakespeare’s but not the author, as though to protect that person. We will now hear Wells out.
Whether this man was the William Shakespeare baptized in Stratford in 1564 might seem to be of only secondary importance, but even so there is unimpeachable evidence that he was. First is the evidence supplied by the memorial verses on the monument to the man of Stratford which compare him to great figures of classical antiquity – Virgil, Nestor, and Socrates – which declare that he now inhabits Olympus, and which claim that ‘all that he hath writ / Leaves living art but page to serve his wit.’ Then there are the verses printed in the First Folio by Ben Jonson which allude to the author of the works in that volume as a ‘swan of Avon.’ Applied to a local wool or malt merchant, however successful, these terms might appear to be improbably hyperbolical. Lines in the Folio by Leonard Digges refer to its author’s ‘Stratford monument.’

Turning to the Stratford data, clearly Wells has taken the memorial verses on the Holy Trinity Church cenotaph, originally to Shakspere’s father, as genuine and unimpeachable. (See Appendices--Stratford Monument Plaque) These verses advance a hoax while appearing pompously reverent. Nestor is cited for judgment. But Nestor was known as an old fool who advised Patrocles to disguise himself as Achilles. So Patrocles did and Hector killed him. Socrates is cited for genius. But Socrates detested poets and never wrote anything. Plato was the genius who employed the memory of Socrates as a dramatic ploy to his dialogues. Maro (Virgil) is cited for art, meaning learning. But Spenser was the English Virgil, not Shakespeare. And the more probable reference was to Virgilius Maro, the Grammarian, a medieval charlatan who made up stories to parody scholastic study and promote his fame. In short, the Latin inscription was high-sounding verbiage about a fool, a figure-head, and an imposter. The rest of the Latin verse says, “The earth buries, the people mourn, Olympus takes.” There is no object of the verbs. There is no one to bury, mourn, or be raised to Olympus—the home of the gods and muses, not poets. Poets rose to Parnassus. The Stratford plaque is a parody in place of an epitaph. The English verse is also enigmatic, barely syntactical and essentially meaningless. David L. Roper has argued that it doubles as a Cardano puzzle that explicitly states ‘de Vere is Shakspeare’ [sic], attested by Jonson’s initials, IB.

I will not decode the English message on the Stratford Monument, because Roper has done that. However, I would like to point out that the Latin message format triggers the subject of the English message. Bruce Spittle of New Zealand discovered the indentation of the second Latin line, such that the number of letters in that line sum to 34, twice seventeen. The first section before the telltale comma has ten characters, with the next word summing to seventeen, then twenty-two, then thirty-four. These are all critical numbers in the study of sub-textual messaging regarding de Vere.

Wells now discusses Basse,

An elegy on Shakespeare by William Basse first printed in 1633 links him with the dramatist Francis Beaumont and the poets Edmund Spenser and Geoffrey Chaucer and refers to him as a ‘tragedian’, which could mean both an actor and a writer of tragedies. One of the numerous manuscripts of this elegy is headed ‘On Mr William Shakespeare he died in April 1616’ and in another ‘On William Shakespeare buried at Stratford-upon-Avon his town of nativity.’

He does not say if these are authenticated texts and why the author wrote such unpoetic and oddly informative titles about the deceased’s date of passage and residence. Professor Wells’s argument here is, like those before, problematical, since Basse was a retainer in the household of de Vere’s middle daughter, Bridget, and the poem is said to have been written by someone else, William Brown. The
poem, not even included in the 1623 First Folio introduction, is used as a pivot by which Jonson rejected its plea that ‘Shakespeare’ be buried in the Poet’s Corner of Westminster Abbey. A name cannot be buried, and an unknown tradesman’s corpse cannot be exhumed and moved to Westminster without causing suspicion. He continues,

Then there are the verses printed in the First Folio by Ben Jonson which allude to the author of the works in that volume as a ‘swan of Avon.’ Applied to a local wool or malt merchant, however successful, these terms might appear to be improbably hyperbolical. Lines in the Folio by Leonard Digges refer to its author’s ‘Stratford monument’.

The *non sequitur* “Sweet Swan of Avon” is another ambiguous ploy. Neither man was called that while alive. There are Avons, or rivers, near the Herbert estate Wilton House; near Bilton Manor where de Vere had lived, upriver from Stratford; and near Hackney where he lived in London. The swan was the Sidney family insignia. Jonson celebrated the swans over the Thames, where royalty watched plays, not over the Warwickshire Avon. Also Jonson the classicist did not neglect the allusion of his phrase to the dying swans in Ovid’s *Heroides*, de Vere being alluded to by Freeman and others in connection with Ovid.

A neglected medieval chanson de geste may also touch on the “swan” referent. The Knight of the Swan was a mysterious palladin who saved the lady with a swan-drawn boat. The only condition required to receive his favor was that he never be asked his name. His designation in French was Chevalier de Cygne, a tangential link with the Sidney-Pembroke’s constellational insignia. An Avon flowed past their estate. According to Sir Walter Scott in ‘Essays on Chivalry, Romance’ (1887), p. 112, de Vere would “conceit himself to be descended of the doughty Knight of the Swan.” (quoted in Celeste Turner, ‘Anthony Mundy, An Elizabethan Man of Letters’, p. 43)

The medieval French “swan” reference has never been credited to de Vere, who spoke fluent French and was steeped in its literature. The “Swan of Avon” phrase instead became, by default, virtually the only geographical allusion attaching together the shadowy claim that Shakspere and Stratford-upon-Avon had anything to do with the Shakespeare canon.

Both by high-born assertion implicit to the First Folio and by subsequent traditional acceptance, it was this interpretation that survived. Its history, though, merely highlights an adage of the same Sir Walter Scott we quoted above: “O what a tangled web we weave, when first we practice to deceive.” In the duplicate and duplicitous communication that was Elizabethan literary ambiguity, the “Swan of Avon” reference resonated very differently to the uninformed and deceived than to the educated deceiving.

Returning for a moment to our numerical discussion, the Sweet Swan of Avon phrase occurs ten lines up from the end of the poem. (See Jonson Eulogy—p. 2) One is entitled to ask, where is ‘seventeen’ in this scheme? Should we not be able to expect so significant a figure to reoccur? Yes, it does and makes direct reference to de Vere. The seventeenth line up, “For a good Poet’s made, as well as borne,” contains the *ad hoc* word ‘made’. ‘Be made’ or ‘become’ in Latin is *esse fieri*. Jonson used it to hatch an f-to-v pun: *fieri*=*vier*-I/Vere-I. The added phrase ‘as well as’ is also significant. We already knew that well-casing in Italian is *vera*. Also, ‘well’ begins as the 22nd character. The original aphorism was “Oraturem fit, poeta nascitur”; an orator is made, a poet born. Jonson added the ‘well’ phrase to heighten the punning content of the line.
Finally, Digges’s reference to the ‘Stratford’ monument is essentially about its transience in Stratford, not its immortality there.

Wells turns next to historiography and we are close to the end because he invokes the courteous trope “ladies and gentlemen”.

Some of this evidence, ladies and gentlemen, is posthumously derived. Anti-Stratfordians frequently dismiss all such evidence, using the phrase ‘in his lifetime’ as a mindless mantra, as if posthumously derived evidence were ipso facto inadmissible. But if we accepted only evidence derived from a subject’s lifetime we should not know, for example, how Christopher Marlowe died in Deptford, or of Charles Dickens’s relationship with the actress Ellen Ternan, or how Anne Frank lived and died in hiding during the Second World War.

Correction please. She died of typhus and starvation in Bergen-Belsen. But the point is quite right that posthumously DISCOVERED evidence is nonetheless evidence—but only on condition that it has been authenticated as existing at the time claimed. Otherwise it is hearsay, and personal trust is its only support. In law, hearsay evidence is usually inadmissible. There were no contemporaneous cast lists when Shakspere was putatively an actor, only Jonson’s posthumous claim for him in the Works and the First Folio. Of course we accept now that Anne Frank wrote her diary then—because her father’s secretaries saved and returned both her original and re-written diaries to Otto Frank after the War.

Wells seeks to discredit critical analysis of the Shakespeare narrative as unreasonable and silly. Yet he trusts Jonson, one of the most cryptic writers in English letters, as flatly authoritative that Shakspere was Shakespeare. Jonson’s actor claim appears to be planted, not documented, evidence. It IS documented that Jonson worked for the Herberts, de Vere’s followers and in-laws in 1621-3, producing necessary prefatory matter for the First Folio. Of course we accept now that Anne Frank wrote her diary then—because her father’s secretaries saved and returned both her original and re-written diaries to Otto Frank after the War.

We have seen that Jonson created deceptions, both in the First Folio prefatory matter and in the Stratford Monument language. We may study the First Folio introductory poem for more evidence on that point. (See Appendices—Introductory Poem and Solution) It is comprised of ten lines, a signal to the practiced Elizabethan eye. In a Cardano puzzle grid of 286 characters, it states ‘E. Vere’, twice in the seventh file. The namings are an integral part of this sub-textual message. Thus, the pictorial aspect of the First Folio, i.e., the etching, and its poetical and dedicatory aspects are contrivances belying the surface message that ‘Shakespeare’ was the author of the works. The solution in the seventh file of the grid was triggered by the seventh letter of the title. It is tilted to the right, an ‘e’. The investigators knew to look for something having to do with ‘seven’ and ‘e’ in the text of the puzzle.

We must conclude that Jonson lied in the lesser sense to preserve the ‘truth’ of de Vere’s authorship in the greater. Plato’s allegory of the cave may have been his guiding metaphor. An illusion is sometimes necessary to bear forth and protect truth. Jonson apparently continued to maintain the artifice in his ambiguous remembrances to Drummond, none of which refer to Stratford or Shakspere’s odyssey from it, the greatest rise from an ignorant background in the history of Western civilization if true. Jordan, Ireland, and Collier would plant post facto evidence two centuries later out of professional ambition, in thrall to Jonson’s skillfully manufactured mythology.
Professor Wells concludes,

This and more, ladies and gentlemen, I submit, amounts to unimpeachable evidence that William Shakespeare of Stratford-upon-Avon did indeed write the works attributed to him, and that attempts to deny this fly in the face of historical fact in favour of improbable—nay, impossible—fiction.

On the contrary, he shows that, in the amplitude of human gullibility, plausible fiction is not only possible, not only probable, but amounts to the entire basis for a subset of English studies. Not one statement reflected fact.

What are we to make of this? The Shakespeare establishment’s leading spokesman is totally ignorant of his subject’s biography, skewing his understanding of much of the literature about him. After explicating his speech, we find Wells is in a comparable position, logically speaking, to the farmer who came to town and described a creature he saw in his pasture. It was half-man and half-bear, and the other half was pig. No matter how he told the story, it didn’t add up. As Voltaire said, “Doubt is not a pleasant condition, but certainty is absurd.” Now, I have been around long enough to know that we all have foibles and blind spots, and the same goes for institutions and whole civilizations. The Stratford narrative is one of ours.

Getting Shakespeare and the Elizabethan Age wrong is not the worst official truth. To Turkey, there was officially no Armenian genocide. To the Politburo five million Ukrainians officially did not starve in the 1930’s. To the Warren Commission, Kennedy was officially shot from behind, even though his brain matter lay on the limousine’s trunk. Israel officially has no nuclear weapons. Bush’s administration officially did not torture. The human carnage at Pearl Harbor was officially a surprise attack from Japan, although their military code had already been solved. Three New York buildings collapsed at free-fall speed in classic demolition sequence, officially from the kerosene of two airliners. Official truth. These are sad and painful thoughts. Unlike the theater, on the world’s political stage, blood means nothing and the truth less. Inevitable consequences follow later, what Cavafy called “the never-ending calamities of men”. Careers have been ruined and untruths placed on pedestals during the Shakespeare cultural saga, but no one has died.

I wish to see Stanley Wells’s factual desert bloom and flourish in plenty. A wholesome culture seeks nothing else The adversary is not a person but doctrinal denial enshrouding available knowledge in the academy, the publishing houses, and the hack critics of the media, who collectively tend the Stratford hypothesis like a multi-national church. As Nathaniel Hawthorne wrote in the 1850’s, it is understandable they cannot “get beyond the idea that an assault was meditated on England’s greatest poet.” The main-stream intelligentsia’s capacity to size up the issue has not changed.

The significant change in Shakespeare studies has been the collective and episodic attempts to make historical sense out of the fabulous and illogical interpretations of the events and biography surrounding the canon. We are in the position now to jettison certain coddled myths and get an ever more accurate assessment of the time and its principals. In the course of correcting this error, a revelatory catharsis follows naturally. Truth is continuous; one truth frees the path for more.
For instance, we realize there is no evidence that Shakspere was a stand-in for de Vere, a flimsy conjecture about clouded events, but plenty of indication he played the underhand imposter for gain with publishers. There is no appreciable evidence that Shakspere was an actor, but grounds to suspect that Jonson posthumously fabricated his acting career in the 1616 ‘Works’ and later the First Folio. As another example, it is becoming plain that for 250 years from 1600 to 1850, there was NOT, as presently trumpeted, a seamless consensus for the Stratfordian Shakespeare authorship. The Shakespeare authorship provoked inquiry from the time ‘Venus and Adonis’ saw print. Numerous contemporary authors including those discussed here, and those not (e.g. Gabriel Harvey, John Marston, Thomas Heywood, Richard Brathwait, and Henry Peacham) cumulatively concurred that there was a great author in Elizabeth’s reign. Thomas Vicars referred to him in 1628 as someone “qui a quassatione et hasta nomen habet: who took his name from shaking and spear”. Many knew who he was and deferentially recorded it. No huge blanket conspiracy needed to exist when speaking above one’s station was taboo in the English authoritarian system, or when discretion about a noble ally of literature was the proud and honorable course.

From the time critical study became possible after the English civil wars, the authorship issue was beset with confusion. Within two generations no one remembered the First Folio hoax and its subtextual language. These vanished in the wars. The historical debris remained ominously in the form of the chaotic variation and disorder of the Shakespeare play texts. The early critics didn’t have the historical context to trace the confusion back to governmental power eclipsing a prodigal and rebellious aristocrat. Their near-medieval reverence toward the Histories’ author as the creator of England’s foundation myth muted so dishonorable, blasphemous, even traitorous, a thought. But they saw something was uniquely atypical with the publication of the canon.

The orthodox scholar Albert Feuillerat wrote that the subject of authenticity

… has been raised with more or less insistence since the eighteenth century. Pope conjectured that in Love’s Labor’s Lost, the Winter’s Tale, The Comedy of Errors, and Titus Andronicus there was nothing authentic [by Shakespeare] except a few scenes and some characters (1725). . . . Similar doubts were expressed by Theobald regarding Henry V (1734), by Hamner regarding the Two Gentlemen of Verona (1744), by Samuel Johnson regarding Richard II (1765), and by Farmer regarding The Taming of the Shrew (1767). Ritson found some disparities so evident that in The Two Gentlemen, Love’s Labor’s Lost and Richard II he claimed he could distinguish Shakespeare’s hand as easily as one could recognize the brilliant brush strokes with which a Titian might have sought to touch up a mere daub. Malone in 1790, in his often quoted dissertation on Henry VI, did not recognize Shakespeare’s hand except in some passages of the second and third parts and thought that the first part came entirely from one of Shakespeare’s predecessors. And parenthetically, Thomas Caldecott, a prominent collector and editor, characterized Steevens who first saw Jonson’s style in the First Folio matter, as an ass and Malone as a fool. There was no reverential unanimity about Shakespeare or each other.

W.W. Greg outlined the confusion in publications, capitalized upon for ill-gotten gain by play brokers and thieves—their pirating the canon with no known objection from the author. Greg did not draw the
obvious conclusion—that this pattern neatly matched a hidden high noble’s plight, writing aristocratic plays in the cut-throat commercial milieu of London. In Greg’s words, “...there grew up a tradition of textual pessimism in respect of Shakespeare’s plays that lasted a couple of hundred years.” Steven Pinker is more explicit about the overlapping confusion: “… For 250 years there have been doubts as to whether that man composed the plays we attribute to him.” Greg quoted Samuel Johnson, “To have a text corrupt in many places, and in many doubtful, is, among the authours that have written since the use of types, almost peculiar to Shakespeare.” It was not normal publishing or authorial practice.

These were traditional scholars, early and late, trying to piece together a jumbled and somewhat sinister history. We may see the situation in more relief by looking at the criminal record. Side by side with puzzled literary critics in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries were the forgers Jordan, Ireland, and Collier; the art brokers who peddled portraits of de Vere, treasures defaced and altered to resemble the First Folio etching; right down to the House of Windsor renaming the Elizabeth I painting by Ketel as ‘Portrait of an Unknown Woman’. It bears an Acteon cartouche after the manner of Edward de Vere that has yet to be dis-covered knowledge.

The chronicle of Shakespearean artifacts is more clear-cut than the manuscript history as a tale of theft, fraud, conjecture, defacement, fabrication, and real estate chicanery, all we would expect when deceptive beginnings burgeon forth into future folly.

Now let us proceed from Feuillerat and the early critics to the current processed Stratfordian version of Shakespeare history. There the standard view is that all was well with Stratford Will until misguided trouble-makers surfaced in the nineteenth century. Emotionally, beneath that rhetorical veneer is an undercurrent of condemnation, captured in Bacon’s aphorism: “Rebellion is as the sin of Witchcraft, and Stubborness as the crime of Idolatry.” Conformity can strangle reason. It pulls rank and does not credit bona fide concerns of some of the greatest minds across three centuries, from political leaders to learned judges to artistic luminaries and intellectual giants. This is, above all, a moral question: Justice to the artist and veracity to the civilization. All members of the civilization have a stake in clarifying this question.

Wells insisted in the Washington Post, March 18, 2007, “No one up to [1785] had doubted that he [Shakspere of Stratford] wrote them; nor was there any reason to.” Jonathan Bate parroted: No one in Shakespeare’s lifetime or the first two hundred years after his death expressed the slightest doubt about his authorship…. That nobody raised the question for two hundred years proves that there is no intrinsic reason why there should be a Shakespeare Authorship Controversy [later to be re-named The Shakespeare Authorship Conspiracy Theory]…There was no Shakespeare authorship question at the beginning of the eighteenth century.  

Three years later in 2010, seven years after John Rollett, once an Oxfordian, discovered the 1805 Wilmot-Cowell lectures [testifying there was no Shakspere literary record] were fabricated, James Shapiro, in Contested Will, importuned himself as a pioneer debunking the fraud. He never would have known to look for anachronisms in the lectures without Rollett’s finding they were written on dubious paper matter and were unsupported by Ipwich historical records. Shapiro breathlessly described his discovery to the readers. Rollett with no main-stream forum welcoming his work, no standing in the guild, no credibility, and no funding for research, lost to scholastic low-ball. Apparently Shapiro bided
his time to see if Rollett would publish before his book’s due date, and when he didn’t, Shapiro picked his tree. Wells backed him with the following statement in the September 27, 2010 New York Review of Books:

Shapiro’s discovery destroys the belief that the anti-Stratfordian movement originated before the time of Delia Bacon, an ambitious, eccentric, independent woman who published her *Philosophy of the Plays of Shakspeare Unfolded* in 1857.³²

Actually Wells and other Stratfordians created that myopic and self-serving ‘belief’ as a reflexive means of discrediting and minimizing Oxfordian research. Now Wells forward-dated their alleged golden age of consensus from 200 to 250 years, to 1857.

In 2007, just three years before, Wells had been far less mannerly to his adversaries. He had warned Mark Rylance he would end up in a lunatic asylum like Delia Bacon,³³ if he continued to doubt the Bard. It is not wholesome scholarly discourse to assiduously tie the hypothesis of one’s adversaries to the fate and reputation of a woman who went mad.

Now in September 2010, almost as a grudging concession given the previous language, Wells stipulated, in the NYR’s smallest type, that Shapiro had acknowledged “the anti-Stratfordian journal *Shakespeare Matters*” published “an earlier suspicion that the [Wilmot-Cowell] documents may have been forged.”

Correction please. Suspicion BY WHOM? Shapiro made no acknowledgment to Rollett, unless burying prior mention as deeply and vaguely as he could in a rambling bibliography nobody would read, which does not include the name Rollett, defines the term ‘acknowledgment’. He had to have been aware of Rollett and the crucial historical information he found, either from the Shakespeare Matters report, or from someone tipping him off about it. He did everything but say so, constituting a modern example of falsification of fact to buttress a status quo narrative under threat.

The fanciful literary history attached to the Shakespeare canon, of which Wells’s work is representative, and the doctrinal contortions and prevarications in Shakespeare studies, including those just outlined, descend from the First Folio deception, as the lowland delta started at a mountain source. By scorning further biographical study—and any who pursue it—the establishment’s bunker mentality guarantees its own scholastic paralysis. It also reveals much unprofessional bias under strain. Professor James Shapiro characterized *Shakespeare Identified* by John Thomas Looney [Loh’ nee] as “nostalgia for a repressive and authoritarian medieval past” that was “dangerously naïve,” and tantamount to Nazi theory, (p. 187) and he asserted the author was “dead set against the forces of democracy and modernity to the very end.” (pp. 182, 183)

John Galsworthy, liberal, lawyer, and holder of several honorary degrees and the Nobel Prize, did not find reason to slur the book’s author. He said it was “the greatest detective story I have ever read.” Freud admired it. Looney’s own words might reply from the grave to Shapiro’s devaluations of his life and work, “This is the kind of argumentation one associates with political maneuvering rather than a serious quest for the truth on great issues, and it makes one suspect that he is not very easy in his own mind about the case.”
In fact, the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust’s web-blog IS political maneuvering in the form of propaganda, so much heated pride and social prestige are at stake, as well as comfortably entrenched economics.\textsuperscript{34} From a psychological view, their denial must be respected as a formidable defense mechanism, before the denier is moved to seek the healing processes of compromise, acceptance, and a new understanding.

Despite the “unlifted shadow” that continues to lie across Edward de Vere’s memory, scholarly means to achieve a richer more historical understanding are completely accessible by standard historiographic and literary methods of inquiry. In setting aside accepted evidentiary methods due to institutional inertia and patent ignorance of Elizabethan texts, the Shakespeare establishment betrays the responsibility of intellectuals in a civilization, to seek the truth and unmask falsehood.

I take humble pride in efforts to rectify the—even yet—perpetuated cultural tragedy surrounding the literary name Shakespeare, its author, and his time and nation, and to honor the airing of long buried knowledge, in words spoken by those today, and by those of the past, seemingly departed and silent, but still bearing witness, like guardians, to the truth. For, as Plato said, “Truth is the beginning of every good thing, both to gods and men.” May it be so.

With gratitude for the assistance of Jerri-Jo Idarius of Creation Designs.

William J. Ray
Willits California
January 20, 2013
END NOTES

1 http://www.shakespeare-oxford.com/?p=108
3 A.J. Pointon, The Man who was never Shakespeare, pp. 24, 273
4 Diana Price, Shakespeare’s Unorthodox Biography, p. 60
5 North, The Anonymous Renaissance, p. 3
7 Bonner Cutting, “Shakespeare’s Will…Considered Too Curiously” (Brief Chronicle, Vol. I, pp. 172; 187, nt. 40)
8 James Shapiro, Contested Will, Advance Reader’s Edition, p. 225
10 B.N. De Luna, The Queen Declines, p. 230
14 David L. Roper, Shakespeare To Be or Not To Be, p. 176
18 Robert Sean Brazil, Edward de Vere and the Shakespeare Printers, p. 10
20 Roper, Shakespeare To Be Or Not To Be?, Ch. 22, and Jack A. Goldstone in “The Latin Inscription…”, Shakespeare Matters, 11:2, Spring 2012, pp. 1, 22-4, made persuasive arguments along these lines.
21 David L. Roper, Proving Shakespeare, p. 16
22 Charleton Ogburn, Jr., The Mysterious William Shakespeare, p. 222
23 Katherine Chiljan, Shakespeare Suppressed, pp. 203-32
25 Joseph Quincy Adams, Oenone and Paris, 1594, p. xv
26 W.W. Greg, The Shakespeare First Folio, p. 83
27 Steven Pinker, The Stuff of Thought, p. 10
28 W.W. Greg, The Shakespeare First Folio, p. 83
29 www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/.../2007/03/16/AR2007031602690.html
30 Jonathan Bate, The Genius of Shakespeare, p. 73)
31 James Shapiro, Contested Will, Advance Reader’s Edition, 2010, pp.11-12. In the forty-page unfootnoted or item-listed bibliographical essay, Shapiro made oblique reference to the seven-years-prior Oxfordian Shakespeare Matters newsletter article announcing Rollett’s discovery, but did not acknowledge the discoverer Rollett, pp. 284: “The only previous effort I know of to examine the Cowell manuscript is described in Nathan Baca’s report of Daniel Wright’s unpublished research on Cowell and his suspicion that the document may be a forgery, in Shakespeare Matters 2 ( Summer 2003).” His comments concerning J. Thomas Looney are produced in that edition on pp.182-7.
33 www.shakespeareanauthorshiptrust.org.uk/pdf/swdebate.pdf

Copyright © 2013 W.J. Ray
BIBLIOGRAPHY

Brazil, Robert Sean, Edward de Vere and the Shakespeare Printers, (Cortical Output, 2010)
Camden, William, Remaines of a Greater Worke Concerning Britaine, (John Russell Smith, 1870)
Chiljan, Katherine V., Shakespeare Suppressed, (Faire Editions, 2011)
Cutting, Bonner Miller, “Shakespeare’s Will...Considered Too Curiously”, (Brief Chronicles I, 2009, pp. 169-191)
Oenone and Paris 1594, Joseph Quincy Adams, ed., (Folger Shakespeare Library, 1943)
Pinker, Steven, The Stuff of Thought, (Viking, 2007)
Pointon, A.J., The Man who was never Shakespeare, (Parapress, 2011)
Price, Diana, Shakespeare’s Unorthodox Biography, (Greenwood Press, 2001)
Roper, David L., Shakespeare To Be Or Not To Be?, (Orvid Editions, 2010)
______________, Proving Shakespeare, (Orvid Publications, 2008)
Shapiro, James, Contested Will, Advance Reader’s Edition (Simon & Schuster, 2010)
END NOTES

1 http://www.shakespeare-oxford.com/?p=108
3 A.J. Pointon, *The Man who was never Shakespeare*, pp. 24, 273
4 Diana Price, *Shakespeare’s Unorthodox Biography*, p. 60
5 North, *The Anonymous Renaissance*, p. 3
7 Bonner Cutting, “Shakespeare’s Will…Considered Too Curiously” (Brief Chronicles, Vol. I, pp. 172; 187, nt. 40)
10 B.N. De Luna, *The Queen Declines*, p. 230
13 David L. Roper, *Shakespeare To be Or Not To Be?,* p. 176
18 Robert Sean Brazil, *Edward de Vere and the Shakespeare Printers*, p. 10
20 Roper, *Shakespeare To Be Or Not To Be?,* Ch. 22, and Jack A. Goldstone in “The Latin Inscription…”, Shakespeare Matters, 11:2, Spring 2012, pp. 1, 22-4, made persuasive arguments along these lines.
21 David L. Roper, *Proving Shakespeare*, p. 16
22 Charleton Ogburn, Jr., *The Mysterious William Shakespeare*, p. 222
23 Katherine Chiljan, *Shakespeare Suppressed*, pp. 203-32
26 W. W. Greg, *The Shakespeare First Folio*, p. 83
27 Steven Pinker, *The Stuff of Thought*, p. 10
28 W. W. Greg, *The Shakespeare First Folio*, p. 83
29 www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/.../2007/03/16/AR2007031602690.html
30 Jonathan Bate, *The Genius of Shakespeare*, p. 73
31 James Shapiro, *Contested Will*, Advance Reader’s Edition, 2010, pp.11-12. In the forty-page unfootnoted or item-listed bibliographical essay, Shapiro made oblique reference to the seven-years-prior Oxfordian Shakespeare Matters newsletter article announcing Rollett’s discovery, but did not acknowledge the discoverer Rollett, p. 284: “The only previous effort I know of to examine the Cowell manuscript is described in Nathan Baca’s report of Daniel Wright’s unpublished research on Cowell and his suspicion that the document may be a forgery, in Shakespeare Matters 2 (Summer 2003).” His comments concerning J. Thomas Looney are produced in that edition on pp.182-7.
33 www.shakespeareanauthorshiptrust.org.uk/pdf/swdebate.pdf
BIBLIOGRAPHY

_A Hundredth Sundrie Flowres_, Ruth Loyd Miller, ed., (Kennikat Press, 1975)


Brazil, Robert Sean, _Edward de Vere and the Shakespeare Printers_, (Cortical Output, 2010)

Camden, William, _Remaines of a Greater Worke Concerning Britaine_, (John Russell Smith, 1870)

Chiljan, Katherine V., _Shakespeare Suppressed_, (Faire Editions, 2011)

Cutting, Bonner Miller, “Shakespeare’s Will…Considered Too Curiously”, (Brief Chronicles I, 2009, pp. 169-191)


_Oenone and Paris_ 1594, Joseph Quincy Adams, ed., (Folger Shakespeare Library, 1943)


Pinker, Steven, _The Stuff of Thought_, (Viking, 2007)

Pointon, A.J., _The Man who was never Shakespeare_, (Parapress, 2011)

Price, Diana, _Shakespeare’s Unorthodox Biography_, (Greenwood Press, 2001)


Roper, David L., _Shakespeare To Be Or Not To Be?_, (Orvid Editions, 2010)

__________, _Proving Shakespeare_, (Orvid Publications, 2008)

Shapiro, James, _Contested Will_, Advance Reader’s Edition (Simon & Schuster, 2010)
