



Shakespeare Matters

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"Let me not to the marriage of true minds admit impediments..."

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The Sonnets dedication puzzle

By Robert R. Prechter, Jr. ©2005

TO. THE. ONLIE. BEGET TER. OR.
 THESE. IN SVING. SONNETS.
 M^r. W. H. ALL. HAPPINESSE.
 AND. THAT. ETERNITIE.
 PROMISED.
 BY.
 OVR. EVERLIVING. POET.
 WISHETH
 THE. WELL-WISHING.
 ADVENTVRER. IN.
 SETTING.
 FORTH.
 T. T.

Fig. 1

The famous dedication to *Shakespeare's Sonnets*, published in 1609, has been the subject of consternation and ridicule, and several scholars have denounced it as convoluted and bombastic.

Students of the authorship question have long suspected that the odd arrangement of words, obscure meaning and bizarre syntax suggest the possibility of an encoded message. Inspired by discussions at an Oxfordian conference in 1998, I tackled the problem of the Sonnets dedication and presented a summary of some of my findings at the annual conference of the Shakespeare Oxford Society in Stratford (Ontario) in October 2000.

To summarize what I believe lies hidden in the Sonnets dedication, it contains not a code but—at least from our point of view—a puzzle. The contents of what I call the Dedication Puzzle are a list of names, including most importantly the following:

- (1) The names of the principals who got the Sonnets published.
- (2) The names of the characters in the Sonnets.
- (3) The true name of Shakespeare.
- (4) Additional names of (mostly) real people that Edward de Vere used as pseudonyms.

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The name is new, the beat goes on

Shakespeare Authorship Studies Conference meets in Portland



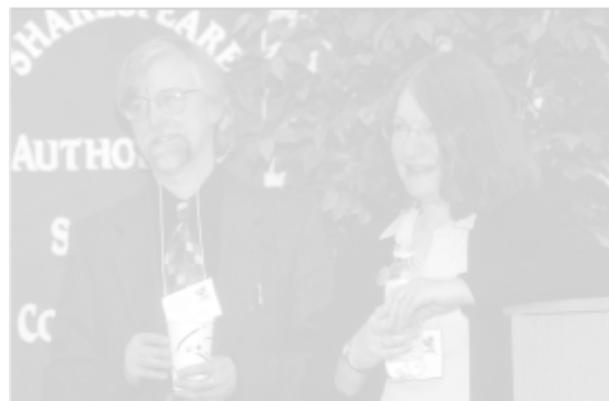
Charles Beauclerk (l) and William Cecil, 8th Marquess of Exeter, seated together at the Awards Banquet. Beauclerk, who lived in the US for 10 years actively promoting Oxford in the late 1980s and 90s, received the Distinguished Scholarship Award, while Cecil was the featured speaker at the banquet.

This year's authorship conference in Portland, Oregon, would have been the 9th Annual Edward de Vere Studies Conference, but instead inaugurated a new era under the name The Shakespeare Authorship Studies Conference.

Conference Director Dr. Daniel Wright had decided upon the change last fall in an attempt to make the forum more inviting to scholars who were interested in the authorship debate, but who might also be reluctant to seem to commit to Oxford's authorship by attending a conference named after him.

Nonetheless, as Wright also notes, his commitment to Oxford remains as firm as ever, and the majority of papers presented continue to explore authorship issues from an Oxfordian perspective. This year's conference was a testament to the continuing Oxfordian nature of the event, and

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Dr. Roger Stritmatter and Fellowship President Lynne Kositsky gave a joint presentation laying out an excellent case for why the infamous "Strachey letter" is not a problem for Oxford—who died in 1604—being the author of The Tempest.

Sonnets dedication (continued from page 1)

From the simple clues embedded in the puzzle, a researcher can piece together important aspects of Shakespeare's life. The resulting inquiry has led to further information, namely that Oxford wrote under a long list of pseudonyms beginning when he was twelve. The investigation also appears to have revealed the identities of the two men who created the Dedication Puzzle, namely Thomas Thorpe, who conceived the idea, and Ben Jonson, who, I suspect, completed it.

Unlike a code, a puzzle is a construct that upon occasion can have more than one answer, so we must address the question of probability. I hope to show that while the chances of any single name appearing in a particular manner are — depending upon length — between 2 in 3 and 1 in 20, the chances of all the cited names appearing are one in a million. Therefore, while we may entertain any objection that a *particular* name appears by chance, we may not easily argue that the entire list appears by chance.

Here are the names embedded in the Dedication Puzzle that I believe are deliberately part of the construct:

- (1) Names of people who got the Sonnets published:

William Herbert (Earl of Montgomery, "grand possessor")
Philip Herbert (Earl of Pembroke, "grand possessor")
Thomas Thorpe (the publisher)

- (2) Names of people addressed in the Sonnets:

Henry Wriothesle[y] (Earl of Southampton)
Elisabeth (the Queen)
Elisabeth Vernon (Southampton's wife)
Emilia Bassana (a courtier)

- (3) The true name of Shakespeare:

Edward (de) Vere

- (4) About a dozen of Oxford's pseudonyms (for example, Robert Greene).

The final category listed above is a topic in its own right and outside the scope of this article. But the fact of Oxford's multiple pseudonyms will figure into the analysis.

Hints of a Puzzle

For centuries, the Sonnets publication has been a topic of speculation. The dedication (see Figure 1, page one) is cryptic, the personages addressed or alluded to in the poems are unidentified, and how Thorpe obtained the manuscript has remained a mystery. Howard Staunton, in Park Lane's *The Complete Illustrated Shakespeare*, says, "Thorpe has prefixed to his quarto...this enigmatic preamble...a dedication silly in form and very puzzling in expression..."¹ Anything "enigmatic" and "puzzling" from the Elizabethan era cries out for a deeper look.

Writing in the autumn 1997 issue of *The Elizabethan Review*,² Oxfordian researcher John Rollett described a possible hidden message in the dedication and a code to unlock it. He observed that the dedication is arranged in inverted pyramids of 6, 2 and 4 lines, reflecting the number of letters in the name Edward de Vere, as shown in Figure 2. When he highlighted every 6th, 2nd and 4th word, he found the message, "THESE SONNETS ALL BY EVER THE FORTH."

Though brilliantly derived, there are problems with the hidden

Rollett's Solution, with additional observation, at right

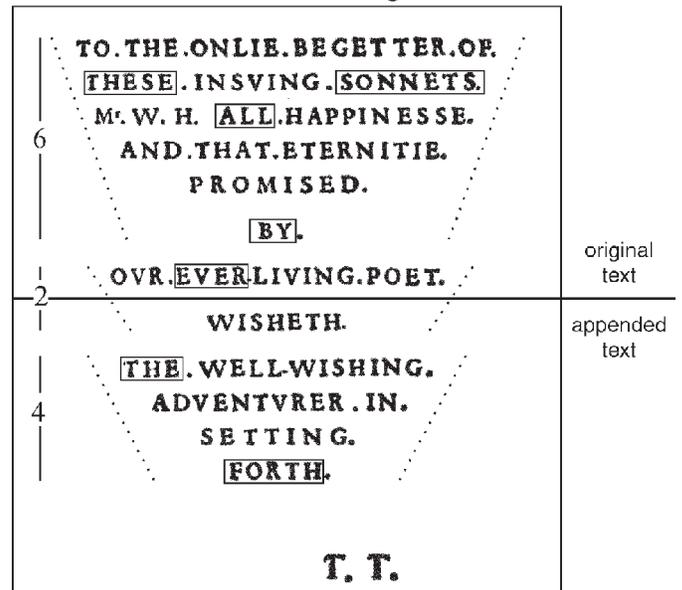


Figure 2

message that Rollet found. The words "THE FORTH" have proved a mystery. Ad hoc attempts at explanation typically take "forth" as "fourth." But "*E Vere* the fourth" would be inaccurate, as the 17th earl was not the fourth E. Vere; he was in fact the first. "Forth" is not "fourth" in the first place, and one must provide justification for presuming that the message means something other than what it says. Elizabethan spelling was often varied due to substantial reliance on phonetics, but I have yet to encounter in literature from the time the spelling "fourth" to mean "forth" or vice versa. Shakespeare consistently referred to "Henry the *Fourth*," and Ben Jonson bid him, "Shine *forth*, thou Star of Poets," indicating that when authors meant either "fourth" or "forth," they spelled it that way. Finally, there is no reason for the cryptographer — if there was one — to have added those final two words. He had already identified his particular subject, E. Ver, so further elaboration was unnecessary. Had the message read, "the Earl of Oxford," it might have required an added word or two to tell us which one out of the eighteen (up to that time) earls of Oxford he meant, but that is not the case. Thus, the justification so far offered for the two unexplained words is strained beyond acceptability.

On the Trail

As it happens, the mystery of the stilted language of the dedication clears up the mystery of the problematic encrypted message. A close reading of the text reveals something important: Not all of it is obscure; only part of it is. Figure 2 demarcates two distinct sections. Everything through "poet" presents a concise and sensible statement (excepting "begetter," which we will discuss later), while everything after "poet" is so tortured as to be nearly nonsense. Moreover, if we decode the lines only through "poet," then the 6-2-4 encoded message is simply, "THESE SONNETS ALL BY EVER," likewise a much more concise and sensible statement. There are two strong reasons, then, to conclude that the final eight words were *added to an original composition*.

Is it possible to arrange the proposed original composition in

such a way as to convey the 6-2-4 key to the hidden message, "These sonnets all by E.Ver"? Figure 3 shows a 6-2-4 pyramid arrangement of this proposed original composition, hinting at Edward de Vere's name and providing the key to decoding the hidden message. (We can just as easily invert the pyramids to the published style.) The three divisions in Figure 3 actually make a better presentation of the sense of the message than the longer one in the 1609 Quarto. This fact fits the deduction that the final product was the result of tampering with an original one.

TO
THE
ONLIE
BEGETTER
OF THESE
INSUING SONNETS
Mr WH
ALL HAPPINESSE
AND
THAT
ETERNITIE PROMISED
BY OUR EVER-LIVING POET

Figure 3

Despite the neatness of the proposed original Sonnets dedication, the fact is that the composition does *not* stop where it seems it should have. Rather, it rambles on for another eight words of obscure meaning, thereby adding two nonsensical words ("THE FORTH") to the otherwise satisfactory hidden message. Because the appended words mar both a sensible text *and* a clear encoded message, there must be a *purpose* behind their appearance. If so, what is it?

Rollett had wondered if the name Henry Wriothesley, Earl of Southampton, who scholars agree is the sole or the primary addressee of Sonnets 1 through 126, might somehow be encoded in the text. At first glance, it seemed impossible, as all of the required letters are there *but one*. Both "Henry" and "Wriothesley" end in *y*, but the text contains only one *y*.

With the name of the Fair Youth in mind, I went back to examining the dedication as it stood. Maybe the 6-2-4 decoder applied to letters as well as words. No, that wasn't it. Maybe there was a global pattern of some kind, a superimposed figure that dictated where to locate the letters. No, that didn't seem to work. Maybe marking where the letters are located would imply an image I hadn't considered. Let's see, here's an H.... That expectation was wrong, but after pursuing this line of inquiry for a while, a sequence began to materialize. It was becoming apparent that there is a point within the dedication from which the letters of the name Henry Wriothesle (omitting the final *y*) appear *in order*, although they are otherwise spaced irregularly. There are also quite a few duplicate letters. Figure 4 illustrates (omitting duplicate letters) what was emerging from the mist.

This hint of order seemed to be an important clue to deconstructing what might be some kind of puzzle. Still, maybe it was just coincidence. Maybe this approach would accommodate just about any person's name. But no, it soon became clear that certain other names cannot be spelled in this manner, including Shakespeare, Southampton and Oxford. It was even more exciting

A Solution Emerges

TO THE ONLIE BEGETTER OF
THESE INSUING SONNETS
M'WH ALL HAPPINESSE
AND THAT ETERNITIE
PROMISED
BY
OUR EVER LIVING POET
WISHETH
THE WELL WISHING
ADVENTURER IN
SETTING
FORTH

Begin here ↗

Figure 4

to realize that not even *John, James, Carl* or *Kim* appears. But H-E-N-R-Y-W-R-I-O-T-H-E-S-L-E does, fifteen necessary letters in a row. It was beginning to look as if these letters were in order for a reason.

To get a better look at how the name worked itself into the larger text, I wrote "HENRY WRIOTHESLE" vertically, attaching the original message to the column on both the left and right.

One thing was perturbing: the missing final *Y*. Finding anything less than a full name would mean that I was reading a pattern into a chance occurrence. A nearby bottle of bargain-basement *Concha y Toro* merlot triggered the right synapse, and the composer's ending flourish suddenly appeared. The last complete word in the column is *AND*. In Spanish, the word for *and* is *y*. Now the whole name is spelled out: HENRY WRIOTHESLEY, *and its expression requires a full run through the words of the dedication.*³ (See Figure 5.)

THAT
ETER-
NITIE
PROMISED
BY OUR EVER LIVING POET
WISHETH THE WELL WISHING
ADVENTURE R
IN SETTING
FORTH
TO
THE ONLIE BEGETTER
OF THESE INSUING
SONNETS M'WH
ALL
HAPPINESSE
AND= [Y]

Figure 5

(Continued on page 14)

Sonnets dedication (continued from page 13)

Checking the Odds of Coincidence

So we can find the final letter in Southampton's name but only through an invention. Is our invention one that the composer intended or to which he defaulted, or is it a coincidence?

For the time being, let's investigate the extent that coincidence might play in rendering the first fifteen letters in the name Henry Wriothesley in the manner we have found, omitting the *y* that is only implied. I first created a list of unique 15-letter name-based patterns (for the source, see later discussion and Endnote 7) and then checked to see how many of them appear in the dedication in the same manner. Out of 57 15-letter name sequences, 51 *do not* appear; only 6 do. So the probability of finding a single name by chance from that list is about 10 percent. This number is low enough to suggest that the appearance of HENRY WRIOTHESLE could be the result of deliberate design. That fact in turn increases the probability that the imputed *Y* is also there on purpose.

What else can we say about that possibility? Given the other Sonnet-related names that we will soon find embedded in the dedication without special wordplay, we could presume strict puzzle rules and eliminate Southampton as having anything to do with the Sonnets. If you are a devotee of William Herbert as the Youth, then you can dismiss the entry of Henry Wriothesley's name as incomplete and therefore invalid. I do not believe, however, that doing so would be intellectually honest.

Utter strictness is required only in certain aspects of a puzzle, not in its entirety, as in a code. For example, while a crossword puzzle's *design* is precise, its *definitions* are anything but. The Dedication Puzzle has rules, but we may not insist in advance on what those rules are; we can only induce them from the evidence. In a puzzle, context is crucial; one cannot solve a jigsaw or crossword puzzle without the other pieces as a guide. I am inclined to conclude that the clever way that the puzzle provides the final *Y* is a human touch that can be taken more as an indication that a person *was* involved in an embedding process than that one was not, and further, that he meant to include this name. *AND* is the only remaining word after 15 out of 16 required letters appear in a row. It rather stares you in the face. We should give this "coincidence" its due. It works so nicely in context that we would be remiss in *not* assuming significance.

There is another subtle point that works in favor of accepting the name as deliberately embedded. Without knowledge of how the puzzle was discovered, one might hastily conclude that anyone wishing to fit "Wriothesley" into it was forcing the issue. But at the outset I had no puzzle, no rules or guidelines, no issue to force at that initial point; *I was trying to find out if there was one*. The "Wriothesley" question led me to the fact of the puzzle in the first place, and this is no small matter. Had I contrived the name's appearance, then *the other logically expected names would not have panned out*, and there would have been no pack of solutions connected to the Sonnets and therefore no discovery. Knowing that Southampton was the front-runner as the Sonnets' primary addressee was the biggest clue to cracking the puzzle because I assumed, correctly or not, based upon scholars' conclusions, that if any names were to be found, his would surely be among them. If one were still to insist that 15/16ths of Henry's name is there by chance and that the implied final letter is also coincidence, we would certainly have enjoyed extraordinarily good luck in finding

that it revealed how the puzzle works.

We are subject to no imperative on this matter; the ultimate value of this investigation has trumped any care about this particular solution. But for the time being, and awaiting further comment, we may tentatively accept the idea that the whole name is there, and quite ingeniously. If we conclude that this rendition is deliberate, we need offer no excuses for the composer's abilities. He was no struggling compromiser, and he even had a sense of humor. Speaking of the puzzle's composer, who was he?

T **O** **T** **H** **E** **O** **N** **L** **I** **E** **B** **E** **G** **E** **T** **T** **E** **R** **O**
T **H** **E** **S** **E** **I** **N** **S** **U** **I** **N** **G** **S** **O** **N** **N** **E** **T** **S**
M **'** **W** **H** **A** **L** **L** **H** **A** **P** **P** **I** **N** **E** **S** **S** **E**
A **N** **D** **T** **H** **A** **T** **E** **T** **E** **R** **N** **I** **T** **I** **E**
P **R** **O** **M** **I** **S** **E** **D**
B **Y**
O **U** **R** **E** **V** **E** **R** **L** **I** **V** **I** **N** **G** **P** **O** **E** **T**

Figure 6

Thomas Thorpe's "CIPHERING" History

Thomas Thorpe's initials, *TT*, follow the Sonnets dedication and are the only other letters on the page, implying that Thorpe wrote the dedication. I think we can show that he did, at least up to the word "POET." Observe in Figure 6 that the dedication up to that point hides the name THOMAS THORPE in the same manner that we find HENRY WRIOTHESLE except that it is expressed even more neatly, from the start to the end of the text. Indeed, in this part of the dedication, no other significant name appears in this manner. As we will see in the next article (Part 2), the probability of this name's appearance by chance is just 2.5 percent.

Its appearance would be even less likely a coincidence if we were to find that Thorpe had embedded his name in exactly this way (see Figure 6) in previous publications under his direction.

After all, if there is no such other example, we might have reason to question the entire thesis of his involvement with the dedication and perhaps also with any design behind the appearance of Southampton's name. Not only would another example confirm the method of the Dedication Puzzle but it would also answer potential objections that "no one ever saw a puzzle like this before." Of course, no one would have seen anything like this unusual puzzle before if we discover that *it was someone's personal little game*.

Let's go straight to another of Thorpe's dedications. Katherine Duncan-Jones writes, "The...most puzzling link between [Richard Barnfield's] *Cynthia* and the *Sonnets* lies in its inclusion of...a floridly over-written commendatory poem by...one 'T.T. in commendation of the Authour his worke,' whose tone of cryptic knowingness is somewhat analogous to that of Thomas Thorpe's dedication to [*Shakespeare's Sonnets*]." She concludes from "This writer's fondness for contorted word-order and somewhat awkward compound epithets"⁴ that he is probably Thomas Thorpe. As we are about to see, this is surely the case.

The poem consists of four stanzas of seven lines each, through which we find Thorpe's name embedded seven times in succession (more when counting all permutations). I doubt that the renditions

| | | |
|------------------|--|-------------|
| THOMAS | Whylom th at in a sh Ep hear Ds gray coate ma ske d , | ED |
| THO | (Where m Aske d love th e noneage of his skill) | WA |
| RPE | R eares now his Eagle-wing eD pe n, new task e d, | RD |
| THO | To scale th e by-clift Muse so le-pleasing hill: | |
| M | Dropping sweete Nectar poesie from m his quill, | |
| AS THORPE | a Dmires fayr E Cynthia with his iv ory pe n | DE |
| | Fayre Cynthia lo V 'd, f Ea R'd, of Gods and m En. | VERE |
| | Down E sliding from that clou D es ore-peering mountaine: | ED |
| | Decking W t double gr A ce ye neighbor plaines, | WA |
| | D Rawes christall D ew, fro[m] Pegase foot-sprong fou[n]tain, | RD |
| | Whose flowre-set banks, delights, sweet choyce containes; | |
| | Nere yet discover'd to the country swaines: | |
| | Heere bu D thos E branches, which adorne his turtle, | DE |
| | With lo V e mad E ga R lands, of hart-bleeding Mirt L E. | VERE |
| | Rays'd from th E cyn D ers, of the thrice-sact towne; | ED |
| | Illions sooth-telling Sybillist appears, | |
| | Eclipsing Phoebus love, with scornefull frowne, ⁶ | |
| | W hose tragick end, A ffoo R Ds warme-water teares, | WARD |
| | (For pittie-wanting Pacae, none forbear e s, | |
| | Such perio D haps, to b E auties price ore-priz'd; | DE |
| | Where Ianus-faced lo V E, doth lu R k E disguiz'd. | VERE |
| TH | N Ere-waining Cynthia yeel D s thee triple thanks, | ED |
| OM | W hose be A mes unbo R row E d darke ye wor L D's fair E eye | WARD |
| AS | And a s full streames that e V E R fill th E yr banks; | VERE |
| THORPE | So th ose rare Sonnets, where wits ty pe doth lie, | |
| THOMAS | With Troyan N ym phe; doe so a re thy fame to sk ye. | |
| THO | And th ose, and these, contend thy Muse to rayse | |
| RPE | (Larke mou[n]ting Muse) wt more the[n] comon pr aise. | |

Figure 7

in the middle stanzas are deliberate, since the letters in Thorpe's name are fairly common. But the dual appearance of his name in the first and final stanzas, shown in bold capital letters to the left of the poem, may be intentional, particularly in light of further evidence of his technique. Recall that among the names I find embedded in the Sonnets dedication, only Thomas Thorpe appears in the original portion of it, and in beginning-to-end order. No other names that quickly come to mind appear that way in these two stanzas.

There is more. We do not find the name of the supposed author, "Richard Barnfield" (or "Richard Barnefeilde," as it is spelled in *Cynthia*), embedded in *any* of the stanzas. Is anyone else's name embedded therein? Yes, in *every* stanza, we find the name of the man I believe to be the true author, whom the poet was careful to tell us in the very first line appears "in a shepherds gray coate *masked*."⁵ Along with his own name, Thorpe embedded "Edward de Vere" *in order, in every one of the stanzas*, using none of the letters required for his own name. Apparently we have discovered Thomas Thorpe's personal word game.

To the left of Figure 7 are two double renditions of Thorpe's name, marked with bold, lower-case letters in the text; to the right are the renditions of Oxford's name, marked with bold, capital letters in the text. The names are shown again to the left and right of Figure 7.

Observe some regularity in the layout, as shown to the right side of Figure 7. In every case, VERE appears intact on the final line that Thorpe uses to express the name, and DE appears in the line

before it. In the first three stanzas, those words may be found on the same lines: 6 and 7. The first two stanzas have the same layout of ED/WA/RD/DE/VERE, on the same lines (1, 2, 3, 6, 7). In the last stanza, the first three lines yield EDWARD DE VERE, and the last three lines yield THOMAS THORPE, as highlighted by the underlined side notes in Figure 7.

The next task was to test the probability that these names are embedded in the text by chance. Designing a fair statistical test is not as easy as you might think. We may not test the appearance of various random strings of 12 letters, because perhaps some letters were used less frequently in the Elizabethan age. Also, words naturally lend themselves to finding other words (including names), requiring a test of words or names instead of simply random letters. To satisfy as many criteria as possible for a fair test, I began with a list of 100 names of Elizabethan writers (basically every name that I had collected in my research up to that point; see Endnote 10). I culled out each "Thomas" and "Edward" (and an "Everard" and a "Devereux"), since they are forms against which we are testing. I then removed repeated forms (such as John), including only one instance of each, so as to remove any bias of inclusion or exclusion based on the availability or lack thereof of certain strings of letters. I took the remaining names and mixed them up to remove any bias in alphabetical listing. Then I strung them together and cut them into 72 pieces of 12 letters each.⁷ I asked a statistician with a Masters degree in applied mathematics to run a series of tests. In testing the stanzas, we disregarded the

(Continued on page 16)

Sonnets dedication (continued from page 15)

imputed letters in brackets and the diminutive letters following the y's.

The simplest test for the possibility that THOMAS THORPE appears by chance in the Barnfield poem is to determine the likelihood of finding any of the 12-letter test "names" embedded twice in a row in the first and final stanzas, as his is. The answer is zero. A more generous question of how many test names appear twice in a row in *any* two stanzas, we find only two (sterherberdt and nsontourneur), indicating a probability of only 2.8 percent, or one instance out of 36. These strings of letters both appear in the middle stanzas, which is less suggestive of deliberate intent than Thorpe's name's appearance in the first and last. So we would have been remarkably lucky, absent intent, to have found Thorpe's name twice in a row in any two stanzas, much less the first and last.

We next tested two prominent aspects of the appearance of EDWARD DE VERE in the poem, namely its appearance at least once in each stanza and the consistent appearance of his last name alone on one line. Here are the results using our test names:

- Test names showing up in all four stanzas: 22%, or about 1 in 5.
- Test names showing up in all four stanzas with the final four letters on a single line each time: 4.2%, or 1 in 24.
- Test names showing up in all four stanzas with the final four letters *alone* on one line (i.e., with no other required letters in the pattern earlier on that line): *zero*.
- Test names showing up in all four stanzas with the final four letters alone on the *final* line of the stanza in at least three of the four stanzas: *zero*.

We next tested the chance of finding actual names of other Elizabethan poets in this text. I checked each stanza for names from the list of Elizabethan poets given in Endnote 10. Out of those 100 names, 11 also show up at least once in each stanza.⁸ Three of them are Thomas, and one is an Edward, though, so there are only 7 independent names. We can tentatively estimate that the chance of "Edward de Vere" showing up *somewhere* in each stanza by chance is about one in ten. "Edward de Vere" is the *only* name that shows up so that the last name is intact on one line all four times. The probability of its being there by chance in that manner is apparently less than 1 in 100. Either assumption will serve our purpose in suggesting a high probability of deliberate design.

Now we can guess why Thorpe's "tone of cryptic knowingness is somewhat analogous to that of TT's dedication to [*Shakespeare's Sonnets*]." That tone is in both places *for the same reason*, which is that he was working not only to create English sense but also to embed names according to his personal word game. He was addressing the Earl of Oxford cryptically because he knew something that he could not otherwise reveal about the "masked" man (line 1) wielding "his *ivory* (E.Ver-y) pen" (line 6). Thorpe was involved in at least two of Oxford's projects, one for Thomas Nashe in 1590 and this one for Barnfield in 1595, which made him a sensible choice for publishing the Sonnets

in 1609. With all these connections, we may perceive personal meaning in Thorpe's use of the word *our* in "our ever-living poet."

The Same Construct Appears in the Inscription on the Stratford Monument

Sometime between 1616 (when it is dated, per Shaksper's death) and 1623 (the probable time), someone erected a monument in the Holy Trinity Church of Stratford-Upon-Avon. It showed a merchant with a sack of grain. Several decades later, someone altered it to show the man with a quill pen and a pillow. Fronting the monument is an inscription in Latin and English, as shown in Figure 8.

IVDICIO PYLIUM, GENIO SOCRATEM, ARTE MARONEM,
TERRA TEGIT, POPULUS MAERET, OLYMPUS HABET

STAY PASSENGER, WHY GOEST THOU BY SO FAST?
READ IF THOU CANST, WHOM ENVIOUS DEATH HATH
PLAST

WITH IN THIS MONUMENT **SHAKSPEARE**: WITH WHOME,
QUICK NATURE DIDE: WHOSE NAME, DOTH DECK YS TOMBE,
FAR MORE, THEN COST: SIEH ALL, YT HE HATH WRITT,
LEAVES LIVING ART, BUT PAGE, TO SERVE HIS WITT.

Figure 8

The message begins with a Latin inscription that is inappropriate to Shakespeare but can be taken as a cynical dig at Shaksper. There is more to pique the skepticism of the careful reader. The inscription does not spell Shakespeare the way that name appears in the poet's publications. It is spelled "Shakspeare," providing the *short a* sound of the first half of Shaksper's name and the *long e* sound of the second half of Shakespeare's name, as if to equivocate just enough to satisfy local people who think they are looking at monument created for Shaksper and visitors who come to see a monument to Shakespeare. The words of the inscription are evasive and non-specific, telling us naught about who "Shakspeare" was or why he had a monument. The reference to his "witt" and what he hath "writt" is similarly obscure. If one is in on the story of Shakespeare and Shaksper, one can easily read the lines as hilarious sarcasm: "All that he hath writ [*which is absolutely nothing*] leaves...but page [i.e., *an empty page*] to serve his witt."

The inscription's most intriguing words are "Read if thou canst," which is a bold challenge to look for something to read that would not be obvious to everyone. Does the layout of the inscription provide a hint of what one should find?

| | E | D | W | A | R | D | |
|-------------|---|---|---|---|---|---|--------------|
| | IVDICIO PYLIUM, GENIO SOCRATEM, ARTE MARONEM, TERRA TEGIT, POPULUS MAERET, OLYMPUS HABET | | | | | | |
| | D | E | V | E | R | E | |
| | STAY PASSENGER, WHY GOEST THOU BY SO FAST? | | | | | | |
| EDWA | READ IF THOU CANST, WHOM ENVIOUS DEATH HATH PLAST | | | | | | ED |
| R | WITH IN THIS MONUMENT SHAKSPEARE : WITH WHOME, | | | | | | WA |
| D DE | QUICK NATURE DIDE : WHOSE NAME, DOTH DECK YS TOMBE, | | | | | | RD DE |
| | FAR MORE, THEN COST: SIEH ALL, YT HE HATH WRITT, | | | | | | |
| VERE | LEAVES LIVING ART, BUT PAGE, TO SERVE HIS WITT. | | | | | | VERE |

Figure 9

Observe as shown at the top of Figure 9 that the Latin words beginning the inscription comprise *twelve words*, separated into two lines of *six words each*. This layout corresponds to the six letters in each of the first and last names of Edward de Vere. The English verse is also laid out in *six lines*, reflecting the same theme. Could this layout be providing the same hint given by the twelve lines, divided 6-2-4, in the Sonnets dedication, as surmised by Rollett? Are we being entreated to seek the letters that spell the true name of Shakespeare? I think so.

In the monument's inscription, EDWARD DE VERE is embedded in the text in the same manner that we find "Thomas Thorpe" in the Sonnets' dedication, i.e., starting at the beginning of the text and ending at the end. In fact, the name is there *twice*, which makes the probability soar that it was placed there on purpose. Its appearance requires two sets of 12 sequential letters in 42 words of 178 letters.

Figure 9 shows both renderings of the name. The bold sequence derives from the first set of available letters, the underlined sequence from the second set. Aside from the double rendering, some aspects of the layout are further suggestive of deliberate design:

- (1) In both cases, "EDWARD DE" is found over three consecutive lines, a line is skipped entirely, and then "VERE" is all on one line.
- (2) "VERE" is intact on the *final* line of the inscription both times. In Thorpe's dedicatory poem to Barnfield, VERE is intact on the final line required for the name every time and on the final line of a stanza three times out of four.
- (3) The "DE" is together in both instances and on the same line (line 4).
- (4) Both times, the name appears in the order of the message and only in that order. In other words, there is no coincidental occurrence of the name starting from any point after line one and circling back through the text to that point.
- (5) The names begin not on the first line but rather with the suggestive phrase, "read if thou canst."

Testing the Probability of Chance

If you think it would be easy to find two names embedded twice in the monument's inscription in this manner, try a little test. Give yourself the extra leeway of using all six lines of the message and look for some of your favorite names. Francis Bacon? No, it's not there even once. Roger Manners? Nope, not once. Christopher Marlowe? You can't even get "Christopher" out of it. William Stanley? No, you can't even get "William." Which means we also can't get William Shaksper, either. In fact, if you start at "Read if thou canst," you can't even get "Bill." Surely we can get just Shakespeare, since we are already given "Shakspeare" in a single word. Sorry, you can't get that, either. John Lyly? Forget it; you can't even get the first letter, J. But "Edward de Vere" is there, all 12 letters in a row, twice.

To obtain the probability of EDWARD DE VERE appearing twice in this manner by chance, we did four tests, using the 72 12-letter test names listed in Endnote 7. We were generous in using the *entire* text, not just that beginning with "Read if Thou Canst." Here are the results:

—Test names showing up in the text twice, from beginning to end, without using any of the same letters of the text: 3 out of 72,

or 4.2 percent.

—Test names showing up as above but with the final four letters on any single line each time: *one*.

—Test names showing up as above but with the final four letters on the same (much less the last) line: *zero*.

EDWARD DE VERE's special appearance has a *very* low probability of occurring by chance. We could not find a single test name out of 72 in which the final four letters, much less the entire last name, appear in the same line, much less in the last line of the text, much less when beginning with the second line, "Read if thou canst." Recall also that the prefix DE is found intact both times, on the same line. We would have to test thousands of 12-letter sequences to get an accurate statistical probability of EDWARD DE VERE appearing by chance in this manner. For now, however, we have enough information to postulate deliberate design.

I next decided to do a statistical test that would satisfy the question that the inscription appears boldly to ask, "*Canst thou read who the real poet is?*" Using all six lines of the message, I tested the inscription⁹ for the names of 100 Elizabethan poets to see who else the poet might be.¹⁰ Not a single other name appears so that the last name is intact on the final line.

Only four names show up twice somewhere in the text. One of them is Edward Dyer, which is there simply because "Edward de" has been purposely embedded there already, thereby requiring only two more letters to produce the name.¹¹ The remaining three names are *Thomas Nashe*, *Thomas Twyne* and *Thomas Watson*. "Thomas" appears compactly in full on the second line of the inscription (the same line that begins both renditions of Edward de Vere), aiding this result. As it happens, my research shows that all three of these twice-appearing names—Thomas Nashe, Thomas Twyne and Thomas Watson—are among Oxford's pseudonyms. So from a list of 100 Elizabethan poets, among the only five whose names appear twice, four are either the Earl of Oxford or one of his pseudonyms, while the fifth is a near copy of Edward de Vere, rendering it irrelevant.

Because the three Thomases share a first name, it is highly unlikely that all their names are there on purpose. We have three possible explanations: (1) They are all there by chance; (2) they result by chance as derivatives from a purposeful single embedding of the name Thomas Thorpe; (3) all three of them are there deliberately as examples of Oxford's pseudonyms; (4) one or two of them are there deliberately, and the others result by chance. If *any* of the four Thomases (including Thorpe) are there deliberately, then those remaining are probably there by chance, which means that we have *no* additional names from our list appearing twice unaided by design.

The fact that "Thomas" begins on the same line as "Edward" is suggestive of a purposeful embedding. If one of the three Thomases is there on purpose, it is probably Thomas Nashe, given evidence I have found that Nashe was Jonson's favorite among Oxford's pseudonyms.¹² "Thomas" appears in full on line two and "Nashe" in full on line three and on line four. If *any* of the four Thomases (including Thorpe) are there deliberately, then those remaining would be much more likely to appear, which would mean that we have *no* additional names from our list appearing twice unaided by design.

(Continued on page 18)

Sonnets dedication (continued from page 17)

To gain some insight into the exclusivity of this construction, we might also ask how many among the 100 names of Elizabethan poets show up at least *once*. If we eliminate from consideration all poets named Edward or Thomas, then only five independent names show up even *once*, and only *two* of those show up if we begin on line two, where Edward de Vere begins. *No name appears even once if we require the last name to be intact in the final line.* From all this, we can be secure in concluding that someone arranged the Stratford monument inscription to spell out twice the true name of Shakespeare.

To obtain the probability of finding “Edward de Vere” in *both* Thorpe’s ode to Barnfield and the Stratford monument by chance as we have, we must multiply their two probabilities together. By the most loosely construed rules of construction, that probability is .22 x .042, or 1 in 100. By the most restrictively construed rules, the probability is beyond our simple tests to compute.

I further suggest that it is not coincidence that *both* compositions produce the name “Vere” intact on the final line of the poem or stanza in five renderings. The composers seem to have done so as a rule of construction.

Did Thorpe Do It?

We certainly must allow that some authority commissioned Thomas Thorpe to create the Stratford monument inscription, within which he once again employed his personal word game. While I recoil from the gratuitous condescension that attends mentions of Thorpe in the orthodox literature, composing for the Stratford monument does seem rather an exalted commission for one of Oxford’s occasional publishers. If it wasn’t Thorpe, it was probably someone intimately associated with Thorpe who shared or had adopted his method of hiding names in texts. Given our evidence that an original text for the Sonnets dedication was expanded beyond the requirement of neatly embedding Thorpe’s name, we may surmise that whoever created the Stratford monument inscription might also have had a hand in creating the remaining portion of the Sonnets dedication. As we will explore in a future article, the investigation ultimately leads to Ben Jonson. But for now we have a more important question to ask.

Why Those Particular Words?

If Thorpe had successfully embedded his own name in the first part of the Sonnets dedication as was his custom, why did he or someone else add eight additional words and choose such gibberish in doing so? Only W-R-I-O was missing from Southampton’s name in a run through the original dedication. Certainly, had the composer wished to add only enough words to generate the required letters to complete Southampton’s name, he could have written a better line than “wisheth the well-wishing adventurer in setting forth.” For example, “WRITER, AUTHOR” would finish the message after “POET” well enough, i.e., “...promised by our ever-living poet, writer, author.” Two simple words such as these would simultaneously provide W-R-I-O to complete Henry’s name *and* make the hidden message read, quite sensibly, “THESE SONNETS ALL BY EVER, AUTHOR.” *Why did the composer append those particularly odd eight words instead?*

This question opened Pandora’s Box. The answer had to be that the composer’s project was much larger than embedding just a single name. That he settled for such obtuse verbiage almost

certainly meant that he had hidden other names pertinent to *Shakespeare’s Sonnets* in the message.

Future articles will discuss a statistical analysis of the puzzle, the names of the Sonnets’ producers, the real-life characters in Shakespeare’s Sonnets and the probable role of Ben Jonson in the project.

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Endnotes:

1. *The Complete Illustrated Shakespeare*, ed. Howard Staunton, Park Lane, New York, 1979, p.758.
2. Rollett, John. *The Elizabethan Review*, Autumn 1997.
3. Almost the same wordplay occurs in English. The final *AND* precedes the opening word, *THAT*. The letter *Y* in those years was commonly used to stand for the Old English “thorn,” the first two letters in certain short articles beginning with *th*, such as *the*, *this* or *that*, as in “Whose beames unborrowed darke y^e world’s faire eye,” which is found in Thomas Thorpe’s dedication to Barnfield. The *y* in such cases was typically followed by a tiny lower-case letter to indicate which specific article was meant. For example, *y^e* denoted *the*, *y^s* meant *this*, and *y^t* denoted *that*. So after using all words necessary to spell “Henry Wriothesle” up to the final letter, the next words are “...AND THAT;” perhaps a clever way of approximately saying, “...AND Y.” I have no intention of arguing the deliberateness of this particular wordplay, because of its imprecision in that *Y* is not *precisely* “that” and also because using the word *THAT* in this manner requires overlapping the *H* that begins HENRY. As we will deduce, the composer did not, and indeed could not, allow such an overlap when embedding a name in the dedication.
4. Duncan-Jones, Katherine. (1998) *Shakespeare’s Sonnets*. Arden Shakespeare, p.91, 47.
5. There is a further connection between Barnfield and Oxford that will be important later when we discuss Ben Jonson.
6. There is also a very compact rendering of EDWARD DE VERE across the second and third stanzas, with EDWARD DE in lines 5 and 6 of stanza two and VERE on line 3 of stanza three. Also, there is another VERE among the three words, “ivory pen/ Fayre.” There is also an EDWARD DE ERE in the last three lines of the final stanza, with ERE on the final line, where it belongs. I can make a case that the missing V in this otherwise ideally positioned rendering is but a typesetter’s error.
7. Here are the 72 12-letter name-based patterns that we tested: MichaelDrayt, onHeywoodAch, elowLewickeF, lemingGrange, WilliamAlaba, sterHerbertD, aviesJamesMa, bbeBarnabeBa, rnesWatsonGe, rvaseMarkham, AngellDayOwe, nSackvilleMa, rkAlexanderB, oydPeeleNich, olasMarstonW, ebsterGeorge, BucCampionTa, ylorGeoffrey, GatesChurchy, ardLodgeDavi, dRowlandSamu, elDanielChri, stopherMarlo, weForsettGol, dingRobertPe, rcyWeeverFai, rfaxDyerMidd, letonFerrers, EdmundBolton, AbrahamGooge, LokFraunceMo, ffettTilneyD, onnePhilipSi, dneYFulkeGre, villeDekkerJ, osephHallArt, hurBrookeCon, stableWotton, GabrielHarve, yMaryPorting, tonDeloneyFr, ancisMeresJa, sperWarnerHu, ghHollandBen, SmithMontgom, erieBretonJo, nsonTourneur, HumphreyKing, KydJohnClaph, amBlenerhass, etLaneSoowth, ernDickenson, EmiliaLanyer, TurbervilleL, ylyDeebleWhe, tstoneSouthw, ellAnthonyMu, ndayWillobie, NasheHaringt, onProctorWal, terGuilpinSp, enserRaleighB, astardWilmot, TwyneGreeneH, enryChettleM, atthewRoyden, FernandoStan, leyStillJosh, uaSylvesterR, ichardBarnfi, eldCharlesCy, rilUnderdown.
8. Here are the names found in each stanza. Shared names appearing are in bold: **Thomas** Bastard, Henry Chettle, Angell Day, Michael Drayton, **Edward** Forsett, Mary Herbert, **Thomas** Nashe, Matthew Royden, Owen Roydon, **Thomas** Watson, and Henry Wotton. None of them appears with the last name intact on one line.

9. As in the Barnfield test, I took the Ys in Ys and Yt at face value, but it does not really matter to our results, as this is only a statistical test. You are welcome to try it using “this” and “that.”
10. Here are the names I tested for inclusion in the monument inscription. Underlined names appear at least once. The dual numbers denote the number of times that name appears, from the start of the message and from line two, where Edward de Vere begins. Shared names appearing are in bold: **Thomas Achelow** (1,1), William Alabaster, Barnabe Barnes, Richard Barnfield, Thomas Bastard, Thomas Blenerhasset, Edmund Bolton, Mark Alexander Boyd, Nicholas Breton (1,0), Arthur Brooke, George Buc, Thomas Campion, George Chapman, Henry Chettle (1,0), Thomas Churchyard, John Clapham, Henry Constable, Samuel Daniel, John Davies, Angell Day, Nicholas Deeble, Thomas Dekker, Thomas Deloney, Robert Devereux, John Dickenson, John Donne, Michael Drayton, **Edward Dyer** (2,2), Richard Edwards, Edward Fairfax, George Ferrers, Abraham Fleming, **Edward Forsett** (1,1), Abraham Fraunce, Geoffrey Gates (1,0), Arthur Golding, Barnabe Googe, John Grange, Robert Greene, Fulke Greville, Everard Guilpin, Joseph Hall, John Harington, Gabriel Harvey, Mary Herbert (Sidney) (1,1), Jasper Heywood, Hugh Holland, Ben Jonson, Humphrey King, Thomas Kyd, John Lane, Emilia Lanyer (Bassana/o), Edward Lewicke, Thomas Lodge, Henry Lok, John Lyly, James Mabbe, Gervase Markham, Christopher Marlowe, John Marston, Francis Meres, Thomas Middleton, Thomas Moffett, Alexander Montgomerie, Anthony Munday, **Thomas Nashe** (2,2), George Peele, William Percy, Richard Portington, **Thomas Proctor** (1,1), Walter Raleigh (1,1), David Rowland, Samuel Rowlands, Matthew Royden, Owen Roydon, Thomas Sackville, Philip Sidney, William Smith, John Soowthern, Robert Southwell, Edmund Spenser, Fernando Stanley, William Stanley, John Still, Joshua Sylvester, John Taylor, Charles Tilney, Cyril Tourneur, George Turberville, Nicholas Turberville, **Thomas Twyne** (2,2), Thomas Underdowne, William Warner, **Thomas Watson** (2,2), John Webster, John Weever, George Whetstone, Henry Willobie, Robert Wilmot and Henry Wotton.
11. If you want to make a case that the writer meant to cite Dyer and that de Vere is there by coincidence, be my guest.
12. One might also propose that Nashe, Twyne or Watson is included deliberately because he was a writer in his own right and co-wrote the Shakespeare canon with Oxford, but the evidence strongly contraindicates this view.

Sidebar - A Possible Decoding Device

From our point of view, finding the names hidden in the Sonnets dedication presents a puzzle. From the point of view of its creators, it probably wasn't one. Even people in on the secrets of Oxford's life might not know what to look for in any specific layout. Worse, some names can show up as artifacts unintended by the creator. Hidden messages that have no planned method of solution (this discovery notwithstanding) are unlikely ever to be read. Therefore, we should consider the possibility that there was a device for reading the secretly embedded names in such constructs. Although there could be some sort of internal decoding device, I haven't found one. What else could it be?

The layout of the dedication hints at an answer. The words are printed in *capital letters, equally spaced apart*, as if to give each letter equal status for some decoding process. The lower-case *r* in “Mr.” is disproportionately small, as if to avoid having it get in the way. I suggest that the answer may lie not within the dedication itself but in physical decoders. *Pieces of paper with holes cut out, corresponding to the letters in each embedded name*, would work just fine. Figure A shows such a page, with holes in it corresponding to certain letters in the dedication. When it is overlaid onto the dedication, one reads only THOMAS THORPE, as shown in Figure B. This idea has further application in that one could use such a device to extract the whole-word message, THESE SONNETS ALL BY

EVER, from the dedication *without* being forced to include the offending additional words, THE FORTH. So this possible answer solves two problems at once. Moreover, we can easily see how the word AND could appear in a single box, denoting the single letter Y at the end of HENRY WRIOTHESLEY and providing some amusement in the process.

This solution to the question of decoding is utter conjecture, as I have no evidence that any Elizabethans used such a device. (Such evidence may yet turn up, as I haven't sought it out.) But one can easily imagine a sheaf of perforated papers surreptitiously accompanying a copy of *Shake-speare's Sonnets* for those in on the secret. Behind closed doors, champions of the Earl of Oxford might have gotten together to enjoy the parlor game of overlaying the pages onto the dedication and reading and discussing the identities of the players in his life's story. If some agent of the Cecils or the king saw the papers, so what? “Those silly things? They are just my daughter's playtime cut-outs.”

Speaking of puzzle devices, what should we make of the periods that permeate the message? There are 28 of them, and they have no obvious function. One possibility is that they denote the number of deliberately embedded names. This series of articles lists or alludes to 21 likely inclusions. We will explore other possibilities later.

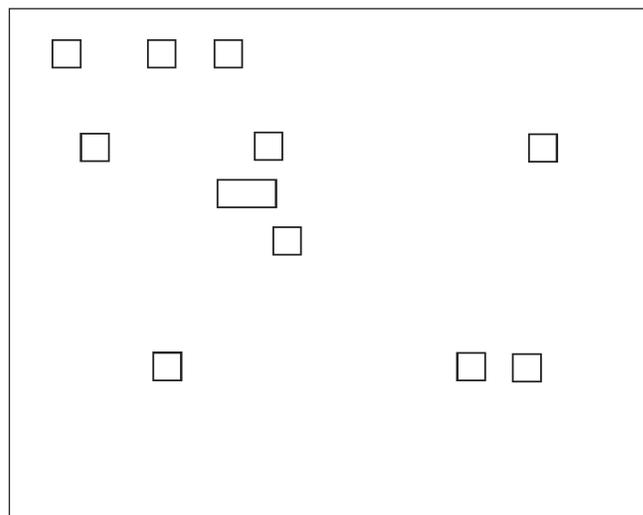


Figure A

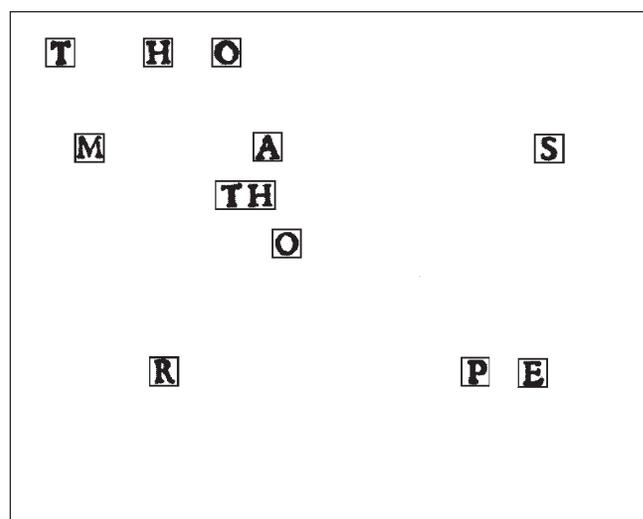


Figure B