



Beyond Reasonable Doubt: New Evidence and Arguments since The “Declaration of Reasonable Doubt”

Part 2: Major discoveries: First Folio and Stratford monument

With Professor Stanley Wells’ admission that all of the evidence for Shakspeare as a writer is posthumous, the case for him as Shakespeare rises or falls on the credibility of the First Folio and Stratford monument. Could it be that the so-called “twin pillars” of the Stratfordian case are just slender reeds, easily snapped?

The First Folio

In the Declaration we say that “The First Folio testimony does point to Shakspeare as the author,” but then ask “should this be taken at face value?” and go on to point out several anomalies that call it into question. We stand by all of it, and now offer these additional reasons to think the Folio front matter is questionable:

The first problem is the iconic image, supposedly of the author, on the title page. The [Droeshout engraving](#) is so odd in so many ways that orthodox scholars find it an embarrassment and are unable to account for it. It has no neck, and the head is too big for the body, making it appear to be suspended on the ruff in mid-air. The hair is longer on one side than the other. The great bulbous forehead is so large that it seems unnatural. Some think it has two right eyes, one lower than the other, its nose is off center, and the mouth is too small.

Scholars blame the engraver, Martin Droeshout, but the publishers did not have to accept it and could have hired someone else for such an important project. The fact that they did not implies that they were satisfied. At least one notable oddity was evidently quite deliberate. In 1911 a tailor published an article pointing out that the right side of the front of the doublet shown in the engraving is “obviously” the left side of the back. He wrote that it was “not unnatural to assume it was intentional and done with express object and purpose.”

In 2010, a detailed analysis of the pattern in the doublet concluded that the tailor had it exactly right. The other oddities are subjective and could be due to bad drawing, but not the “Impossible Doublet.” The analysis of the doublet is objective, involving measuring and counting, and completely verifiable. The engraver, working from some real garment, based the left front of the doublet on the left front of the garment, then turned the garment around and based the right front of the doublet on the left rear of the same garment. As a result, the most iconic image of the author turns out to have two left arms! Rather than amateurish and incompetent, the engraving turns out to be a skillfully executed enigma.

The analyst then points out other anomalies and writes that “although one or two peculiarities might be ascribed to carelessness, six or seven (some obvious) seem to point towards a deliberate agenda...” He found it difficult not to think that the man depicted was being gently and surreptitiously mocked, and that by featuring a “ridiculous caricature” of the Stratford man, the publishers were suggesting to the observant reader that the notion that Shakspeare was the author Shakespeare was a deception. See in Chapter 10: “Shakespeare’s Impossible Doublet” in [Shakespeare Beyond Doubt?](#) (Shahan and Waugh, eds), a book cited and discussed several times in “Beyond Reasonable Doubt,” Part 1 above.

Why give the man depicted two left arms? Not having a right arm, he must have written left-handed. A tradition about left-handed writers dates to Artemidorus in the 2nd Century AD, who commented: “Writing with the left hand is to make some secret circumvention, to cunny-catch, deceive, or defame any one.” The OED defines “cunny catch” as “to trick, cheat, dupe or gull.” If the portrait represents Shakspeare of Stratford, then the “express object and purpose” that the tailor surmised in 1911 seems to have been to depict him as a deceiving, gulling, tricking, cheating defamer and not the real author. Artemidorus was widely read and quoted at the time, including by William Camden and Ben Jonson.

His “Interpretation of Dreams,” with the allegation about lefties, was translated into English in 1606, and Jonson mentions Artemidorus and “Interpretation of Dreams” in his play *Silent Woman* in 1610.

On the page facing the Droeshout engraving is a ten-line poem about the engraving by Ben Jonson, addressed “To the Reader.” Jonson was known for his ambiguity, and this poem is a good example. It begins:

This Figure, that thou here seest put,
It was for gentle Shakespeare cut;

Rather than a *picture of Shakespeare*, we see a “Figure” that was cut “for” him and then “put” there. A frontispiece image in an author’s collected works should be *of him*, not something created *for him*. According to the OED, one definition of “figure” at that time was “an imaginary form, a phantasm.”

A few lines later the poem reads:

O, could he have but drawn his wit
as well in brasse, as he hath hit
His face;

It seems odd to speak of the engraver having “hit” his face. An alternative meaning of “hit” is “hid.” Chaucer once used it that way, as Jonson probably knew. Did he perhaps mean for others to read it that way and think that the engraving actually hid the author’s image, rather than being a likeness?

Jonson ends by saying “Reader, looke/ Not on his Picture, but his Booke.” Rather than affirming the authenticity of the engraving (its ostensible purpose), it undercuts its own message, telling the reader that the engraving should be ignored in favor of the plays, where the real author is to be found. Since we now know that the Droeshout engraving is blatantly bogus, this interpretation has strong support. (For a visual analysis of the Impossible Doublet by actress Debbie Radcliffe, watch this online [video](#).)

If, in fact, the image and poem are cautions to the reader, it appears that there is much to be cautious about. Nothing in the First Folio specifically states that Shakspeare of Stratford *was* the author “Shakespeare,” nor does it contain any biographical information to confirm that he was. It would have been very easy to do so. It does not even display the coat of arms that he and his father went to such trouble and expense to acquire. That would have left no doubt about the identity of the author, and its omission can hardly be an oversight. Nor does the Folio include a eulogy from any of the fellow writers with whom he supposedly collaborated. At least they were consistent, since no putative collaborator wrote a tribute at the time when he died, either.

Ben Jonson was the only important writer to pen a tribute for the First Folio – this for the “Soul of the age!” Jonson’s own folio contained numerous tributes from fellow writers, far more than the four to Shakespeare. The three others who wrote tributes to Shakespeare in the First Folio all seem to have been close to Jonson. Ben Jonson and Shakespeare were rivals, and in his later writings Jonson is critical of Shakespeare’s plays. It seems odd that Jonson was chosen to write the main eulogy rather than one of the putative collaborators, such as Heywood, Dekker, Middleton or Fletcher. The Folio ascribes all of the plays to Shakespeare alone. If, in fact, the author collaborated with others, then we know that the Folio is misleading at least about that.

Stratfordians take at face value two introductory letters attributed to Shakspeare’s fellow actor-shareholders John Heminge and Henry Condell (their names are *printed* beneath them, not “signed” as is often claimed). According to the two letters, they collected, edited and published the thirty-six plays in the 900-page Folio, despite having no evident prior experience as writers or editors, in order to “keep the memory of so worthy a friend, & fellow alive, as was our SHAKESPEARE.” This is said to prove that Shakspeare was the author. In fact, Ben Jonson, not Heminge and Condell, wrote the two epistles, as George Steevens showed in 1770. Steevens, a distinguished 18th-century Shakespeare editor, produced twelve pages of parallels between the epistles and writings of Jonson. He concluded that Jonson wrote both epistles, and Edmond Malone agreed. Jonson, unlike Heminge and Condell, *was* qualified to write the front matter and edit the plays in the Folio,

having edited and published his own collected *Works* – the *first* folio of English plays – seven years earlier. If the Folio’s claims about Heminge and Condell are false, why assume everything else in the Folio is true?

Both letters contain falsehoods and contradictions. One says they were “without ambition... of self-profit,” while the other repeatedly tells the reader to “buy!” The second letter says that the plays were “maimed and deformed” but are now “cured and perfect” and “absolute in their numbers as [the author] conceived them.” It is well known that the plays are full of obvious errors, yet Ben Jonson has Heminge and Condell uttering promotional puffery for their supposed play editing skills, which discerning readers would know is not true. “Maimed and deformed” contradicts the claim on the title page that the plays were “Published according to the True Originall Copies.” If Heminge and Condell were the editors, how did they miss the contradiction?

And how can something be both an original and a copy? The front matter is full of this kind of double-talk. Both letters say that the dramatist did not have a chance to prepare the plays for publication before he died. The dedication letter says the plays outlived their author, who had no chance to edit his writings. The letter “To the Great Variety of Readers” wishes “that the Author... had liv’d to have set forth... his own writings.” Shakspeare allegedly retired in 1610, at age forty-six, giving him six years to edit the plays if they were his. For more on this topic, see Chapter 11 on “The Ambiguous Ben Jonson” in [Shakespeare Beyond Doubt?](#)

Jonson’s eulogy begins with a sixteen-line false start before bursting forth with his “Soul of the Age!” Those sixteen seemingly superfluous lines alert the reader that “silliest ignorance on these may light,” meaning his words may be misinterpreted by those of “silliest ignorance” who miss double meanings. Jonson was a master of ambiguity. When he gives us such a warning, we should take him at his word. Seen in context, Ben Jonson’s famous reference to the author as “Sweet Swan of Avon!” refers not to the Avon River in Stratford, as has long been assumed, but to a *place* along the banks of the Thames where Elizabeth and James saw plays performed:

Sweet Swan of Avon! What a sight it were
To see thee in our waters yet appeare,
And make those flights upon the banks of Thames
That so did take Eliza, and our James!

In 2014 an article by Alexander Waugh originally titled “[The True Meaning of Ben Jonson’s Phrase: ‘Sweet Swan of Avon!’](#)” shows that Hampton Court – the principal venue for court performances of plays under both Queen Elizabeth and King James – was well known in Ben Jonson’s day as “Avon.” The article cites references to it as “Avon” by John Leland (1543, 1545), Raphael Holinshed (1586), Henry Peacham (1612), Laurence Nowell (who transcribed one of Leland’s references) and historian William Camden, in both the Latin (1607) and the English (1610) editions of his *Britannia*. Jonson, a voracious reader, probably knew all of them, but we can safely assume that he read at least the two editions of William Camden’s *Britannia*, since Camden was his tutor, mentor and lifelong friend.

Again, in context, “Sweet Swan of Avon!” refers not to Stratford-upon-Avon but to Hampton Court, but Jonson evidently anticipated that those of “silliest ignorance” would assume it meant the former. How ironic that those of silliest ignorance would include all modern Shakespeare scholars, until now.

The Stratford Monument

In the Declaration we point out that today’s Stratford monument does not look like the version in an early 17th century sketch, and that when the monument was “repaired” the effigy was “altered to depict a writer.” We also mention that some orthodox biographers describe the inscription on the monument as “enigmatic.” It never actually states that Shakspeare *was* the author, and it never mentions poetry, plays, acting or theater. Others have made these observations, but now another article by Alexander Waugh, also published in 2014, titled “[‘Thy Stratford Moniment’ – Revisted](#),” appears to be his second major breakthrough within the year.

The article first observes that the distinctive “Cavalier moustache” now worn on the face of the bust can be confidently dated to the late 1640s or early 1650s. Documents show the monument was repaired, modified, beautified, repainted and in various ways tampered with on at least eight occasions between 1649 and 1861. In light of this, it isn’t credible to think the effigy in today’s Stratford monument is the same as the original. So the article first examines a sketch by antiquarian William Dugdale, showing how he depicted it in 1634, eleven years after it was first mentioned in the First Folio and before any of the documented modifications.

Dugdale was known for accuracy, yet he seems to have given the figure in the bust oddly ape-like features. The head is too small. It has no neck. The shoulders are sloped, the arms elongated, the left hand claw-like. As if providing confirmation of this, the pillars on either side appear to be capped with gaping apes’ heads, each about the same size as the head in the effigy, suggesting that perhaps he should be seen as a third ape! This brings to mind Ben Jonson’s epigram “On Poet Ape,” first published in 1616, and thought to be about the actor from Stratford-upon-Avon. The article lists numerous parallels between the poem and monument. The implication is that perhaps Ben Jonson designed the original monument based on his poet-ape concept.

The article then turns to the inscription – probably the same as the original. These seemingly simple verses – two Latin lines above three English rhyming couplets – have defied analysis for 400 years:

*Judicio 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 this Tombe,
Far more, then cost: Sieh all, that He hath writt,
Leaves living art, but page, to serve his witt.

The Latin couplet is usually translated into English as follows:

A Pylius in judgment, a Socrates in genius and a Maro in art,
Earth covers him, people mourn him and Olympus holds him.

“Pylius” is King Nestor of Pylos, “Socrates” the Greek philosopher, “Maro” the Roman poet Virgil. Many have found it strange that Shakespeare would be compared to these three figures of antiquity. Neither Nestor nor Socrates was a writer, and Shakespeare was never compared to them during his lifetime. Virgil was a poet, but hardly Shakespeare’s favorite. One would have expected to see Ovid.

In fact, the translation above is incorrect. As much as we may wish to get “him” (i.e., Shakespeare) into the lines, it cannot be done. The Latin consists of three ablatives (*judicio, genio* and *arte*), three accusatives (*Pylium, Socratem* and *Maronem*), three nominatives (*Terra, populus* and *Olympus*) and three verbs (*tegit, maeret* and *habet*). A correct English translation should therefore read as follows:

Earth covers, people mourn and Olympus holds
Pylius with his judgment, Socrates with his genius, and Maro with his art.

Latin is notoriously elliptical, so one could argue that the clear implication is that Mr. “Shakspeare” is compared with the three classical figures, but strictly speaking he is not there. So it isn’t clear that Shakspeare is compared with Nestor, Socrates and Virgil after all. If not, why are those names there?

The first line in English, right beneath the Latin, reads: “Stay Passenger, why goest thou by so fast?” This could be a suggestion that one should linger a bit longer on the Latin couplet before moving on. Next is: “Read if thou canst, whom envious Death hath placed/ With in this monument Shakspeare:” “Read if thou canst” might suggest that something cryptic or difficult is concealed in the inscription.

Taking the entire sentence, it seems to invite us to figure out who is placed within the monument, i.e., “Shakspeare;” but this makes little sense because the wall monument is too small to contain a corpse. The article notes that the inscription has a space between “with” and “in.” It does *not* read “within.” Yet “with in this monument Shakspeare” makes no sense, prompting one to rearrange the sentence, giving us: “Read if thou canst, in this monument, with whom envious death hath placed Shakspeare.” In other words, the inscription challenges the reader to figure out *with whom* Shakspeare is buried.

The only candidates available are those named in the Latin couplet, i.e., Nestor, Socrates and Virgil. Although, as noted, Shakespeare was not compared to these three, other great English writers were. As the article documents clearly, the English poet most often likened to Virgil was Edmund Spenser. Geoffrey Chaucer was frequently described as a philosopher and was repeatedly likened to Socrates. Spenser, at his own request, was buried next to Chaucer in Westminster Abbey, and the two of them were joined by Francis Beaumont, widely known for his judgment, consistent with “*Judicio Pylium*.” This says the first line of the Latin inscription – “*Judicio Pylium, Genio Socratem, Arte Maronem*” – alludes not to Shakespeare but to three great English poets: Beaumont, Chaucer and Spenser, whom “Earth covers, people mourn and Olympus holds.” So it appears we have an answer to our challenge: Shakespeare is buried with Beaumont, Chaucer and Spenser in Poets’ Corner in Westminster Abbey.

The original monument’s associations with Jonson’s “Poet-Ape,” and the similarities of language and style between the inscription and Jonson’s other verse, including his eulogy to the author in the Folio, make it likely that Jonson was both designer of the Stratford monument and author of its inscription. This position is supported by a [comparison](#) of the inscription on the monument to writings of Jonson that concluded Jonson wrote the inscription. The analyst found that the production of the First Folio and erection of the Stratford monument were a coordinated effort in which Jonson played a key part. He must have known that Shakespeare was actually buried in Westminster Abbey, beside Beaumont, Chaucer and Spenser, which explains these otherwise mystifying lines in his eulogy in the First Folio:

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

The reason why Jonson wouldn’t bid Beaumont to “lye a little farther” so that Shakespeare could be buried next to him, Chaucer and Spenser is because he knew Shakespeare was already buried there, so there was no need. These lines are just a mischievous public nod toward a secret known to Jonson. The fact that he included them in his poem in the Folio helps to confirm that he wrote the inscription.

Jonson’s role with the monument and knowledge of Shakespeare’s burial at Westminster also helps to explain the perplexing line “thou art a Moniment without a Tombe.” Note that the word is spelled “moniment,” with an *i*, not “monument” with a *u*. Stratfordians claim that these are variant spellings of the same word, but Edmund Spenser used “moniment” to mean an “inscription,” and elsewhere to mean “memorial.” “Thou art a Moniment without a Tombe” means that Shakespeare is remembered by an “inscription” or “memorial” at Stratford. The location of his tomb at Westminster is unknown. This [breakthrough article](#) contains much additional information, and it should be read in its entirety.

Finally, Waugh comes to Leonard Digges’ dedicatory verses in the First Folio, where he also refers to the “Stratford moniment,” also seeming to confirm Shakspeare’s authorship:

“When that stone is rent,
And time dissolves thy Stratford moniment,
Here we alive shall view thee still: ...”

But if Ambiguous Ben was behind both the First Folio and the Stratford monument, Leonard Digges’ dedicatory verses might have another meaning. There are many contemporary examples of the word

“dissolve” referring not to the erosion of a stone monument over time, but to the resolving of riddles. What Digges really means is: “When time allows us to solve the riddle of your Stratford monument.” That has now been accomplished, after four centuries, with the decipherment of the inscription, and the realization that Mr. Shakspere was the “Poet-Ape” and the real author is buried in Westminster.

Why would Jonson have orchestrated such a deception? One possibility is that he was recruited and paid by his patron, William Herbert, Earl of Pembroke and Lord Chamberlain to King James, and by William’s brother Philip, Earl of Montgomery, the two men to whom the First Folio is dedicated. Ben Jonson dedicated his own *Works* to William Herbert, in 1616. As Lord Chamberlain, Pembroke oversaw plays performed at court and in the public theaters and also controlled publication of plays. He had the position and wealth to authorize and finance the First Folio and get Jonson to work on it. Without taking sides, it is worth noting that Pembroke had been a candidate to marry one daughter of a leading alternative authorship candidate, while his brother, Philip, did marry another daughter. Their objective would have been to publish the plays, but without revealing a sensitive family secret.

What sort of secret would lead them to conceal the author’s identity if he was a family member? The author himself said in the *Sonnets* that he neither wanted, nor expected, his name to be remembered. This makes no sense unless his name wasn’t yet associated with his works. He says repeatedly that he is in some sort of disgrace, beyond recovery (Sonnets 29, 37, 112, 121), but he never says exactly why. It should not be hard to imagine that such a man might not want his name associated with his works.

From Sonnet 81: Your name from hence immortal life shall have,
 Though I, once gone, to all the world must die:
 The earth can yield me but a common grave,
 When you entombd in men's eyes shall lie.

From Sonnet 72: My name be buried where my body is,
 And live no more to shame nor me nor you.
 For I am shamed by that which I bring forth,
 And so should you, to love things nothing worth.

In publishing the plays, while concealing the author’s true identity (yet hinting he wasn’t Shakspere), they were honoring the author’s own wishes. Jonson wasn’t lying, but practicing the art of ambiguity in writing about a controversial matter – the identity behind the pseudonym “William Shakespeare.” No massive, improbable conspiracy was required, just a small group doing the author a final service.

Regardless of the motives of those involved, the evidence presented shows that there *was* a deception. It never made sense to think that Mr. Shakspere was the author based on what was known of his life. The only remaining props were the name on the works, the First Folio, and the Stratford monument, and all three have now been debunked. What’s most surprising, even shocking, is that it took so long.

It has been said that the one great theme running through all of Shakespeare’s plays is the difference between appearance and reality and the difficulty of determining which is which. The plays are filled with masques, disguises, deceptions, mistaken identities, misread motives, conspiracies and betrayals. Most orthodox scholars would probably agree with this, except when it comes to the authorship issue. Then, suddenly, everything is exactly as it appears and anyone who disagrees is a conspiracy theorist. Shakespeare was a conspiracy theorist. Each play has at least one, and some have many conspiracies. How is it that Shakespeare scholars, of all people, failed to take the author’s central message to heart and refused to consider the possibility of a deception in spite of all the grounds for reasonable doubt?

They should have noticed that the Stratford man’s lengthy will is “missing the mind of Shakespeare.” *They* should have noted that not one collaborator wrote a tribute when he died, or for the First Folio. *They* should have noticed the missing coat of arms and the warning to the reader in Jonson’s eulogy. *They* should have discovered that the Droeshout engraving is a well-executed “ridiculous caricature,”

that “Avon” could also mean Hampton Court, and that the Latin inscription translation is uncertain. That they were so wrong for so long represents a stunning failure of scholarship, and it is scandalous.

In the nine years since we issued the Declaration of Reasonable Doubt, the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust in Stratford has neither written a rebuttal, nor written a declaration of the case for Shakspere, as we requested. We hereby renew our request for a rebuttal to the Declaration and also request a rebuttal of this sequel to it. We also renew our request for a definitive declaration of the case for the authorship of William of Stratford.

In 2013, we challenged the Birthplace Trust to prove, in a mock trial before an unbiased panel of judges, its claim that it is “beyond doubt” that Shakspere was Shakespeare, and to prove it “beyond reasonable doubt.” After they initially declined, we published the [challenge](#) in a full page ad in the *Times Literary Supplement*. We hereby renew our challenge to the Birthplace Trust, and £40,000 donation offer if they prove their case. If they still decline, we believe the public has every right to conclude that they concede the issue by default.

The Trust’s excuse that there have already been several debates, and that debates can turn on debating skill, is not credible. In the first place, we challenged them to a mock trial, not a debate. Trials focus on evidence, with a presiding judge ruling on relevance and admissibility. The presiding judge would also enforce order, maintaining decorum appropriate to the occasion. Each side would be able to present or challenge evidence, and would be able to cross examine the other side’s witnesses. In addition, new and important evidence has turned up since the last debates were held, virtually all of it favoring the doubter side, as seen in this sequel. This new evidence has never been examined in an adversarial proceeding, as the Trust apparently prefers it. There is no reason why English professors, of all people, would be at a disadvantaged in such a proceeding.

If you haven’t yet read the [Declaration of Reasonable Doubt](#), you may wish to do so to put what you have read here in context. If you agree with it, please consider signing. You will be in good company if you do. Again, please join us and more than 5,300 others in signing the Declaration now at: [DoubtAboutWill.org](#).