

Edward de Vere's Autograph on Shakespeare's Sonnet 76

David L. Roper ©2011

The Elizabethan Age has been called the most devious period in English history. Artists painted portraits of their subjects surrounded by clues, sometimes quite abstruse, but which pointed to either their station in life or their character. Furniture was constructed with secret drawers or hidden compartments. Buildings were either erected or modified to include a secret passage or a hidden room, which might then be used as a priest hole. For this was the time of 'The Divorce'; when Henry VIII split from his lawful wife, and in doing so divorced England from Rome: thereby dividing the religious persuasions of his Christian country, and forcing his people to choose an English monarch over a Roman Pope. After the King's death and that of his two children, Mary and Edward, both heirs to the throne, it was left to his second daughter, Elizabeth, to deal with the rift that had developed amongst the population. Ridding a devout person of their heart-felt belief proved to be no easy matter. The choice between obeying the spiritual leadership of the Pope or the dubious dictates of a monarch, whose personal allegiance to the teachings of the Bible might waver, according to the practical concerns of running a kingdom, was seldom overcome. Letters were therefore scrutinised at every level, which led to writing in code; one further method of concealment in an age immersed in secrecy.

Late sixteenth century England was a country that provided a ready audience for dissident code: its people were addicted to hidden meanings. Codes, devices and punning allusions were everywhere—in street songs and ballads, conversations, poems, plays, woodcuts, portraits, jewellery, costumes. Entire buildings were constructed in the form of riddles. . . Readers delighted in decoding. For centuries allegory had been an essential part of all artistic and literary appreciation, and in the late sixteenth century the humanists of the Italian Renaissance were taking it to new heights. (Clare Asquith: *Shadowplay*, Perseus, MA. 2005).

Clare Asquith's reference to 'codes' in the 'late sixteenth century' cannot be separated from the interest that had developed in encrypting secret information in the years before. In the thirteenth century, Roger Bacon (1214-1294) had opened up the subject of cryptography in his two most quoted works, *Opus Majus*, and *Opus Minus*. At the close of the fifteenth century, the Benedictine abbot of Sponheim, Johannes Trithemius (1462-1615) wrote the first real book on codes, *Steganographia*, (from Greek meaning hidden writing). Volumes I and II explained how to encrypt messages. For instance, in one example, he explained how to stretch each letter of a secret message into a word. He then assembled these words into a prose narrative, which might take the form of a sermon. The serious nature of the sermon would, however, conceal the secret message composed by the letters he had placed in the sermon. One example he gave shows only its use for a trivial message. 'Avoid this monk; he likes good wine and is strange.' However the system was far from trivial. Nevertheless, the

manuscript remained unpublished for more than a century. During that time, numerous copies were made. John Dee, Queen Elizabeth's personal astrologer, travelled to Antwerp in 1563 to make a copy, which he brought back to England. A letter sent from Belgium to Sir William Cecil by Dee refers to his acquisition of this copy.

Another example of this stretching of letters in words, as to make them appear in an innocent piece of text occurs amongst a dazzling array of other cryptographic methods. Here is one example.

Padiel aporsy mesarpon omeuas peludyn malpreaxo. Condusen. vlearo thersephi bayl merphon. paroys gebuly mailthomyon ilthear tamarson acrimy lon peatha Casmy Chertiel. medony reabdo. lasonti iaciel mal arti bulomeon abry pathulmon theoma pathormyn.¹

Trithemius left it to the reader to discover that the opening words conceal the encrypted words, 'PRIMUS APEX' by using an equidistant letter sequence (ELS) of 2. The ELS also affects only alternate words; viz: **Padiel aPoRsY mesarpon oMeUaS peludyn mAlPrEaXo.**

This stretching out of words to include the letters required for a hidden message is really a refinement of the method appearing in an earlier study by the Jewish scholar Rabbenu Batchya ben Asher. Writing in the thirteenth century, from the Spanish city of Saragossa, he referred to the method of ELS as a means of encrypting secrets into text. In fact, this method dates back to Judea in the first century A.D., where it is referred to by Nechunya ben HaKanah in his book, *Sefer HaBahir*.²

It is against this background of discovering new and better ways of transmitting secrets from one to another that we must consider Shakespeare's Sonnet 76. The precise date of its composition is unknown, but it was certainly written at a time not long after Thomas Phelippes decoded the letters passing secretly between Mary, Queen of Scots and her sympathisers on the continent, in what became known as the Babington Plot. Phelippes was employed by Queen Elizabeth's spymaster Sir Francis Walsingham, and was undoubtedly his most talented cryptanalyst.

Sonnet 76, in its original 1609 spelling with 'u' in place of 'v', is as follows.³

**Why is my verse so barren of new pride?
So far from variation or quicke change?
Why with the time do I not glance aside
To new found methods, and to compounds strange?
Why write I still all one, euer the same,
And keepe inuention in a noted weed,
That euery word doth almost fel my name,
Shewing their birth, and where they did proceed?
O know sweet loue I alwaies write of you,
And you and loue are still my argument:
So all my best is dressing old words new,
Spending againe what is already spent:
For as the Sun is daily new and old,
So is my loue still telling what is told,**

The sonnet consists of 448 letters; which divide into 32 lines of 14 letters per line. 14 is also the number of lines in a sonnet; hence, 14 is the choice of a key for unlocking this sonnet's secret. This number also allows the letters to fit exactly into a grille with dimensions, 14 X 32.

W	H	Y	I	S	M	Y	V	E	R	S	E	S	O		
B	A	R	R	E	N	O	F	N	E	W	P	R	I		
D	E	S	O	F	A	R	F	R	O	M	V	A	R		
I	A	T	I	O	N	O	R	Q	U	I	C	K	E		
C	H	A	N	G	E	W	H	Y	W	I	T	H	T		
H	E	T	I	M	E	D	O	I	N	O	T	G	L		
A	N	C	E	A	S	I	D	E	T	O	N	E	W		
F	O	U	N	D	M	E	T	H	O	D	S	A	N		
D	T	O	C	O	M	P	O	U	N	D	S	S	T		
R	A	N	G	E	W	H	Y	W	R	I	T	E	I		
S	T	I	L	L	A	L	L	O	N	E	E	U	E		
R	T	H	E	S	A	M	E	A	N	D	K	E	E		
P	E	I	N	U	E	N	T	I	O	N	I	N	A		
N	O	T	E	D	W	E	E	D	T	H	A	T	E		
U	E	R	Y	W	O	R	D	O	T	H	A	L			
M	O	S	T	F	E	L		M	Y	N	A	M	E		
H	E	W	I	N	G	T	H	E		I	R	B	I	R	
T	H	A	N	D	W	H	E		R	E		T	H	E	Y
D	I	D	P	R	O	C	E		E		D	O	K	N	O
W	S	W	E	E	T	L	O		U	E		I	A	L	W
A	I	E	S	W	R	I	T		E	O		F	Y	O	U
A	N	D	Y	O	U	A	N		D	L		O	U	E	A
R	E	S	T	I	L	L		M	Y	A	R	G	U	M	
E	N	T		S	O	A	L	L	M	Y	B	E	S	T	
I	S	D	R	E	S	S	I	N	G	O	L	D	W		
O	R	D	S	N	E	W	S	P	E	N	D	I	N		
G	A	G	A	I	N	E	W	H	A	T	I	S	A		
L	R	E	A	D	Y	S	P	E	N	T	F	O	R		
A	S	T	H	E	S	U	N	I	S	D	A	I	L		
Y	N	E	W	A	N	D	O	L	D	S	O	I	S		
M	Y	L	O	U	E	S	T	I	L	L	T	E	L		
L	I	N	G	W	H	A	T	I	S	T	O	L	D		

W	H	Y	I	S	M	Y	V	E	R	S	E	S	O		
B	A	R	R	E	N	O	F	N	E	W	P	R	I		
D	E	S	O	F	A	R	F	R	O	M	V	A	R		
I	A	T	I	O	N	O	R	Q	U	I	C	K	E		
C	H	A	N	G	E	W	H	Y	W	I	T	H	T		
H	E	T	I	M	E	D	O	I	N	O	T	G	L		
A	N	C	E	A	S	I	D	E	T	O	N	E	W		
F	O	U	N	D	M	E	T	H	O	D	S	A	N		
D	T	O	C	O	M	P	O	U	N	D	S	S	T		
R	A	N	G	E	W	H	Y	W	R	I	T	E	I		
S	T	I	L	L	A	L	L	O	N	E	E	U	E		
R	T	H	E	S	A	M	E	A	N	D	K	E	E		
P	E	I	N	U	E	N	T	I	O	N	I	N	A		
N	O	T	E	D	W	E	E	D	T	H	A	T	E		
U	E	R	Y	W	O	R	D	O	T	H	A	L			
M	O	S	T	F	E	L		M	Y	N	A	M	E		
H	E	W	I	N	G	T	H	E		I	R	B	I	R	
T	H	A	N	D	W	H	E		R	E		T	H	E	Y
D	I	D	P	R	O	C	E		E	D		O	K	N	O
W	S	W	E	E	T	L	O		U	E		I	A	L	W
A	I	E	S	W	R	I	T		E	O		F	Y	O	U
A	N	D	Y	O	U	A	N		D	L		O	U	E	A
R	E	S	T	I	L	L		M	Y	A	R	G	U	M	
E	N	T		S	O	A	L	L	M	Y	B	E	S	T	
I	S	D	R	E	S	S	I	N	G	O	L	D	W		
O	R	D	S	N	E	W	S	P	E	N	D	I	N		
G	A	G	A	I	N	E	W	H	A	T	I	S	A		
L	R	E	A	D	Y	S	P	E	N	T	F	O	R		
A	S	T	H	E	S	U	N	I	S	D	A	I	L		
Y	N	E	W	A	N	D	O	L	D	S	O	I	S		
M	Y	L	O	U	E	S	T	I	L	L	T	E	L		
L	I	N	G	W	H	A	T	I	S	T	O	L	D		

The two grilles, with slightly different arrangements for disclosing the encrypted name, are the poet's way of confirming his intention. One arrangement could suggest a chance happening. By repeating the same message, but in a slightly different way, was intended to reduce the charge of coincidence.

It should therefore be understood that this 'autographed' sonnet proves conclusively that Edward de Vere was the poet who wrote Shakespeare's Sonnets. Once chance has been rejected, there is no other explanation. Thomas Thorpe has already made this same assertion in his asyntactic preface to "**Shakespeare's Sonnets**": while also deliberately hyphenating the poet's penname to obtain consistency with his enciphered assertions. Moreover, he has again repeated de Vere's name for a second time in connection with Shakespeare; the first of which appears in a separate proof.

When this cipher was encrypted, probability theory had barely begun. Girolamo Cardano had made a beginning earlier in the century, but his work was not entirely accurate. It would be left to Blaise Pascal and Pierre de Fermat in the seventeenth century, to jointly establish a securer foundation. It is therefore with probability theory in mind, that we can better consider what value to place on "**LO E DE VERE**" occurring twice between the words "**MY NAME**" and "**MY ARGUMENT**", on a grille of 14 columns.

The solution depends firstly upon the number of ways these words could appear on the grille, by bridging the two phrases: "**MY NAME**" and "**MY ARGUMENT**"; and by allowing the bridge to be read up or down, from left to right or right to left, or even in boustrophedon order. Secondly, upon the

probability attached to the letters L O E D U/V R occurring by chance. For this second requirement, we need to count the frequency with which these letters occur in the first 32 lines, omitting the 'E' in "NAME", since this word is established. Details of the calculation are given at the end. The expectation that "LO E DE VERE" will appear twice on this 14-column grille, so that each version bridges the 6 lines between "MY NAME" and "MY ARGUMENT" is, 1/396,039,604. That is to say, upon a purely random basis, you would expect it to occur by chance once in a little over three-hundred-and-ninety-six-million attempts. The expectation that "LO E DE VERE" will occur in *either* one of its two possible forms is slightly better at 1/20,408,163.

In summary, probabilities at this level are out of contention in terms of chance; hence, the logical conclusion must be an acceptance that the poet who wrote Sonnet 76 deliberately encrypted "LO E DE VERE" against "MY NAME", either playfully as an exercise in cryptography, or because he knew his work was to be reassigned to another person. Either way, this excludes the man who currently receives the world's acclaim for the sonnets and plays of William Shakespeare.

And lastly, for the sake of completeness, it should not pass notice that in the seventh line of the sonnet, the poet has indicated, quite openly, the spelling of his name. For, when he remarks, "that euery word doth almost fel my name" (fel: is O.E. meaning: "to cause to fall" *OED*), he is saying: "That euery word"; with emphasis placed on 'every', doth almost **cause** my name **to fall**; that is, from EVER(Y) to E VER(E); but only if the poet's name really was E Vere.

As for the voice of dissent; the fervent devotees who kneel at the feet of an imposter know too well that numbers do not lie, and that text-book authority for probability theory cannot be gainsaid, so they choose to either ignore the proof, or concoct verbal explanations that are intended to dismiss the numerical proof as just another chance occurrence. These words then become a verbal balm to soothe the sore of a wounded belief, which they trust in time will heal. But forgetfulness is the better cure. It allows the *status quo* to be quickly restored; William Shakespeare of Stratford-upon-Avon is once again in their personal heaven: and all's right with the world.

REFERENCES

1. Jim Reeds, *Solved: The Ciphers in Book III of Trithemius's Steganographia*, 1998 (digital copy).
2. Jeffrey Satinover, *The Truth Behind the Bible Code*,
3. <http://etext.virginia.edu/toc/modeng/public/ShasonQ.html>

Acknowledgement is due to Dr James Ferris, who first drew attention to de Vere's name in Sonnet 76.

Notes Concerning The Probability Calculation: (i) The possibility spaces for 'de uere' and 'lo e' formed in any direction, is 88. (ii) The possibility spaces for 'uere' and 'lo e de' formed in any direction is 192. (iii) The possibility spaces for both versions of the decrypted name totals 48. (iv) The frequencies of the required letters occurring in the first 32 lines are, L (10); O(28); E(43); D(18); U/V(12); R(18). (v) The 32 lines contain 308 letters of which 6 have been removed for 'my name'.

Proving Shakespeare

Second Edition

ISBN 978-0-9543873-4-1

ORVID EDITIONS

BY DAVID L ROPER

