

## Ben Jonson Affirms Edward de Vere as Shakespeare in the First Folio

David L. Roper ©2012

---

By 1623, both the Stratford monument and the First Folio had been introduced to the general public. Each paid tribute to a man known as William Shakespeare. The First Folio included the plays he had written during his lifetime. The Stratford monument was more controversial, and in its original form did little to suggest that the figure of the man clutching a sack of farm produce was the poet and playwright so highly praised in the Folio edition of Shakespeare's plays. In both cases, the hand of Ben Jonson appears to have been at work. It has for long been suspected that Jonson was responsible for the inscription on the monument. His classical knowledge was entirely attuned to the Latin distich, and his poetic style, especially where epitaphs were concerned, is discernible in the phrasing of the English verse beneath the two lines of Latin. As for Jonson's controlling hand in the preface material, to this there can be no doubt. He has written a lengthy poetic tribute in praise of Shakespeare's verse and ability. But it is to his shorter verse adjacent to a supposed representation of the poet, depicted as a cartoonist might render it, rather than a portrait artist, that attention is directed.

The lines in Jonson's verse occur opposite the engraving of Shakespeare, even though there is little to suggest that the face bears any resemblance to that of the figure on the Stratford monument. In fact, Jonson disparages it as a likeness of the author. In his final couplet he exasperatingly exclaims: "*Reader, looke / Not on his Picture but his Booke.*"

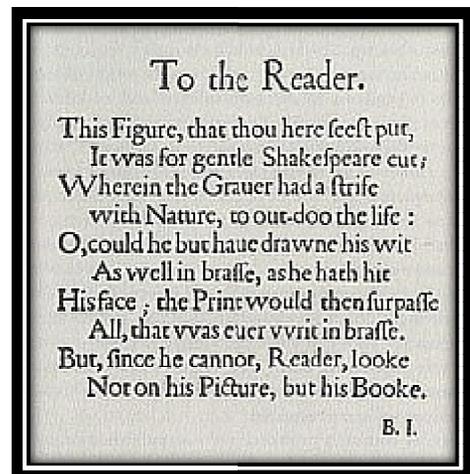
Jonson had previously admitted: "*This figure, that thou here seest ... was for gentle Shakespeare cut.*" The author's ambiguity is at work here. Take note that it was *for* Shakespeare, not *of* him. The difference between the usage of these two words is one of truth; 'for' is ambiguous: whereas, 'of' is not.

To this, we may add Jonson's repeated use of the word 'brass'.

What was Jonson alluding to that had been *written in brass*? Engravings, such as that made of Shakespeare by Droeshout, were etched on copper, not brass. However, if Jonson was using the word 'brass' as a synonym for 'effrontery', then 'writ in brass' would make perfect sense *if* it was intended for someone acting the role of Shakespeare.

Factually, the playwright Shakespeare had used 'brass' in this very same manner when writing dialogue for BEROWNE, in *Love's Labour's Lost*: "Can any FACE OF BRASS hold longer out?" (Act 5, sc. ii). The OED describes this as the first example of 'brass' used to express "insensibility to shame: hence Effrontery."

Those familiar with the encrypted revelations made on the Stratford monument will be aware that Jonson had encoded his initials into the avowal he made. "I AM DE VERE BY BIRTH" followed by "SO TEST HIM, I VOW HE IS E DE VERE: AS HE SHAKSPEARE. ME B. I." It can now be shown that Jonson has repeated a condensed, encrypted version of this second statement in his verse at the front of the First Folio.



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

It is surprising, if nothing else, to discover the statement, E DE VERE, IN THE MATTER OF HE: SHAKESPEARE at the very beginning of the opening page of the book containing Mr William Shakespeare’s Comedies, Histories, and Tragedies. [“Re, in the matter of (chiefly in legal & business use as first word of headline stating matter to be dealt with; also vulg. as substitute for *about, concerning*, in ordinary use);” OED].

Either the gods of incidence have a perverse sense of humour, or Ben Jonson was deliberately emphasising the encryption he had inserted inside his other poem on the Stratford monument: both having been written at approximately the same time, 1622/23. The question is whether these two incidents of identification – both referring to E de Vere by name as Shakespeare, both carrying the same initials of the encoder, and both written at about the same time: one on stone the other on paper – can be construed as chance. It is to this question that the remainder of this article now turns.

The resolution will be directed at constructing a probability model in which at least one letter in the name SHAKESPEARE falls beneath the ‘E’ in ‘HE’. Consequently, SHAKESPEARE will remain stationed on the third row. It may also abut the first ‘E’ in ‘UERE’: in which case the minimum number of columns required is 12. Alternatively, the initial letter of SHAKESPEARE may extend to below the ‘E’ in ‘HE’: whence, the maximum number of columns, 17, will have been reached. The vertical alignment, in alternating columns, of E UERE, DE, RE, HE will form the structure of the model, since it is this that provides the vacant cells for the message. This allows the question to be posed – How many such structured formations are possible, given that the poem contains 283 letters, excepting the 2 initials at the end?

The minimum number of 12 columns allows only 1 structure.

13 columns allow 3 structures. [1 for 12 cols. 1 for 13 cols. And 1 for the cell between ‘E’ and ‘S’]

14 columns allow 6 structures. 15 columns allow 10 structures. It is to be observed that the sequence being formed consists of triangular numbers. Since the maximum number of columns required is 17, the number of structures between 12 columns and 17 columns inclusive, will result as, 1; 3; 6; 10; 15; 21.

For 18 columns, we take the 21 structures in 17 columns and move them horizontally one place to the adjacent 18th column. Hence there are  $2 \times 21 = 42$  structures possible in 18 columns.

This process must be repeated for each added column. Thus 19 columns will result in  $42+21=63$ . Or it can be calculated as  $21 \times 3 = 63$ . In either case, an Arithmetical Progression is occurring. This is helpful, because there is a neat formula that allows the total to be arrived at without having to calculate every term.

To apply the formula, we need to know the first term (in this case 42), the distance between each term (in this case, it is 21) and the number of terms to be counted. Since the least number of rows required to contain EUERE is 5, this requires 56 columns. There are 283 letters to be divided into rows and columns, hence  $5 \times 56 = 280$  with 3 letters occupying the sixth row. Hence, commencing with 18 columns and terminating with 56 columns, inclusive of both end columns, equals 39 terms.

Therefore, inserting these values into the formula:  $39(42) + \frac{1}{2} 39(39 - 1)21 = 17,199$ . This result equals the number of structures possible between 18 columns and 56 columns inclusive.

To this number, we now add the number of structures occurring in columns 12 to 17 inclusive; that is,  $1 + 3 + 6 + 10 + 15 + 21 = 56 + 17,199 = 17,255$ , which now equals the number of structures ranging from 12 columns to 56, inclusive.

Finally, we must include all 4 full rows where the fifth row is only partially filled, since structures could occur in the partial fifth row. For example, 57 columns results in 4 rows with the fifth row occupying 55 of the 57 available places,  $[4 \times 57 = 228; 228 + 55 = 283]$ .

Therefore, the number of available structures for a 57 column grille is restricted to the 55 available columns having letters in 5 rows. Since 17 columns contain 21 structures and there are 55 columns to cover, there are 819 structures possible,  $[(55 - 17 = 38), (38 + 1 = 39), (39 \times 21 = 819)]$ .

Similar calculations are required for 58, 59, 60, 61, 62, 63, 64, 65 and 66 columns;  $66 \times 4 = 264$  and  $283 - 264 = 19$ . The fifth row contains 19 letters: sufficient to include the 17 columns required.

Since the available cells in the fifth row reduce in multiples of 4; that is, 55, 51, 47 ... 19, it implies that the number of structures will descend in multiples of  $4 \times 21 = 84$ . That is, 819, 735, 651 ... 63.

Using the formula for summing Arithmetical Progressions,  $10(63) + \frac{1}{2} 10(10 - 1)84 = 4410$ . This total can now be added to 17,255, resulting in 21,665; which is the total number of structures available for inserting the letters E, U, E, R, E, D, E, R, E, H, E. To find the probability these letters will occur, it is necessary to know the frequency of their occurrence by chance. In a paper by statisticians H. Beker and F. Piper, they calculated the frequencies of these letters as follows: D (4.3%); E (12.7%); H(6.1%); R(6.0%); U(2.8%).

Since there are 283 letters in the poem, in which the name SHAKESPEARE has already been established, there are 272 vacant cells to be filled. Of these, 11 are required to make the intended statement. Hence, the expected number of letters D, H, E, R and U occurring in a piece of text consisting of 272 letters is, respectively, (12, 35, 17, 16 and 8). The probability of these being selected by chance to fill one of the structures is as follows.

E	U	E	R	E	D	E	R	E	H	E
35/272	8/271	34/270	16/269	33/268	12/267	32/266	15/265	31/264	17/263	30/262

Since these letters are to be drawn at random, without replacement, the probability they will be drawn by chance to fill the vacant cells is the product of all 11: that is,  $9.3 \times 10^{-13}$  (2 significant figures). But since there are 21, 665 chances of obtaining a successful outcome, the expectation this will occur is the product of both statistics; that is,  $2.0 \times 10^{-8}$ . A successful outcome can therefore be expected once in 50 million trials. That a successful outcome has actually occurred first time, and at the very beginning of the poem, is a bonus not to be ignored.

This probability model has therefore predicted that Jonson's second encryption (recalling that his first was on the Stratford monument) is extremely unlikely to be due to chance. Consequently, it is entirely reasonable to conclude that Edward de Vere used the name William Shakespeare as his penname, and that

William Shaxpere (for so he described himself on his marriage licence, as did other members of his family on various documents) of Stratford-upon-Avon was employed – secret from the common people’s knowledge – as a figurehead: acting the role of poet and playwright to divert public attention away from the titled nobleman who was the real pen behind the name Shakespeare. Jonson’s poem can therefore be read with an undertone that reviles this brazen ‘effrontery’, and his added encryption is a testimony to his wish to be remembered by posterity for his honesty: for it is now twice that he has revealed the truth of Shakespeare’s identity.

And, of course, this second encryption, placed in the opening words of the First Folio, cannot do otherwise than confirm the encryption he placed in the inscription on the Stratford monument – “So Test Him, I Vow He Is E De Vere: As He, Shakspeare: Me B. I.”

REFERENCE: The table of frequencies was compiled by H. Beker and F. Piper, and originally published in *Cipher Systems: The Protection of Communication*.

The full reason for Jonson’s secrecy is given in detail, in **PROVING SHAKESPEARE**

Second Edition (600 pages)

ISBN 978-0-9543873-4-1 ORVID EDITIONS

BY DAVID L ROPER

