

To the great Variety of Readers signed in the
names of **Heminges and Condell**

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FACSIMILES

1. The address **To the great Variety of Readers** prefixed to the **Shakespeare First Folio** revealing **Bacon is Shakespeare** p. 5

***To the great Variety of Readers* signed in the names of Heminges and Condell**

Concerning Government, it is a part of knowledge secret and retired, in both these respects in which things are deemed secret; for some things are secret because they are hard to know, and some because they are not fit to utter.

[Francis Bacon, *The Advancement of Learning*; Spedding, *Works*, III, pp. 473-4]

The Epistle Dedicatorie to the 'Incomparable Paire of Brethren', the Grand Master of England William Herbert, Earl of Pembroke and Philip Herbert, Earl of Montgomery and the address *To the great Variety of Readers* both signed in the names of the actors John Heminge and Henry Condell are usually for that reason (and others) examined in tandem by Shakespeare scholars. It should have been clear from the outset that things were not as they seemed and obvious that the learned dedication and the address were replete with inconsistencies, incongruities and false statements and could not have been written by the two actors who put their names to them. The first (as far as the present writer is aware) to raise the spectre of this false attribution was the eighteenth-century Shakespeare editor and scholar George Steevens who was responsible for the ten-volume edition of the Shakespeare plays which appeared in 1773, a further second ten-volume edition in 1778, and a fifteen-volume edition published in 1793. Underneath the two prefaces signed by the actors Heminges and Condell, Steevens stated it was his contention that Ben Jonson was partly responsible for the address *To the great Variety of Readers*:

After the publication of my first edition of Shakspeare's works, a notion struck me, that the preface prefixed by the players, in 1623, to their edition of his plays, had much of the manner of Ben Jonson; and an attentive comparison of that preface with various passages in Jonson's writings having abundantly supported and confirmed my conjecture, I do not hesitate now to assert that the greater part of it was written by him. Hemings and Condell being themselves wholly unused to composition, and having been furnished by Jonson, whose reputation was then at the height, with a copy of verses in praise of Shakspeare, and with others on the engraved portrait prefixed to his plays, would naturally apply to him for assistance in that part of the work in which they were, for the first time, to address the publick in their own names. Whatever, therefore, occurred to them on this subject, they submitted, I imagine, to Jonson's revision; and, not approving of their performance, I conceive, he wrote the greater part of it anew: at least, I think I can show the whole of the first member of this address, comprising eighteen lines out of forty, to be *entirely his*; and though in the remainder he did not, I believe, proceed as in the former part, *una litura*, yet his revising hand may be traced there also. . . a minute comparison of the first half of this preface with various passages in Jonson's works, will, I conceive, establish my hypothesis beyond a doubt. The only indulgence I claim is, that the reader will not too hastily pronounce this or the other passage to contain only a fanciful resemblance, nor form his judgment till he has examined the *whole* of this paper; remembering always that other writers beside Jonson have frequently *repeated themselves*.¹

Steevens proceeded to produce over some eleven pages lines and passages from the address *To the great Variety of Readers* alongside corresponding passages from Jonson's various writings to illustrate his belief that Jonson was responsible for the lion's share of its composition before concluding:

From these numerous and marked coincidences, it is, I think, manifest, that every word of the first half of this address to the reader, which is signed in the names of John Hemings and Henry Condell, was written by Ben Jonson. They perhaps had thrown on paper, in the best manner they could, some introductory paragraphs, which Jonson, not approving, instead of the mending them, cured by a total erasure.

Though he was afterwards (as I conceive) more merciful, his hand may be clearly, though not uniformly, traced in the second part also; but the foundation of this latter part, I imagine, was laid by the players themselves, and the passages that relates to the writings and amiable manners of Shakspeare, was unquestionably written by them...²

The Cambridge editors of *The Works of William Shakespeare* suggested that the preface *To the Great Variety of Readers* 'may have been written by some literary man [presumably someone other than Jonson] in the employment of the publishers, and merely signed by the two players.'³

It will be observed that Steevens states that without doubt the greater part of the preface was written by Jonson. Yet according to Sir George Greenwood there can be no reasonable doubt that Jonson demonstrably having written the greater part of the preface wrote the whole of it as well as the Epistle Dedicatorie 'we need have no hesitation in saying that if Jonson is proved to have written part he undoubtedly wrote the whole of the Preface. It seems to me absurd to suppose that, having been called in to write in the names of the players, he would have contented himself with composing a fragment of a preface, and have left the rest to others. Least of all would he have left what he had written to be completed by those "deserving men," Heminge and Condell, who were, as Steevens justly remarks, "wholly unused to composition." ...I entertain no doubt, therefore, that the Preface "To the Great Variety of Readers" was wholly written by Ben Jonson. But, further, there can be, in my judgment, no reasonable doubt that Jonson wrote the "Epistle Dedicatory" also. He was, doubtless...employed as the "literary man" to write the prefaces to the Folio, as, also, the poetical eulogium of the author prefixed to it. The "Epistle Dedicatory" contains many classical allusions, quite in the Jonsonian style. Some of it is taken direct from the dedication of Pliny's *Natural History*, and there is an obvious allusion to a well-known ode of Horace...Nor would this be at all an unusual thing to do. For example, when the folio edition of Beaumont and Fletcher's Plays was brought out in 1647, by the publisher Moseley, there was a dedicatory epistle, similar to that of the Shakespeare Folio, prefixed to it, and addressed to the survivor of the "Incomparable Paire," viz.: Philip, Earl of Pembroke and Montgomery, who was then Lord Chamberlain. This was signed by ten of the players of the King's Company, but nobody, I imagine, supposes that they wrote it, or any one of them. "The actors who aided the scheme," says Sir Sidney Lee, in his Introduction to the Facsimile Edition of the Shakespeare Folio, "played a very subordinate part in its execution. They did nothing beyond seconding Moseley's efforts in securing the 'copy' and signing their names- to the number of ten- to the dedicatory epistle." From this I conclude that, in Sir Sidney Lee's opinion, the actors in this case, at any rate, did not write the epistle to which they so signed their names.'⁴

In his introduction to his *Plays of Mr. William Shakespeare* Appleton Morgan in illustrating how a considerable portion of the Epistle Dedicatorie was adapted from Pliny's *Natural History* by placing several parallels from the two texts side by side with each other commented 'that "Heminge and Condell" is a pseudonym for some one who was very much another sort of person from the two actors who ended their days as a grocer and a Publican, respectively'.⁵

So little known was Steevens' detailed analysis, buried away as it is in the twenty-one volume Boswell-Malone edition, that Professor W. Dinsmore Briggs, himself taking his lead from M. Maurice Castelain who had suggested in *Revue Germanique* Jonson had probably corrected if not composed *To the Great Variety of Readers* believed he had discovered anew unmistakable parallels between the preface and various passages from Jonson's writings. He too not only believed Jonson to have written the Address but the Epistle also 'there is nothing inherently improbable in the idea. Every one familiar with the literary conditions of the time will realize that fact. . .That the two are by the same writer cannot be doubted by any reader.'⁶ As a result of several letters dispatched to the *Times Literary Supplement*-in which the number of parallels

first highlighted by Steevens' were increased by Dinsmore Briggs—he found himself embroiled in a scholarly spat with Professor Percy Simpson who was unable to accept Jonson's authorship choosing instead to imagine Heminges and Condell had modelled themselves on him merely loading their contribution with a mass of quotations taken from his writings.⁷ Similarly, Sir Sidney Lee opined that the phrases contained within the prefaces 'crudely echo' passages from Jonson's writings but the 'ill-rounded sentences' lack his facility of style.⁸ Sir George Greenwood retorted this appears to be nothing more than a ridiculous suggestion 'The prefaces are Jonsonian to the core, and if the two "deserving men," or either of them, had been able to write in this style it is pretty certain that we should have heard of other writings from their pen.'

⁹ Professor Pollard objected to Jonson being the author of the Address due to his well-known comment regarding the absence of blotted lines in Shakespeare's manuscript. Unable to accept the actors Heminges and Condell he suggests an alternative in Blount.¹⁰ In only giving brief notice to Steevens' parallels and the alternative of Blount forwarded by Pollard an admirably restrained Chambers remarked that 'Jonson's claim seems to me on the whole the better.'¹¹ With customary authority the orthodox Professor Felix Schelling pronounced the actors were simply not capable of writing the two prefaces to which their names are appended 'Neither Heminge nor Condell was a writer, and such a book ought to be properly introduced. In such a juncture there could be no choice. The best book of the hour demanded sponsorship by the greatest contemporary man of letters. Ben Jonson was the King's poet, the Laureate, the literary dictator of the age; and Jonson rose nobly to the task, penning not only the epigram 'To the Reader, and his noble personal eulogium, but both the prose addresses of dedication. Of this matter there can be no question whatever, and if anyone is troubled by the signatures of Heminge and Condell appended to two addresses which neither of them actually wrote, let him examine into his own conduct in the matter of circulars, resolutions, and other papers which he has had written by skilled competence for the appendage of his signature.'¹² The large number of parallels between *To the Great Variety of Readers* and Jonson's writings have further been increased more recently by the researches of Joan Ham with her investigations also producing a substantial number of parallels between the *Dedicatorie Epistle* and passages from Jonson's works.¹³ In contrast in *Bacon Cryptograms in Shake-speare* Isaac Hull Platt observes of the *Epistle Dedicatorie* 'Now, if manner, style, diction mean anything, this dedication was written by no other than Francis Bacon [and] anyone sufficiently interested can compare the dedication as a whole with Bacon's Essays.'¹⁴ As to the second piece to which the names of Heminges and Condell are appended 'In regard to the "Address to the Readers" the case is not so clear. It might have been written by Jonson; its badinage somewhat resembles that of some of his introductions, but the wit is more sprightly. I believe this also to be by Bacon for one reason, that is also top heavy with legal phrases—not a peculiarity of Jonson's'.¹⁵ Maybe the dedication and the address *To the Great Variety of Readers* were a joint composition by Bacon and Jonson, or perhaps Bacon made use of some of Jonson's writings when writing both of them which are clearly written by a lawyer replete as they are with the language of the law: one thing is sure (unbeknown to Hull Platt) there are several Baconian cryptograms and anagrams in the address *To the Great Variety of Readers* confirming its Baconian provenance.

We have previously seen that a large initial capital letter **F** indicates the presence of cryptic devices and ciphers as used by Bacon in his Shakespeare poem *The Rape of Lucrece*, the first sonnet in the edition of *Shakespeares Sonnets* and as the first letter in the first verse of *A Lover's Complaint*. In the same manner the address 'To the great Variety of Readers' prefixed to the First Folio also begins with a large capital **F** set within a woodcut resulting in the indentation of the first seven lines. The cryptic phrase in the first and second line 'There you are number'd' points to the alert reader the presence of ciphers within the lettered woodblock as well as the rest of the page. The large capital **F** with the capital **R** (as with the previous examples) forms the monogram **FR** for Francis. The reverse reading under the **F** lettered woodblock yields

words
on block

Letters on block

6



1 headpiece
26

To the great Variety of Readers.

11
9
8
9
11
9
11



From the most able, to him that can but spell: There you are number'd. We had rather you were weigh'd. Especially, when the fate of all Bookes depends vpon your capacities: and not of your heads alone, but of your purses. Well! It is now publique, & you wil stand for your priuiledges wee know: to read, and censure. Do so, but buy it first. That doth best

39
37
41
38
38
39
39

68

commend a Booke, the Stationer saies. Then, how odde soeuer your braines be, or your wisdomes, make your licence the same, and spare not. Iudge your sixe-pen'orth, your shillings worth, your five shillings worth at a time, or higher, so you rise to the iust rates, and welcome. But, what euer you do, Buy. Censure will not driue a Trade, or make the lacke go. And though you be a Magistrate of wit, and sit on the Stage at *Black-Friers*, or the *Cock-pit*, to arraigne Playes dailie, know, these Playes haue had their triall alreadie, and stood out all Appeales; and do now come forth quitted rather by a Decree of Court, then any purchas'd Letters of commendation.

271 Letters

It had bene a thing, we confesse, worthie to haue bene wished, that the Author himselfe had liu'd to haue set forth, and ouerseen his owne writings; But since it hath bin ordain'd otherwise, and he by death departed from that right, we pray you do not envie his Friends, the office of their care, and paine, to haue collected & publish'd them; and so to haue publish'd them, as where (before) you were abus'd with diuerse stolne, and surreptitious copies, maimed, and deformed by the frauds and stealthes of iniurious impostors, that expos'd them: euen those, are now offer'd to your view cur'd, and perfect of their limbes; and all the rest, absolute in their numbers, as he conceiu'd thē. Who, as he was a happie imitator of Nature, was a most gentle expresser of it. His mind and hand went together: And what he thought, he vttered with that easinesse, that wee haue scarce receiued from him a blot in his papers. But it is not our prouince, who onely gather his works, and giue them you, to praise him. It is yours that reade him. And there we hope, to your diuers capacities, you will finde enough, both to draw, and hold you: for his wit can no more lie hid, then it could be lost. Reade him, therefore; and againe, and againe: And if then you doe not like him, surely you are in some manifest danger, not to vnderstand him. And so we leaue you to other of his Friends, whom if you need, can bee your guides: if you neede them not, you can leade your selues, and others. And such Readers we wish him.

L W

A 3

John Heminge.
Henrie Condell.

24 4

A = 1 + 3 = 4

1. The address 'To the great Variety of Readers' in the First Folio revealing Bacon Shakespeare'

BACO the contracted name of its author Bacon and reading downward from the **F** the first three lines yields an anagram of **FR BACON**. The first and last lines within the woodblock contain 39 letters F. Bacon in simple cipher. The whole block contains a total of 68 words comprising 271 letters: $271+68=339$ a quadruple cipher for Francis Bacon (100)/Francis Bacon (100)/Francis Bacon (100)/F. Bacon (39) and conversely $271-68=203$ a double cipher for Francis Bacon (100)/Shakespeare (103) all in simple cipher. The page is framed by a headpiece and the title of its address '*To the great Variety of Readers*', contains 6 words comprising 26 letters: $1+6+26=33$ Bacon in simple cipher and the bottom of the page we read A 3 and the four words *Iohn Heminge/Henrie Condell* containing 24 letters: $1+3+4+24=32$ which plus the headpiece gives a total of 33 Bacon in simple cipher and when added to the 6 words in the address $33+6=39$ F. Bacon in simple cipher. The text of the address comprises a total of 39 lines F. Bacon in simple cipher. Thus the cryptographic message repeatedly conveyed in the address '*To the great Variety of Readers*' prefixed to the Shakespeare First Folio is Francis Bacon is Shakespeare.¹⁶

[In the 24 letter Elizabethan alphabet the I and J and the U and V were interchangeable]

A B C D E F G H I K L M N O P Q R S T U W X Y Z
 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20 21 22 23 24

B A C O N F. B A C O N
 2 1 3 14 13=33 6 2 1 3 14 13=39

F R A N C I S B A C O N
 6 17 1 13 3 9 18=67 2 1 3 14 13=33 67+33=100

S H A K E S P E A R E
 18 8 1 10 5 18 15 5 1 17 5=103

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12. Felix E. Schelling, 'Seedpod of Shakespeare Criticism', *Pennsylvania Gazette*, 16 January, 1920, p. 376.
13. Joan Ham, 'The Two Faces of Ben Jonson', *Baconiana*, Vol. XLVIII, No. 165, October, 1965, pp. 34-43.
14. Isaac Hull Platt, *Bacon Cryptograms in Shake-speare And Other Studies* (Boston: Small, Maynard and Company, 1905), p. 70.
15. Ibid., p. 71.
16. For all the anagrams and acrostics in the text see <https://sirbacon.org/all-is-num2er/>