

To the memory of my beloued, The Avthor  
Mr. VWilliam Shakespeare signed by Ben  
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By  
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## FACSIMILES

1. The first page of 'To the memory of my beloued, The Avthor Mr. William Shakespeare' by Ben Jonson p. 5
2. The second page of 'To the memory of my beloued, The Avthor Mr. William Shakespeare' by Ben Jonson p. 6

**To the memory of my beloved, The Avthor Mr. William Shakespeare signed by Ben Jonson**

It is an Art to have so much judgement, as to apparel a Lye well, to give it a good dressing; that though the nakednesse would shew deform'd and odious, the suiting of it might draw their Readers. Some love any Strumpet (be shee never so shop-like, or meritorious) in good clothes. But these nature could not have form'd them better, to destroy their owne testimony; and over-throw their calumny.

[Ben Jonson, *Timber: Or, Discoveries* (London: printed 1641), p. 16]

Like *The Faerie Queene* and *Paradise Lost*, *Volpone* forces its readers to work their way through a maze of seductive falsehoods: if they are any wiser at the end of the play, it is because they have withstood this assault on their moral bearings.

...Just as *Volpone* gulls his clients, Jonson gulls his audience; but Jonson's falsehood has the capacity to educate as well as to delude.

[David Riggs, *Ben Jonson A Life* (Harvard University Press, 1989), pp. 136-37]

The verse signed by Ben Jonson is headed 'To the memory of my beloved, The Avthor, Mr. William Shakespeare: And what he hath left vs.' He has already revealed to us that he is privy to the secret that Bacon is the concealed author hidden behind the Droeshout Mask at the front of the Shakespeare First Folio for which he employed the pseudonym of William Shakespeare. Only a few years earlier in a verse written for his sixtieth birthday party at York House on 22 January 1621 Jonson hailed Bacon a 'happie *Genius*' raising him to 'the wisdom of my king': who stands 'as if some Mysterie thou did'st'.<sup>1</sup> During the period the Shakespeare First Folio was going through the Jaggards' printing presses Jonson was living with Bacon at Gorhambury working alongside him preparing and composing some of its prefatory material.

With his customary dexterity and using his powers of guile and ambiguity, Jonson repeatedly alludes to the secret identity of his beloved author Bacon-Shakespeare. He slyly hints that its hidden author is still alive '*Thou art a Moniment without a tombe,/And art aliue still, while thy book doth liue*', insinuating he is still literally alive as well as metaphorically through his work, which will be read till the end of time.

His beloved poet Bacon-Shakespeare out-compares all that Greece and Rome had to offer:

*Leave thee alone, for the comparison  
Of all, that insolent Greece, or haughtie Rome  
sent forth, or since did from their ashes come.*

In his posthumously published meditations *Timber: Or, Discoveries* Jonson again writes of his king Bacon by repeating the wording he used for him in his verse prefixed to the Shakespeare First Folio:

He [Bacon], who hath fill'd up all numbers; and perform'd that in our tongue,  
which may be compar'd, or preferr'd either to insolent *Greece*, or haughty *Rome*.<sup>2</sup>

In anticipation of so many of those contributors to the *Memoriae* containing commemorative verses published by Dr Rawley with whom Ben resided with at Gorhambury in alluding to Bacon, Jonson freely conjures up the god Apollo:

*And all the Muses still were in their prime,  
When like Apollo he came forth to warme  
Our eares, or like a Mercury to charme!*

Shortly after the supposed death of Francis Bacon in 1626 his private secretary and Rosicrucian Brother Dr William Rawley issued the *Memoriae Honoratissimi Domini Francisci, Baronis De Verulamio, Vice-Comitis Sancti Albani Sacrum* containing thirty-two Latin elegies wherein eleven of the versifiers held Bacon up as Apollo leader of the Nine Muses. Herein he is called another Apollo, described as greater than Apollo, and said that Apollo was fearful Bacon would replace him as King of the Muses. In elegy XII we are unreservedly informed that Bacon is Apollo ‘How has it happened to us, the disciples of the Muses, that Apollo, the leader of the choir, should die?’ and in Elegy XXI ‘Apollo, the darling, learned Bacon, of your native land’. In Elegy XXIII Bacon is portrayed as the leader of Apollo and the Muses ‘Think you, foolish traveller, that the leader of the choir of the Muses and of Phoebus is interred in the cold marble?’ and in elegy XX Bacon has replaced Apollo the god of poetry as the tenth muse ‘O Bacon! none, trust me, none will there be. Lament now sincerely, O Clío! and sisters of Clío, ah! the tenth muse and the glory of the choir has perished.’<sup>3</sup> As in the verse by Jonson prefixed to the First Folio Bacon is Apollo, leader of the Nine Muses of Poetry, the greatest of all poets and dramatists: ‘*He was not of a age, but for all time!*’, our immortal Shakespeare.

In returning to the comparative theme of insolent Greece and haughty Rome his Rosicrucian Brother ‘Rare Ben’, very deliberately refers to the dramatist Terence, to subtly communicate to the reader William Shakspeare of Stratford is merely a literary front for Bacon-Shakespeare:

*The merry Greeke, tart Aristophanes,  
Neat Terence, witty Plautus, now not please;*

A decade earlier the poet John Davies of Hereford issued his *The Scourge of Folly Consisting of satyricall Epigramms, and others in honor of many noble and worthy Persons of our Land* which contained a sonnet addressed to his Rosicrucian Master Sir Francis Bacon wherein he very clearly identifies him as a concealed poet:

*To the royall, ingenious, and all-learned knight, Sr. Francis Bacon.*

Thy *Bounty*, and the *Beauty* of thy Witt  
(Comprid in Lists of *Law*, and learned *Arts*,  
Each making thee for great *Employment* fitt  
Which now thou hast, (though short of thy deserts)  
Compells my Pen to let fall shining *Inke*  
And to bedew the *Baies* that *deck* thy *Front*;  
And to thy health in *Helicon* to drinke  
As, to her *Bellamour* the *Muse* is wont:  
For, thou dost he embozom; and, dost vse  
Her company for sport twixt graue affaires:  
So vtterst *Law* the liuelyer through thy *Muse*:  
And for that all thy *Notes* are sweetest *Aires*;  
*My Muse thus notes thy worth in eu'ry Line,*  
*With yncke which thus she sugers; so, to shine.*<sup>4</sup>

In the verse Davies contrasts Bacon’s public life with his private or secret life (which he was clearly privy to) with the Bounty Law which Bacon loathed and Beauty of his Wit, the learned arts of poetry and drama, which was his first and last love. He refers to the Bays, the poet’s laurel wreath (*OED*: ‘a wreath made of bay-leaves, for a victor or poet’) that ‘*deck*’ (which sits above what lies beneath) ‘*thy Front*’, a person behind which to conceal his identity (i.e.,

William Shakspeare of Stratford). Mount Helicon is home to the Helicon Muses the goddesses of poetical inspiration and poetry his divine '*Bellamour*' (Bellamore: meaning Beautiful Love). The secret that William Shakspeare was a literary mask for Bacon was communicated to the initiated or those with eyes to see in the same *Scourge of Folly* in which Davies pointedly refers to 'Shake-speare' as '*our English Terence*':

*To our English Terence M<sup>r</sup>. Will:  
Shake-speare.  
Epig. 159.*


SOME say (good *Will*) which I, in sport, do sing)  
Had'st thou not plaid some Kingly parts in sport,  
Thou hadst bin a companion for a *King*;  
And, beene a King among the meaner sort.  
Some others raile; but, raile as they thinke fit,  
Thou shalt no rayling, but, a raining Wit:  
*And honesty thou sow'st, which they do reape;*  
*So, to increase their Stocke which they do keepe.*<sup>5</sup>

The phrase '*our English Terence*' in the title of the verse was very carefully and deliberately chosen. Terence was a Roman African slave known for being a mask for the writings of the Roman senators Scipio and Laelius who wished to keep their authorship secret, just as the actor 'Will: Shake-peare' (the hyphenated 'Shake-speare' indicating it was a pseudonym), was a literary front or mask for Francis Bacon who wished likewise to conceal his secret authorship of the Shakespeare plays.

In his verse Ben Jonson refers to the soul of the age as the Sweet Swan of Avon. In typical Jonsonian fashion the ambiguous line is introduced for the purposes of misleading those simple souls who merely read and understand things on a literal plain (children and schoolmen, etc):

*Sweet Swan of Auon! what a sight it were  
To see thee in our waters yet appeare,  
And make those flights vpon the bankes of Thames,  
That so did take Eliza, and our Iames!*

On one level read literally it seems to be an apparent allusion to William Shakspeare of Stratford-upon-Avon perhaps as a misdirection for maintaining the pious Rosicrucian illusion of Bacon's pseudonymity; nevertheless the true multi-layered meaning and significance of the line is best understood in light of a passage in Bacon's *De Augmentis* published the same year as the First Folio. We know that around this time Jonson was assisting Bacon in translating his *Essays* and several writers have expressed the view there is every possibility he assisted him in translating other works 'It is probable that he (Jonson) assisted him in the preparation of the *Novum Organum*, which was published in 1620, and it is an undoubted fact that the Latin of the *De Augmentis*, which was published in 1623, was the work of Jonson.'<sup>6</sup> Whether or not Jonson assisted in the translation of the *De Augmentis* he was undoubtedly familiar with its contents. In Book II Chapter VII where Bacon discusses '*The Division of Perfect History into Chronicles, Lives, and Relations; and Explanation thereof*' he draws attention to the curiosity that so little is known of the many eminent lives in his own time and how it was that swans would carry medals with the names of the dead to a certain temple consecrate to immortality:



To the memory of my beloued,  
The AVTHOR  
MR. WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE:  
AND  
what he hath left vs.

**D**raw no enuy (Shakespeare) on thy name,  
Am I thus ample to thy Booke, and Fame's  
While I confesse thy writings to be such,  
As neither Man, nor Muse, can praise too much.  
'Tis true, and all mens suffrage. But these wayes  
were not the paths I meant vnto thy praise:  
For seeliest Ignorance on these may light,  
Which, when it sounds at best, but eccho's right;  
Or blinde Affection, which doth ne're aduance  
The truth, but gropes, and vngeth all by chance;  
Or crafty Malice, might pretend this praise,  
And thinke to ruine, where it seem'd to raise.  
These are, as some infamous Band, or whore,  
Should praise a Matron. What coul'd hurt her more?  
But thou art proofe against them, and indeed  
Aboue th' ill fortune of them, or the need.  
I, therefore will begin. Soule of the Age!  
The applause! delight! the wonder of our Stage!  
My Shakespeare, rise; I will not lodge thee by  
Chaucer, or Spenser, or bid Beaumont lie  
A little further, to make thee a roome:  
Thou art a Monument, without a tombe,  
And art al ue still, while thy Booke doth liue,  
And we haue wits to read, and praise to giue.  
That I not mixe thee so, my braine excuses;  
I meane with great, but disproportion'd Muses:  
For, if I thought my iudgement were of yeeres,  
I should commit thee surely with thy peeres,  
And tell, how farre thou didst our Lily out-shine,  
Or sporting Kid, or Marlowes mighty line,  
And though thou hadst small Latine, and lesse Greeke,  
From thence to honour thee, I would not seeke  
For names; but call forth thund'ring Æschilus,  
Euripides, and Sophocles to vs,  
Paccuius, Accius, him of Cordoua dead,  
To life againe, to heare thy Buskin tread,  
And shake a Stage: Or, when thy Sockes were on,  
Loane thee alone, for the comparison

of

1. The first page of 'To the memory of my beloued, The Avthor Mr. William Shakespeare' by Ben Jonson

Of all, that insolent Greece, or haughtie Rome  
 sent forth, or since did from their ashes come.  
 Triumph, my Britaine, thou hast one to shew,  
 To whom all Scenes of Europe homage owe.  
 He was not of an age, but for all time!  
 And all the Muses still were in their prime,  
 when like Apollo he came forth to warme  
 Our eares, or like a Mercury to charme!  
 Nature her selfe was proud of his designs,  
 And ioy'd to weare the dressing of his lines!  
 which were so richly spun, and wouen so fit,  
 As, since, she will vouchsafe no other Wit.  
 The merry Greeke, tart Aristophanes,  
 Neat Terence, witty Plautus, now not please;  
 But antiquated, and deserted lye  
 As they were not of Natures family.  
 Yet must I not giue Nature all: Thy Art,  
 My gentle Shakespeare, must enioy a part.  
 For though the Poets matter, Nature be,  
 His Art doth giue the fashion. And, that he,  
 Who casts to write a living line, must sweat,  
 (such as thine are) and strike the second heat  
 Vpon the Muses anuile: turne the same,  
 (And himselfe with it) that he thinks to frame;  
 Or for the lawrell, he may gaine a scorne,  
 For a good Poet's made, as well as borne.  
 And such wert thou. Looke how the fathers face  
 Liues in his issue; euen so, the race  
 Of Shakespeares minde, and manners brightly shines  
 In his well torned, and true filed lines:  
 In each of which, he seemes to shake a Lance,  
 As brandish't at the eyes of Ignorance.  
 Sweet Swan of Anon! what a sight it were  
 To see thee in our waters yet appeare,  
 And make those flights vpon the bankes of Thames,  
 That so did take Eliza, and our Iames!  
 But stay, I see thee in the Hemisphere  
 Circled, and made a Constellation there!  
 Shine forth, thou Starre of Poets, and with rage,  
 Or influence, chide, or cheere the drooping Stage;  
 Which, since thy flight fro hence, hath mourn'd like night,  
 And despaires day, but for thy Volumes light.

BEN: JONSON.

2. The second page of 'To the memory of my beloued, The Avthor Mr. William Shakespeare' by Ben Jonson

As for Lives, I find it strange, when I think of it, that these our times have so little esteemed their own virtues, as that commemoration and writing of the lives of those who have adorned our age should be no more frequent. For although there be but few sovereign kings or absolute commanders, and not many princes in free states (so many free states being now turned into monarchies), yet are there many worthy personages (even living under kings) that deserve better than dispersed report or dry and barren eulogy. For herein the invention of one of the later poets, by which he has enriched the ancient fiction, is not inelegant. He feigns that at the end of the thread or web of every man's life there hangs a little medal or collar, on which his name is stamped; and that Time waits upon the shears of Atropos, and as soon as the thread is cut, snatches the medals, carries them off, and presently throws them into the river Lethe; and about the river there are many birds flying up and down, who catch the medals, and after carrying them round and round in their beak a little while, let them fall into the river; only there are a few swans, which if they get a medal with a name immediately carry it off to a temple consecrated to immortality.<sup>7</sup>

The artful Jonson knew the *nom de plume* Shakespeare would stealthily secure for Bacon his unparalleled place in the pantheon of immortality, one secretly safeguarded for posterity by a divine Baconian swan, carried on to immortality by his Rosicrucian-Freemasonry Brotherhood.

With his Rosicrucian-Freemasonic Grand Master Bacon, Rare Ben had a love of anagrams and he thoughtfully incorporated one in the last six lines of his verse 'To the memory of my beloved, The Avthor Mr. William Shakespeare', communicating a secret message to posterity regarding the true identity of our immortal poet Shakespeare, by spelling out down the left-hand side his name, **BACON**:

*But stay, I see thee in the Hemisphere  
Aduanc'd and made a Constellation there!  
Shine forth, thou Starre of Poets, and with rage,  
Or influence, chide, or cheere the drooping Stage;  
Which, since by flight fro[m] hence, hath mourn'd like night,  
And despaires day, but for thy Volumes light.<sup>8</sup>*

**BACON.**



## REFERENCES

1. C. H. Herford and Evelyn Simpson, eds., *Ben Jonson* (Oxford Clarendon Press, 1925-52), VIII, p. 225. This verse was reproduced by Lisa Jardine and Alan Stewart in *Hostage to Fortune The Troubled Life of Francis Bacon* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1998), p. 442.
2. Ben Jonson, *Timber: Or, Discoveries; Made Vpon Men And Matter: As They have flow'd out of his daily Readings; or had their refluxe to his peculiar Notion of the Times* (London: printed 1641), pp. 37-38.
3. William Rawley, ed., *Memoriae Honoratissimi Domini Francisci, Baronis De Vervlamio, Vice-Comitis Sancti Albani Sacrum* (Londoni: In Officini Johannis Haviland, 1626), *passim*; W. G. C. Gundry, ed., *Manes Verulamiani* (London: The Chiswick Press, 1950), pp. 38-47.
4. John Davies, *The Scourge of Folly. Consisting of satyricall Epigramms, and others in honor of many noble and worthy Persons of our Land Together, With a pleasant (though discordant) Descant vpon most English Proverbes: and others* (London: printed by Edward Allde for Richard Remer, 1611), p. 14.
5. *Ibid.*, pp. 66-67.
6. Judge Webb, *The Mystery of William Shakespeare A Summary of Evidence* (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1902), p. 123.
7. Spedding, *Works*, IV, p. 307.
8. For Bacon-Shakespeare acrostics and anagrams see Yann Le Merlus, 'Allisnum2er', on B'Hive and his page on the main site <https://sirbacon.org/all-is-num2er/> See also William Bellamy, 'Ben Jonson and the Art of Anagram', *Academia.edu*, pp. 1-52.