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

By
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To the memory of my beloued, 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 beloued, 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’. 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:

\[
\text{Leave thee alone, for the comparison} \\
\text{Of all, that insolent Greece, or haughty Rome} \\
\text{sent forth, or since did from their ashes come.}
\]

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:

\[
\text{He [Bacon], who hath fill’d up all numbers; and perform’d that in our tongue,} \\
\text{which may be compar’d, or preferr’d either to insolent Greece, or haughty Rome.}
\]

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:

\[
\text{And all the Muses still were in their prime,} \\
\text{When like Apollo he came forth to warme} \\
\text{Our eares, or like a Mercury to charm'e!}
\]
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 Clio! and sisters of Clio, ah! the tenth muse and the glory of the choir has perished.’ 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 Shakspere of Stratford is merely a literary front for Bacon-Shakespeare:

*The merry Greekke, tart Aristophanes,*  
*Near Terence, witty Plautus, now not please;*  

A decade earlier the poet John Davies of Hereford issued his *The Scourge of Folly Consisting of satyrical 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*  
   (Comprisd in Lists of *Law,* and learned *Arts,*  
   Each making thee for great *Imploment* 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 grave affaires:  
   So vterst Law the luelyer 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.*

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.,
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 Shakspere 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 Mr. 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, bee a King among the meaner sort.  
Some others raile; but, raile as they thinke fit,  
Thou shalt no rayling, but, a raigning Wit:  
And honesty thou sow’st, which they do reape;  
So, to increase their Stocke which they do keepe."

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-speare’ (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 upon the bankes of Thames,  
That so did take Eliza, and our James!

On one level read literally it seems to be an apparent allusion to William Shakspere 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.” 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 beloved, The AUTHOR
Mr. William Shakespeare:
And what he hath left us.

O draw no envy (Shakespeare) to thy name, 
Am I thus ample to thy book, and fame?
While I confess thy writings to be such,
As neither Man, nor Muse, can praise too much.
To true, and all men's suffrage. But these words
were not the path I meant unto thy praise,
For false ignorance on these may light;
Which, when it sounds at first, but echoes right.
Or blind affections, which doth us advance.
The truth, but grapes, and gather'd all by chance.
Or crafty Malice, might pretend this praise,
And thanks to none, where it is found to arise.
There are, as sense infamous blind, or where,
Should praise a Matron. But honest honours more art
but thus are praise against them, and indeed.
Above that fortune of them, or the need.

Therefore will begin, Scale of the Aged
The applause I delight (the wonder of our Stage too).
My Shakespeare, if we will not judge thee by
Chaucer, or Spenser, or Bed Beaumont (Jesu)
A little further, to make thee sounder in manor.
Thou art a Monument, without a tomb.
And art as weli still, while the Book doth last, and so
And we have more to read, and praise thrice.
That I not mix thee, my brain excesses 3,
I mean with great, but disportation Muses:
For, if I thought my judgment were of secrec,
I should commit thee surely with thy peers,
And tell, how farse thou distill our Lily out-shine,
Or spurting Kid, or Marlowe mighty line;
And though thou hast small praise, and left Greek
From thence to heaven thee, I would not seek
For names, but call forth round ring Achilles,
Euripides, and Sophocles to us,
Paccius, Accius, home of Cordou dead,
To life again, to hear thy Bucchin tread,
And make a Stage: or, when thy Sowers were on,
Loose thee alone, for the comparison.
Of all that Infantile Greece, or Diaphanic Rome
Sight forth, or since did from their ashes come,
Triumph, my Britaine, thou best eue to shine,
To whom all Grecian of Europe homage gave.
He was not of an age, but for all ages
And all the Muses still were in their prime,
When like Apollo he came forth to warme
Our eyes, or like a Mercury to charme!
Nature her selfe was proud of his desigges,
And joy'd to weare the dressings of his lines;
Which were so richly spun, and woven so fit,
As since, he will scarce else no other Writ.
The merry Greeke, late Aristophanes,
Next Terence, witty Plautus, now not pleas'd;
But antiquated, and deserted he
As they were not of Nature's family.
Yet must he not give Nature all: The Art,
My gentle Shakespeare, must enjoy a part.
For though the Poets matter, Nature be,
His Art doth give the Passion. And, that he,
Who casts to write a living line, must flex,
(Such as these are) and strike the second beat
Upon the Muses amule, turne the same,
(And himselfe with it) that he thinkes to boose,
Or for the luswat, he may gaze a seeming,
For a good Poets made, as well as borne.
And such worth shew. Look how the fathers face
Lies in his issue, even so, the race
Of Shakespeare's minde, and manners brightly shines
In his well turned, and true files lines:
In each of which he seems to shake a Lance,
As brandish'd at the eyes of Omniscence.
Sweet Swan of Avon: what a sight it were
To see thee in our waters yet appear,
And make thine flights upon the Bankes of Thames.
That so did take Eliza, and our James!
But stay, I see thee in the Hemisphere
Comas'd, and made a Constellacion there!
Sight forth, thou Starre of Poets, and with joy,
Influence, chuse up where the destine Stage;
Where, since thy Flight to home, hath wound a like Night,
And appears day, but for thy Volumes light.

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.7

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 beloued, 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 despaieres day, but for thy Volumes light.*

**BACON.**
REFERENCES


2. Ben Jonson, Timber: Or, Discoveries; Made Upon 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.


5. Ibid., pp. 66-67.

