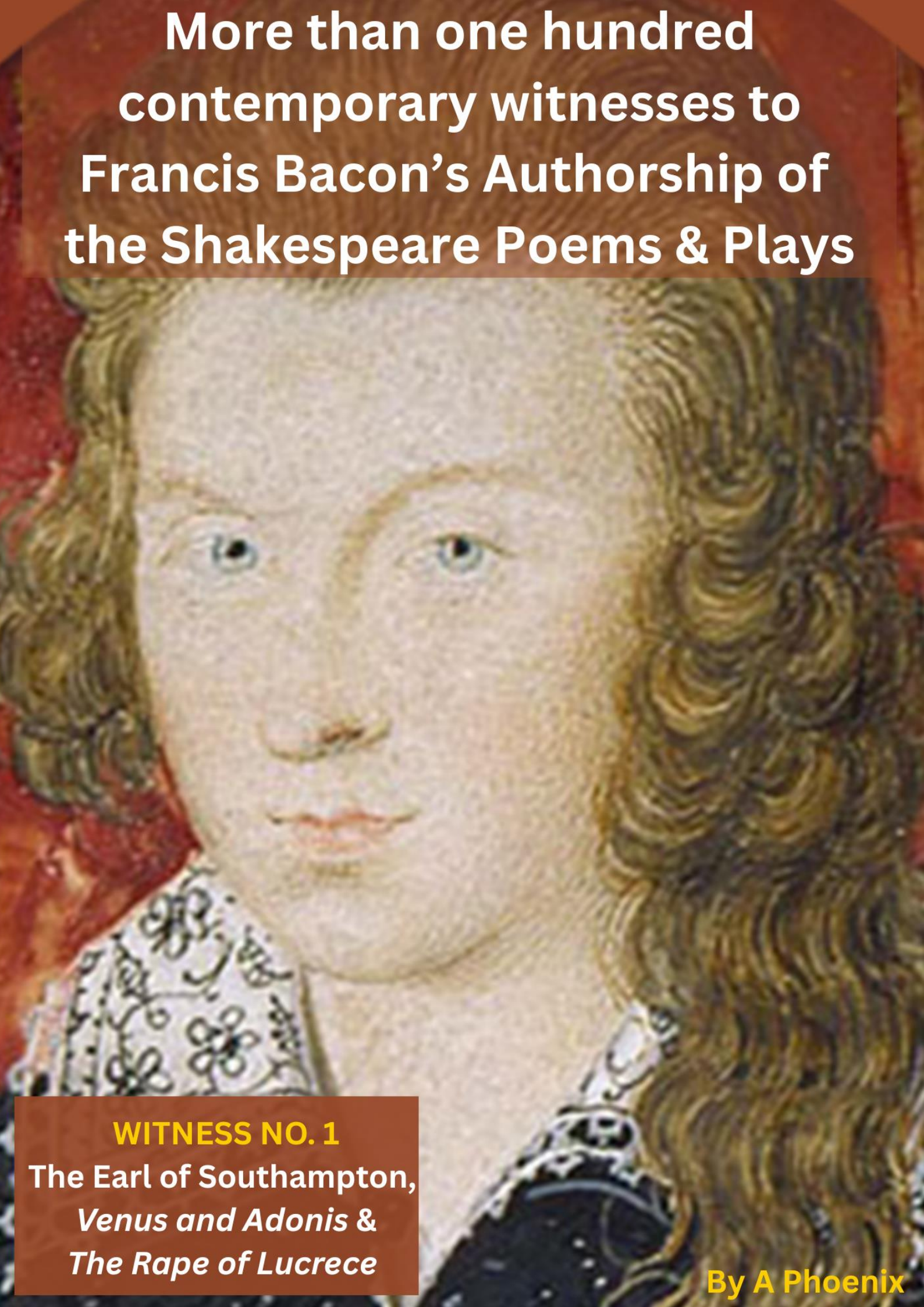
More than one hundred contemporary witnesses to Francis Bacon's Authorship of the Shakespeare Poems & Plays



WITNESS NO. 1

The Earl of Southampton, *Venus and Adonis* & *The Rape of Lucrece*

By A Phoenix

Witness 1.
Francis Bacon, the Earl of Southampton, *Venus and Adonis* (1593) and *The Rape of Lucrece* (1594), the first two works to carry the pseudonym, William Shakespeare

These writings can be classified into four categories: first, texts that Bacon wrote but not for public consumption; second, texts Bacon wrote to be circulated with his name; third, texts Bacon intended to circulate anonymously; and fourth, texts that were intended to circulate under another's name.

[Alan Stewart with Harriet Knight, eds., *The Oxford Francis Bacon*: *Early Writings 1584-1596* (Oxford Clarendon Press, 2012), p. xxviii]

For obvious reasons the orthodox editors and biographers of Francis Bacon and the biographers of Henry Wriothesley, Earl of Southampton have very carefully avoided placing them together even though Bacon and Southampton had a very close, intimate and complex relationship with each other from at least the late 1580s right through to the latter's death in 1624.

In 1593 the *nom de plume* William Shakespeare appeared for the first time in a printed work in the poem *Venus and Adonis*, not on the title page but underneath an intimate dedication to Henry, Wriothesley, third Earl of Southampton (1573-1624). This was followed in 1594 by the second Shakespeare poem *The Rape of Lucrece*, with as before the *nom de plume* William Shakespeare appearing below an even more intimate dedication to the Earl of Southampton.

Following the death of his father the second Earl of Southampton Henry Wriothesley became a royal ward and at eight years old in *c*.1581-82 he was delivered into the care of Bacon's uncle William Cecil, Lord Burghley, Master of the Wards and raised at his official London residence Cecil House where Lord Burghley and his wife Lady Mildred superintended his studies and education.[1] Lady Mildred Cooke Cecil was the elder sister of Lady Anne Cooke Bacon wife of Lord Keeper Sir Nicholas Bacon, mother and father of Francis Bacon, the secret author of the Shakespeare poems and plays.

It was here at Cecil House Southampton first met another of Cecil's wards Robert Devereux, second Earl of Essex with whom he was to form one of the closet relationships of his life and Francis Bacon with whom he was to form the closet relationship of his life, then residing within walking distance at Gray's Inn.

In 1585 through the good offices of his guardian the earl was admitted to St. John's College, Cambridge where he remained for the next four years graduating in 1589 with a Master of Arts then aged sixteen. Before leaving university, Southampton was admitted to Gray's Inn on 29 February 1588,[2] where Francis Bacon its rising star resided in his large suite of chambers built by his father Lord Keeper Sir Nicholas Bacon. He entered Gray's Inn in 1579 and soon became its *de facto* Master of the Revels organising the dramatic entertainments, masques and plays, much loved by Southampton who it was said attended the London theatres on an almost daily basis.

On the evening before the earl became a member of the Society, he most likely witnessed the performance of the important play *The Misfortunes of Arthur* performed by Gray's Inn before the Queen at Greenwich on 28 February 1588. This first work to carry the name Francis Bacon in print has been overlooked and suppressed by Bacon editors and biographers for more than four hundred years because of its clear and demonstrable links to Bacon's concealed authorship of the Shakespeare works.[3]

The little known and little read play immediately pre-dates the recognised Shakespearean era which on close examination confirms the same poet and dramatist who wrote *The Misfortunes of Arthur* also wrote the Shakespeare poems and plays.[4] Its central themes and language find expression and are demonstrably echoed in a significant number of his early Shakespeare plays including the first tetralogy *I Henry VI*, *2 Henry VI*, *3 Henry VI* and *Richard III*, written around

Fig. 1 Portrait of Francis Bacon from Old Gainsborough Hall, *c*. 1590, author unknown

Fig. 2 Henry Wriothesley, 3rd Earl of Southampton, Fitzwilliam Museum, 1594,
by miniature by Nicholas Hilliard

the same time or shortly after the *Misfortunes*, and from the same early period *Titus Andronicus*, *King John*, *Richard II* and *The Comedy of Errors*.

During his stay at Gray's Inn the strikingly beautiful and bisexual Southampton formed a close and intimate relationship with Bacon and when Burghley sought a match for his ward to his granddaughter Lady Elizabeth Vere, the nineteen-year-old daughter of the Earl of Oxford from the beginning of the new decade, the earl resolutely refused the match, as his interest lay elsewhere. From the early 1590s Southampton was spending more time about the court and increasingly moving in the Bacon-Essex circle located in and around Essex House where Francis and Anthony Bacon were handling all the domestic and foreign intelligence passing through the *de facto* Foreign Office of the English Secret Service. During these years his secret relationship with Bacon continued to deepen and flourish and in 1593 the earl received the first of two intimate dedications printed below a Baconian-Rosicrucian AA Headpiece written under his *nom de plume* of William Shakespeare, whom Bacon cherished, honoured and loved:

TO THE RIGHT HONOURABLE
Henrie VVriothesley, Earle of Southampton,
and Baron of Titchfield.

RIght Honourable, *I know not how I shall offend in dedicating my vnpolisht lines to your Lordship*, *nor how the worlde vvill censure mee for choosing so strong a proppe to support so vveake a burthen*, *onelye if your Honour seeme but pleased*, *I account my selfe highly praised*, *and vowe to take aduantage of all idle houres*, *till I haue honoured you vvith some grauer labour. But if the first heire of my inuention proue deformed*, *I shall be sorie it had so noble a god-father*: *and neuer after eare so barren a land, for feare it yeeld me still so bad a haruest*, *I leaue it to your Honourable suruey, and your Honor to your hearts content*, *vvhich I wish may alvvaies ansvvere your ovvn vvish*, *and the vvorlds hopefull expectation.*

Your Honors in all dutie,
William Shakespeare.[5]

In 1594 the second and longer poem *The Rape of Lucrece* bore a dedication to Southampton that was even more warm and intimate than the one preceding it, insinuating a private concealed longstanding relationship, one of a profound love, honour and respect. With a repeated promise of everlasting devotion from dedicator to dedicatee, in a manner it has been often said, unlike any other in Elizabethan literature:

TO THE RIGHT
HONOVRABLE, HENRY
VVriothesley, Earle of Southhampton,
and Baron of Titchfield.

THE loue I dedicate to your Lordship is without end: whereof this Pamphlet without beginning is but a superfluous Moity. The warrant I haue of your Honourable disposition, not the worth of my vntutored Lines makes it assured of acceptance. VVhat I haue done is yours, what I haue to doe is yours, being part of all I haue, deuoted yours. VVere my worth greater, my duety would shew greater, meane time, as it is, it is bound to your Lordship; To whom I wish long life still lengthned with all happinesse.

Your Lordships in all duety.
William Shakespeare.[6]

The first Shakespeare poem *Venus and Adonis* was personally licensed for printing by Bacon's former Cambridge tutor and Master of Trinity, John Whitgift, now Archbishop of Canterbury, in whose living quarters and under whose close paternal supervision Francis and Anthony had resided with for more than two years.[7] In the intervening years Bacon and Whitgift, Archbishop of Canterbury had secretly conspired with each other in the compiling of a letter anonymously written by Bacon in the name of Sir Francis Walsingham, some three year earlier in 1589-90, and the high ecclesiastical pontificate had long been privy to the secret Bacon was a concealed poet from their Cambridge days.[8] The poem *Venus and Adonis* was entered on the Stationers' Register on 18 April 1593 'under thandes of the Archbisshop of Canterbury and master warden Stirrop, a booke intituled, Venus and Adonis'.[9] A number of individuals under Whitgift's control, including his secretaries Murgatroyd and Hartwell, as well as Master Cawood were authorized to license books for printing. The second Shakespeare poem *The Rape of Lucrece* was entered on the Stationers' Register on 9 May 1594 as follows: 'Master Harrison Senior Entred for his copie vnder thand of Master Cawood Warden, a booke intituled the Ravyshement of Lucrece.'[10]

The close relationship between Bacon and Southampton continued through the 1590s during which time their lives became further intertwined with that of Robert Devereux, second Earl of Essex. The events leading up to the ill-fated Essex uprising adversely affected the dynamic between them. In the aftermath Essex was executed for treason, however Southampton, most probably following the private intervention by Bacon with Elizabeth, had his death sentence commuted. On the accession of James I, the earl was released from prison. Buried away in Spedding's seven-volume *Letters and Life of Francis Bacon* is a virtually unknown letter from Bacon to Southampton where he pointedly says in direct reference to their previous intimate relationship 'I may safely be now that which I was truly before':

It may please your Lordship,

I would have been very glad to have presented my humble service to your Lordship by my attendance, if I could have foreseen that it should not have been unpleasing unto you. And therefore, because I would commit no error, I choose to write; assuring your Lordship (how credible soever it may seem to you at first) yet it is as true as a thing that God knoweth, that this great change hath wrought in me no other change towards your Lordship than this, that I may safely be now that which I was truly before. And so craving no other pardon than for troubling you with this letter, I do not now begin, but continue to be

Your Lordships humble and much devoted.[11]

Not only was Henry Wriothesley, third Earl of Southampton obviously privy to the true identity of the poet Shakespeare, several others of his contemporaries, also secretly knew Francis Bacon was the concealed author of *Venus and Adonis* and *The Rape of Lucrece*.

WITNESSES REFERENCES

1.

Francis Bacon, the Earl of Southampton, *Venus and Adonis* (1593) and *The Rape of Lucrece* (1594), the first two works to carry the pseudonym, William Shakespeare

1. G. P. V. Akrigg, *Shakespeare And The Earl Of Southampton* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1968), p. 25ff.

2. Ibid., p. 31.

3. *Certaine Deuises and shewes presented to her Maiestie by the Gentlemen of Grayes-Inne at her Highnesse Court in Greenwich*, *the twenty eighth day of Februarie in the thirtieth yeare of her Maiesties most happy Raigne* (London: printed by Robert Robinson, 1587), i.e., 1588.

4. A. Phoenix, 'Francis Bacon's Unacknowledged Play *The Misfortunes of Arthur* and its Links to his Shakespeare Plays', (2021), pp. 1-136.

5. William Shakespeare, *Venvs And Adonis* (London: printed for Richard Field, 1593), A2^{r}.

6. William Shakespeare, *Lvcrece* (London: printed by Richard Field for John Harrison, 1594), A2^{r}.

7. Lisa Jardine and Alan Stewart, *Hostage to Fortune*: *The Troubled Life of Francis Bacon* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1998), pp. 34-37.

8. Spedding, *Letters and Life*, I, pp. 96-97; Frank J. Burgoyne, *Collotype Facsimile & Type Transcript Of An Elizabethan Manuscript Preserved at Alnwick Castle, Northumberland* (Longmans, Green, and Co., 1904), pp. xi, 50-54.

9. E. K. Chambers, *William Shakespeare Facts And Problems* (Oxford Clarendon Press, 1930), I, p. 543.

10. Ibid., I, p. 545.

11. Spedding, *Letters and Life*, III, pp. 75-76.