

Ben Jonson's "Small Latin and Less Greeke": Anatomy of a Misquotation (Part 2)

by Roger Stritmatter

Ben Jonson's 80-line poem of praise in the 1623 Shakespeare First Folio (FF) constitutes a remarkable illustration of the ingenious constructive powers that led Jonson's admirers to call him the "prince of numbers."¹ Like Jonson's "To the Reader" epigram written to accompany the Droeshout engraving, the encomium is constructed on a very deliberate numerical design, as has been recognized at least since C.M. Ingleby's 1879 *Century of Praise* volume of Shakespeare allusions. I call it an encomium, but it may actually be more accurate to think of it as Jonson's own drily ironic *tour de force* of the genre of the "mock encomium," a form closely allied in the Renaissance to the idea of paradox and traceable back to the 5th Century BC, in which ironic praise is heaped on an unworthy object. Peter G. Platt analyses the genre as one designed to "bring readers astonishment, surprise, and shock, as they experience a deviation from the norm, and must re-evaluate conventionally held opinions and beliefs" (20).

Analyzing in any detail the complex mathematical structure of the poem is not the main purpose of this essay, any more than offering a comprehensive and detailed Oxfordian understanding of it. Many matters of detail including Jonson's artful use of "number" in the Folio prefatory materials are covered in Waugh and Stritmatter (forthcoming). More modestly, I propose here to focus attention on the sole consideration of the meaning of Jonson's phrase "small Latin and less Greek."² Our understanding of this phrase, however, will benefit from a brief summary of Jonson's design, which has been carefully and deliberately constructed from numerical principles chosen in part for their symbolic significance.

Occupying signatures A4^r–A4^v in the Folio—just following the two dedicatory essays with the names of Heminges and Condell subscribed to them—Jonson's poem could also be classified as a "column" or "pillar" poem, a form which *The Arte of English Poesie* identifies as signifying "stay, support, rest, state and magnificence" (110), as printing the two halves together reveals. The examples used in *Arte* to illustrate the form are somewhat more obvious pillars than is Jonson's poem. But if we re-examine Jonson's encomium with care we will see that this poem, like the examples of the genre in *Arte*, has a very distinct capital, in this case composed of Jonson's ornately tablated title, "To the memory of my beloued, THE AUTHOR," etc.

Jonson's poem might most specifically and constructively be categorized, as John G. Demaray suggests, as a *triumph*: "Jonson, in praising the playwright and the British theatre, presents Shakespeare as a participant in a triumph" (1). The triumph, as Alastair Fowler documented in copious and telling detail (1970), is a literary genre closely tied to renaissance and medieval (not to mention ancient) ideals of mathematical order used to construct representations of complex and typically hierarchical social relationships. Demaray even helpfully suggests the triumph is "a theatrical form characterized by the surprise entry and revelatory unmasking of disguised aristocrats" (1).

The triumphalism of Jonson's encomium becomes even more interesting in view of what is now known about Jonson's reputation for complex forms of literary equivocation. As Richard Dutton emphasizes, Jonson has become one of the most widely misunderstood of all early modern writers. He suffers from "a familiarity that has bred not contempt but complacency, a feeling that he is known, weighted up, comprehended—a colorful character, perhaps, but not the most exciting of writers" (1). Far from being out of keeping with Jonson's practice in other contexts, the linguistic subtlety attributed to Jonson in our analysis, says Dutton, is a signature of his method and an expression of his abiding convictions about language:

As a satirist, Jonson is the supreme tactician, an unusually inventive strategist (Dutton 4)...behind [Jonson's work] lies an attitude to language itself, an assumption that it is a precision instrument, a divine gift, and to be respected as such by both parties in its interchange. Jonson has little patience for those who cannot or will not appreciate this. (Dutton 83)

This assessment of Jonson's fascination with negotiating the boundary between esoteric or forbidden knowledge to articulate the unspeakable without

Roger Stritmatter, Ph.D., is a Professor of Humanities and Literature at Coppin State University and a member of the Shakespeare Oxford Society since 1990. He was a founding member of the Shakespeare Fellowship in 2000. With Gary Goldstein, in 2009 he established *Brief Chronicles: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Authorship Studies*, serving as general editor from 2009 to 2016. The 2015 third edition of the *Index to Oxfordian Publications* identifies 105 articles by him between 1990 and 2014, many in orthodox academic journals including *The Shakespeare Yearbook*, *Review of English Studies*, *Notes and Queries*, and *the Scandinavian Psychoanalytic Review*. He is the author, with Lynne Kositsky, of *On the Date, Sources, and Design of Shakespeare's The Tempest* (McFarland 2013) and, with Alexander Waugh, *A New Shakespeare Allusion Book: Literary Allusions to Shakespeare, 1584-1786 from Historical Principles* (forthcoming, 2018) and has appeared in two authorship documentaries, *Last Will. & Testament* (2012) and *Nothing Truer than Truth* (2017).

suffering a penalty from offended authority, has grown in recent decades to be widely shared by Jonson scholars interested in early modern censorship and censorship theory. Jonson is a central figure in Annabel Patterson's "hermeneutics of censorship"; she describes him as one who "throughout his life...meditated" on problems of censorship, developing a "political and social theory of literature, a poetics of censorship" (57). Concurrs William Slights: "I have become convinced that the driving social force, distinctive dramatic techniques, and persistent interpretative puzzles in [Jonson's later] plays are related in one way or another to *the topic of secrecy*" (13). Jonson, in other words, was a master of inducing "astonishment, surprise, and shock" in readers obliged to "experience a deviation from the norm" and re-evaluate their own "conventionally held opinions."

Jonson's 80-line iambic pentameter "triumph" is composed of 400 feet arrayed in lines of five feet per line and neatly divided into four sections³:

- **A 16-line *exordium* (introduction).** Line 17, following this exordium, then states, "I, therefore, will begin."
- **A 48-line *narratio*.** This is composed of two exactly symmetrical 24 line segments, with the center falling between lines 40-41, and the second segment commencing "triumph my Britain." This structure is a textbook example of the role of the "privileged center" in triumphal forms (See Fowler, 23-33 for an outstanding introduction to the importance of ethnographically ubiquitous concept of the "privileged center," and further commentary, including Appendix 1, below).
- **A 16 line *peroration* (conclusion).** This commences with line 65.5, "Look how the father's face lives in his issue."

Let us consider these parts in greater detail and see how the design of Jonson's poems contributes to the significance of his utterance about "small Latin and less Greek."

The Exordium and First Narratio

Orthodox Shakespeare commentators rarely if ever attempt to explain or consider why Jonson's exordium develops at length the theme of misinterpretation, and unambiguously equates Jonson's position with someone writing under duress: "But these ways/ were not the paths I meant to take unto thy praise" (5-6). He fears that Shakespeare's work, in consequence of his own praises, will become the object—conjuring the image of a hawk with its eyes sewn shut—of "seeliest ignorance"; he will be subject to "blind affection" directed by "chance," or even become the victim of "crafty malice" that "thinks to ruin" where it "seems to raise."⁴

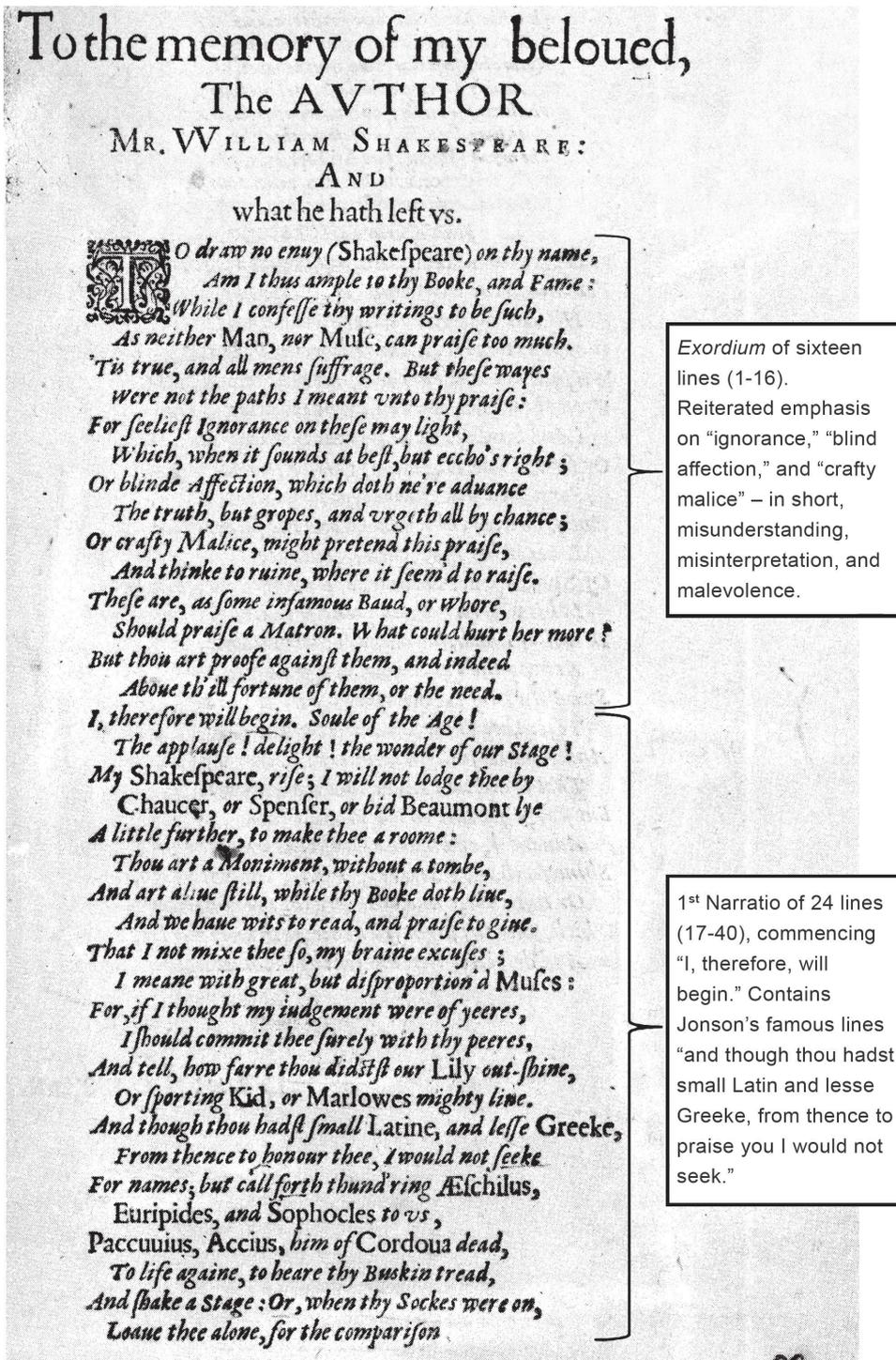


Figure 1A: Jonson's "column" poem in the First Folio with major sections marked.

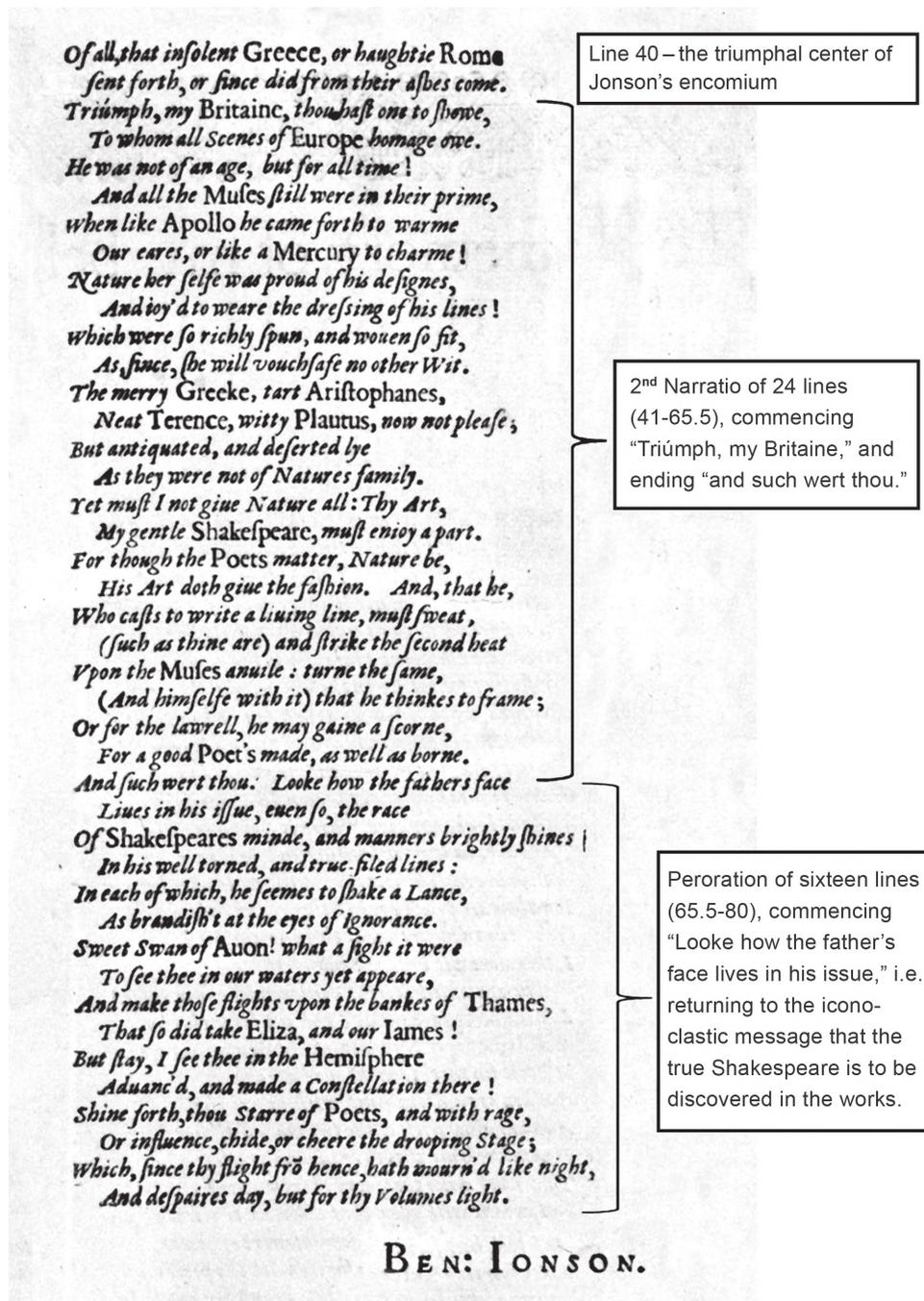


Figure 1B: The second half of Jonson's "column" poem in the First Folio with line 40 and the next major sections marked (below).

These themes of misinterpretation are reiterated for emphasis in the peroration, which alludes to "the race of Shakespeare's mind" which "brightly shines" in the bard's "Well torned and true-filed lines."

We may be tempted here to wonder about the potential ironic application of the warnings of the exordium to Jonson's own poem. If we are at risk of misunderstanding Shakespeare, what about Jonson himself? Whose "eyes of ignorance" does Jonson have in mind? What can he be implying about the risk of misunderstanding, not only Shakespeare's words, but his own? According to Richard Dutton, Jonson's works are marked by "an oblique invitation to the audience to discover in the work precisely what he is disowning" (52). Dutton's observation about Jonson's paradoxical methods of indirection is applicable to the passage about Shakespeare's "small Latin and less Greek." About halfway through the first *narratio*, comes the key phrase "and though thou hadst small Latine, and lesse Greeke" (Figure 2).

*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 Aeschilus,
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,
Looue thee alone, for the comparifon*

Figure 2: "small Latine and lesse Greeke" detail.

Although it has been acknowledged at least since C.M. Ingleby's *Century of Praise* allusion book (151), that this is in the subjunctive voice, Shakespeare scholars have been reticent to follow this admission to its logical conclusion: the statement is a mixed contrary-to-fact conditional of the kind familiar to all students of Greek and Latin (Table 1).

Table 1: Contrary to fact statements in Classical texts and in Jonson's Folio encomium.	
<p><i>Sî mê citius invênissês, liber nunc essem.</i> If you had found me sooner [but you did not], I would be free now [but since you did not, I am not]</p> <p>Or, somewhat more obliquely, Though thou hadst found me sooner [but you did not], I would be free now [but since you did not, I am not]</p>	<p>And though thou hadst small Latin and less Greek [which you do not], from thence to praise you I would not seek, for names, but call forth thundering Aeschylus....</p>

The contrary-to-fact conditional consists of two parts, the first of which—the protasis—denies a condition under which the second—the apodisis—would *be* true. Jonson is not saying that the real Shakespeare “has *small* Latine and Less Greek”—he is instead elliptically praising his proficiency in these languages. Many parallel examples from Jonson can illustrate this usage (Table 2); he frequently uses the auxiliary “had” in similar conditional constructions.

Table 2: Contrary to fact statements from Jonson.
I <i>would thou hadst</i> [but you do not] some Sugar-candied to sweeten thy Mouth (CR)
O, <i>hadst thou known</i> [but you do not] the worth of Heav'ns rich gift,/Thou wouldst have turn'd it to a truer use. (CR)
Fortune, thou hadst no Deity, if Men Had wisdom [but they do not] (Sej.)
And though all praise bringing nothing to your name, Who (herein studying conscience and not fame) are in yourself rewarded* *An Epigram to the Honored Countess of _____, <i>Epigrammes</i> .

As does Shakespeare himself (Table 3):

Table 3: Contrary to fact statements from Shakespeare.
Tis well thou art not fish; <i>if thou hadst</i> [but you are not], thou hadst been poor John.
<i>And thou hadst</i> been set i' the stocks for that [but you were not] question, thou hadst well deserved it.
Thou <i>shouldst not have been</i> old [but you are] till thou hadst been wise.

And the KJV New Testament (Table 4):

Table 4: Contrary to fact conditions from the KJV of the New Testament.
Then saide Martha vnto Iesus, Lord, <i>if thou hadst</i> bene here [but you were not], my brother had not died. (John 11:21, KJV)
Saying, <i>If thou hadst known</i> [but you didn't] even thou, at least in this thy day, the things which belong unto thy peace! but now they are hid from thine eyes. (Luke 19:41, KJV.)

Some may object that none of the cited examples use Jonson’s word “though” to introduce the protasis of the conditional. But this objection is plainly mooted by the fact that the OED (3299) prominently recognizes “though” as the equivalent of “even if” (definition II), “formerly used with a verb in the

subjunctive" or "even supposing that" in introducing subordinate clauses. It even cites *The Tempest* as an example: "he'll be hang'd yet, *though* every drop of water sweare against it" (1.1.62). Jonson's usage thus represents a modest variation on clearly established conventions of meaning and logic, well attested from contemporaneous documents. As the cited examples illustrate, the variations of surface structure used to convey the deep grammatical logic *even if x, then...* is a wide one: "If thou hadst," "and thou hadst," and "would thou hadst" all can introduce the past tense protasis of contrary to fact conditionals. The formula is not dependent on a particular surface structure, but can be represented in a variety of ways in correct English.

Closer examination of the entire logic of Jonson's *narratio* confirms the relevance of these analogues; the passage in question forms the climax of a series of negations, each serving to define the bard through by what he *is not* or *cannot be* compared to:

I will not lodge thee.... [with the English greats] (l. 19)

I will not mix thee with "great but disproportioned muses" (l. 25)

If I thought my judgment were of yeeres (I would compare thee to Lily, Kid or Marlowe) [but *it is not*, so I will not] (l. 27)

And though thou hadst Small Latin and Less Greek [but *you do not*] (l. 31)

Figure 3 allows the reader to examine the entire passage with this series of statements in context:

*My Shakespeare, rise; I will not lodge thee by
Chaucer, or Spenser, or bid Beaumont lye
A little further, to make thee a roome:
Thou art a Monument, without a tombe,
And art aliue 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 thundring Æschilus,
Euripides, and Sophocles to vs,
Paccuius, Accius, him of Cordoua dead,*

Figure 3: Jonson's Negations defining "Shakespeare" through a series of negations in the first *narratio* of his *Folio encomium*.

No one disputes, in fact, that the immediately precedent statement (“If I thought my judgment were of years”) is a contrary-to-fact; Jonson is saying, in effect, “*since my judgment is not of years (i.e. ‘does not concern establishing historical contemporaneity’), I will not classify you with your contemporaries, Lyly, Kid, and Marlowe.*” The “small Latin and less Greek” statement is built on the same syntactical and logical framework, extending and completing the thought of the previous three negations, with the result that Jonson has by the conclusion of the thought in line 40 produced the apotheosis of the author and he can begin again a new thought in line 41:

Triumph, my Britaine, thou has one to showe.

That Jonson is *not* saying what Stratfordians have claimed for over two hundred years he *is* saying (that Shakespeare had “small Latin and less Greek”) is confirmed by close attention to his diction and syntax now that we are aware of the contrary-to-fact character of the expression. Baldwin (1944) and other orthodox apologists implicitly take the word “thence” as referring to an idealized abstraction extrapolated from the previous line, as if referring to a kind of fund of classical knowledge—not “small Latin and less Greeke” but *much Latin and most Greek*, or some similar notion. This is neither satisfying syntax nor credible logic. The much more obvious and logical antecedent of the passage is the actual phrase, “with thy peeres” (ln. 32, Figure 4).

<i>For, if I thought my judgement were of yeeres,</i>	27
<i>I should commit thee surely with thy peeres,</i>	28
<i>And tell how farre thou didstst our Lily out-shine,</i>	29
<i>Or sporting Kid, or Marlowes mighty line.</i>	30
<i>And though thou hadst small Latine, and lesse Greeke,</i>	31
<i>From thence to honour thee, I would not seeke</i>	32
<i>For names; but call forth thund'ring Æschilus,</i>	33
<i>Euripides, and Sophocles to vs,</i>	34
<i>Paccuius, Accius, him of Cordoua dead,</i>	35

Figure 4: “Thence” (ln. 32) refers to “with thy peeres” (ln 28).

Any accurate and comprehensive paraphrase of the traditional reading yields the pretzel logic of Jonson predicating his comparison of Shakespeare with Aeschylus, Euripides, and Sophocles on his classical ignorance, as if to say “because you have small Latine and less Greek, I will not seek among the ancients for names to praise you, but will instead call forth thundering Aeschylus, etc.” We notice, also, the particular force of Jonson’s “thence” (“*that place*”), as contrasted to “hence” (“*this place*”). Had Jonson intended the referent to appear in the immediately adjacent line, “hence” would have been a more apt word choice.

Logically, reading “with thy peeres” as the antecedent also makes much more sense. Now Jonson is no longer contradicting himself. Instead he is

saying—more complexly but also more logically—that even if Shakespeare had “small Latin and Less Greek” [which he does not], he would still call forth the ancients, and not the Elizabethans, as his apt peers. This, it deserves notice, is the logical predicate of Jonson’s final point, established in the second half of the *narratio*, that even the ancients hold no candle to Shakespeare. He places the bard above them not *only* because of his knowledge of ancient languages, but *in addition to it*.

Triumph, My Britain...

Jonson’s encomium, in the words of Alastair Fowler, “consists in effect of a triumphal procession of authors, with overgone ancients and moderns figuring as the captives, Shakespeare as the national Triumphator” (Fowler 70). A defining feature of the genre, Fowler also notes, is a ritual emphasis on the center: “This position once carried a generally recognized iconological significance: it was the place, if not for an image sovereignty, at least for a ‘central feature’ (to use an idiom still current)” (23). Jonson’s 80-line poem, consistent with this definition, discloses a very distinctive center (Figure 5), falling between lines 40-41, with line 41 marking the hiatus with a new start, “Triumph, my Britaine, thou hast one to show.”

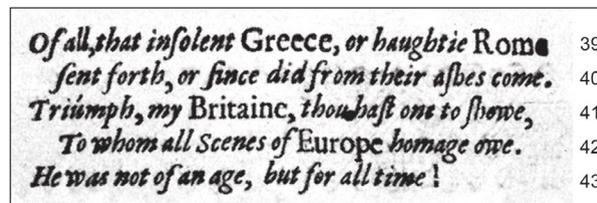


Figure 5: The ritual center of Jonson’s encomium: “Triumph my Britaine...”

This central placement of the key phrase “Triumph, my Britaine,” framed against the “ashes” of “insolent Greece” and “haughtie Rome,” and the “scenes of [contemporary] Europe”—with the bard announced as “one to show,” a “triumphator” who will transcend both antiquity and contemporary pomp and circumstance—had, in 1623, very distinct, local, and particular connotations that are lost as soon as the passage is abstracted from the surrounding context of the ongoing debate over the Spanish marriage, a contextualization originally proposed by Peter Dickson (1997) and summarized in detail in Stritmatter (2017), the first half of the present discussion. More particularly, when Jonson sets Shakespeare at the center of his own literary triumph, he can hardly fail to be thinking of this triumph as one *mirroring*, or even, given the patronage network supporting the Folio, in *competition* with Prince Charles and Buckingham’s “triumphal” procession (the members of which were leading domestic opposition to the Spanish marriage) into Madrid, which occurred on March 26, 1623—less than 7 months prior to the publication of the folio.

The Spanish Marriage Crisis And the Design of the First Folio

Published at height of the Spanish crisis, the Shakespeare First Folio printing timeline coincides, as we have seen (Stritmatter 2017), with remarkable exactitude to the dates of imprisonment of Henry de Vere, 18th Earl of Oxford, jailed in the tower for opposing James' plan to marry Prince Charles to the Spanish Infanta. According to the publishing timeframe established in his classic bibliographic study, Charlton Hinman determines that the Folio printing started in or around March/April, 1622, and we know that it was completed in approximately nineteen months, by around November 1623—de Vere being subsequently released in December.

The evidence suggests that Pembroke had been laying the groundwork for the Folio publication at least since October 1621, when the Upper Palatinate was seized by Catholic troops and Elizabeth and Fredrick took refuge in The Hague. The July death of Phillip III had accelerated plans for the Spanish match, and both Southampton and Oxford (the latter for the first time), against the backdrop of these fast-moving events, were also jailed that summer. By the summer of 1622 it was also becoming apparent that Ben Jonson, for some time a confidante of the Stuart clique, was no longer welcome at court. The coincidence in timing is difficult to ignore: on October 5 Pembroke awarded Jonson with the reversion of the post of Master of the Revels, a position Jonson had long coveted, and simultaneously is rumored to have increased Jonson's stipend to 200 pounds per annum. Meanwhile throughout the period 1620-24 Thomas Scott, Pembroke's protégé and chaplain, kept up a steady barrage of pamphlets opposing the match. Defending himself for his use of fictional techniques in his *Vox Populi*, in *Vox Regis* (1624) published not long after the Shakespeare Folio, Scott more than once makes reference to the traditional license of the theatre, insisting that, "Kings are content in plays and masques to be admonished of diverse things" (Ev).

Born in an epoch marked by intense domestic struggle and constitutional crisis foreshadowing the open violence of the mid-century—during which Kings were sometimes far from content to be admonished, even in plays and masques—the Folio, including Jonson's poem, embodies the nationalistic aspirations of the so-called 'patriot earls'—Pembroke, Montgomery, Oxford, Southampton and Derby—but also expresses England's participation in an international literary sphere that transcended local politics. If we need any reminder of how poignant this contradiction was we need look no further than then intense involvement of Folio agents Jonson, Digges, Mabbe, Blount, Pembroke and Montgomery, in preparing, facilitating, or endorsing, such Spanish works as *The Rogue* (1622) or Don Gonçalo de Cespedes' *The Unfortunate Spaniard* (1622).⁵ As much as this faction opposed the Spanish marriage as policy, they were also proponents of Spanish literature and culture.

They saw the Folio in this international context and shaped its conscious relationship to their translations of Spanish literature.

One common motif evident in both Digges' translation of *The Unfortunate Spaniard* and the Shakespeare Folio is that both works deconstruct the boundary between art and nature, or, as modern literary scholars would more likely think of it, between non-fiction and fiction. If, as James Shapiro blithely assures us, "the evidence strongly suggests that imaginative literature in general and plays in particular in Shakespeare's day were rarely if ever a vehicle for self-revelation" (268), then one must wonder how Digges, Jonson, and Mabbe failed to get Shapiro's memo on this topic. More specifically, in his introduction to the reader, Digges insists that the author Cespedes is "a Spanish gentleman, who in the time of five years of his Imprisonment, *under the borrowed name* of Gerardo, personates himself in his owne misfortunes" in his novel (A3; emphasis added). "Partly with truth," and "partly with fiction"—so insists Digges—Cespedes weaves his picaresque narrative of "the unfortunate Spaniard," who "personated" himself under a "borrowed name."

To Stratfordians it must seem like a coincidence bordering on an "imaginative conspiracy"—to use the potent phrase of Supreme Court Justice John Paul Stevens (1991)—that during the months Digges was preparing his translation of work based on the author's life experiences as "personated....under the borrowed name" of the protagonist and narrator of his own novel, he was involved with Jonson in publishing a posthumous encomium introducing "Shakespeare's" complete plays to the world. Moreover, when they did so—as we have already noticed—it was in a literary genre "characterized by the surprise entry and revelatory unmasking of disguised aristocrats" (Demaray 1).

As Peter Dickson has vigorously argued, for hundreds of years the period of the Spanish marriage crisis "drifted off into obscurity," suppressed as an embarrassing fiasco, and it was not until Thomas Cogswell's 1989 *The Blessed Revolution* that the period began to come back into focus for early modern historians. For three centuries powerful nationalist impulses assigned the history of the marriage crisis to the margins, with the enduring result that 21st century Shakespeare scholars are still reluctant to recognize the relevance of the crisis for the publication and reception of their "book."

Taking a geopolitical perspective on the Folio allows us to see not only the close interrelatedness of the books that Jonson's Folio collaborators were producing in 1622, but also to better apprehend the implications of the paratexts that make up the volume's introduction of the plays to the world. It also allows us to perceive how the folio's elements are constructed to make the volume "speak" to its publication circumstances, as in Jonson's identifying of his encomium with a "triumph" at a moment when all of Europe was focused on the immense triumphs, at which Prince Charles was being fêted at Madrid and throughout Spain.

Acknowledging the Spanish marriage crisis as part of the folio's context also generates new insights into the arrangement of the plays in the Folio. For hundreds of years of European culture, long before publication of the folio, the emblem of the shipwreck had become a metaphor for political disaster. Thus we see that England's deepening sense of political crisis, leading up to the Folio publication during what Michael Drayton called the "evil years" of 1621-23, when catastrophe seemed imminent to many—may be reflected in the placement of the opening scenes of *The Tempest*, the first play of the folio. Even more direct and eloquent testimony to the explanatory force of the Spanish marriage context of the volume is the case of *Cymbeline*, the last play in the Folio, a fact long considered a glaring anomaly of FF bibliography, as the play is not generally classified as a "History" but is placed as the concluding play in the final section of "History" plays in the folio. An early Arden editor conjectured that its placement may have been "the result of late receipt of the 'copy' in the printing house" (Nosworthy xiii). W.W. Greg supposed that it may have been "through a misunderstanding that Jaggard placed it at the end of the volume instead of the section [containing the comedies]" (8, n. 8).

In fact, the placement eloquently proclaims the close association in the minds of the volume's designers, between the Shakespearean plays and the marriage crisis. With *Cymbeline* slipped into emphatic final place as the last of the volume's plays, as has recently been argued by several scholars (see, e.g. Stritmatter 1998), the volume itself ends with a declaration of "published peace" that perfectly expresses the nationalist eirenism of the Pembroke faction, whose motto was, "peace with English honor":

Laud we the gods;
 And let our crooked smokes climb to their nostrils
 From our blest altars. Publish we this peace
 To all our subjects. Set we forward: let
 A Roman and a British ensign wave
 Friendly together: so through Lud's-town march:
 And in the temple of great Jupiter
 Our peace we'll ratify; seal it with feasts.
 Set on there! Never was a war did cease,
 Ere bloody hands were wash'd, with such a peace.

Conclusion

As we have seen, contrary to many decades of well-fortified belief, Ben Jonson does not say in the First Folio that "Shakespeare" had "small Latin and less Greeke." Instead he concedes that the Bard has significant Latin and Greek, but says that this is not the only or the most important reason for

his literary greatness. However satisfying this conclusion, in the sense that it follows the grammar and logic of Jonson's utterance, it cannot be denied that it raises as many new questions as it resolves old ones. Why would Ben Jonson, if he really considered the bard to be superlatively trained in the classics, express this conviction in such an oblique and easily misconstrued fashion? Why has it been so difficult for so long to set the record straight?

The answers to such questions may in part lie in the study of how Shakespeare the author has interacted ideologically with core legitimating principles of colonialist or post-colonialist ideologies, according to Michael Dudley, who suggests that "totalizing and essentialist rhetoric concerning the 'natural genius' of both Shakespeare and 'the West' (and the Author's singular position within it) have proven an impediment to advancing acceptance of—let alone solution to—the authorship question. By interrogating the centrality of Shakespeare to western identity, we can begin to chart a more reflexive Shakespeare scholarship" (13).

Certainly, the misinterpretation of Jonson's poem has long supported the idea of the bard as a *sui generis* author, the embodiment of a pure form of *essentially* English genius, "warbling his wood notes wild," as Milton puts it in "P'Allegro." As we have seen, from the very start the Folio, while slyly alluding to the "triumphal" events recently celebrated at Madrid, mystifies its own moment of historical production. Jonson's encomium, in other words, seeks to universalize the bard as one "not of an age, but for all time!" and concludes by apotheosizing him, not as a man, but as the constellation of Cygnus.

Jonson's high-flying, mythopoeic rhetoric about Shakespeare in the Folio forms a striking and apparently deliberate contrast to the homely, personable tone he assumes when writing of Shakespeare's Warwickshire colleague Michael Drayton only six years after the folio, which begins:

It hath been questioned, Michael, if I bee
A Friend at all; or, if at all, to thee....

And concludes:

And till I worthy am to wish I were,
I call the world, that enuies mee, to see,
If I can be a Friend, and Friend to thee.
(1-2, 92-94)

Like many other patterns of fact surrounding "Shakespeare," the contrast between the cozy intimacy of Jonson's words to Drayton and the abstract,

mythologizing logic of his Folio encomium reinforces rational doubts about authorship. Anticipating the pregnant remarks of John Keats that “Shakespeare lived a life of allegory” and “his works are comments on it,” Jonson attests in his own words in his own way, what that the bard “personates himself” in his own plays. To discover the “real” Shakespeare, the discerning reader should look not on the purposive enigmas of the Folio paratexts, but to the plays themselves. For hundreds of years, Jonson’s advice has been neglected or ignored; instead the better part of posterity has persisted in quoting him out of context to suborn his testimony. As Jonson warned, significantly through the misconstruction of his own words, the bard has been transformed into a national idol and a tourist trap.

The misinterpretation of Jonson’s Folio poem has over the centuries become a critical linchpin in the construction of this commercial mythopoeia. As early as 1712, a mere three years after Nicholas Rowe’s first edited edition of the plays, and half a century before David Garrick would establish the idea of Shakespeare as a tourist attraction through the Stratford Jubilee, John Dennis connects the strands of our inquiry with his patriotic assertion of the co-dependency of the myth of the unschooled bard and the concept of English national identity as it was expanding under emerging colonialist and mercantile influence: “He who allows Shakespeare had learning, and a learning with the ancients, ought to be looked upon as a detractor from the glory of Great Britain” (1712). The passage is quoted approvingly by Dr. Richard Farmer, in his 1776 *Essay on the Learning of Shakespeare*, perhaps the most sadly influential work ever written on the topic, as an illustration of “great patriotic vehemence.” Such nationalist faith in the pureness of Shakespeare’s English genius has had a long half-life in Shakespeare studies. As Collins notes, summarizing the tradition in which Dennis forms a critical linchpin:

One of the strongest arguments advanced by the party in favour of the independent recognition of our own literature was the supposed case of Shakespeare. Why, it was asked, should the study of English literature be associated with the study of languages and literatures of which the greatest of English writers was all but wholly ignorant, and to which he owed nothing immediately?... Shakespeare has been, for nearly three hundred years, the stock example of what can be achieved by a poet and a philosopher who had no pretension to classical scholarship, and who knew nothing, except what he picked up in conversation or through versions of his own tongue, of classical writers.
(Collins 1904, 2)

These misplaced pieties should not deter the student motivated by an authentic desire for encounter with the past in all its rich complexity. In Jonson’s own

words from his posthumously-published *Discoveries*, many—even, sometimes, scholars,

Labour onely to ostentation; and are ever more busie about the
colours, and the surface of a work, then in *the matter*, and *foundation*:
For that is hid, the other is seen.
(emphasis supplied)

In focusing on both the *matter* and the *foundation* of the 1623 folio, as opposed to the surface and the colors, it is hoped that this paper has revealed some significant but otherwise covert dimensions of the Shakespeare problem. Jonson's Droeshout epigram, printed on the first preliminary leaf of the volume—in a passage that no less an orthodox authority than Leah Marcus tells us is designed to “set readers off on a treasure hunt for the author” (Marcus 19)—advises, “look not on his picture but his book”. In his 80-line encomium a few pages later, Jonson, as if confirming Demaray's observation that the triumph is “a theatrical form characterized by the surprise entry and revelatory unmasking of disguised aristocrats,” reiterates the message that the real author will be found not in the externalities of the Stratfordian biography, in “what he hath left us” in the Folio, as well as in the memories of those who live after him: “Look how the father's face/ lives in his issue, even so, the race/of Shakespeare's mind, and manners brightly shines/in his well-t[ur]ned and true-filed lines” (78-80).

Certainly, these latter words take on new immediacy and import when we recognize that the two dedicatees of the volume included Edward de Vere's son-in-law, the Earl of Montgomery, and his brother, William, Earl of Pembroke, but beyond this they return us to Shakespeare's “well torned and true-filed lines/In each of which he seems to shake a Lance,/as brandish't at the eyes of Ignorance.” In the larger sense, however, Jonson is shaking his own spear at the scholarly tradition that has paid lip service to a superficial reading of the prefatory materials of the First Folio while systematically avoiding both the larger circumstances of the Folio's production and the post-Stratfordian logic of Jonson's mock encomium.

Endnotes

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1. See Jasper Mayne in *Jonsonus Virbius*, who states that while alive Jonson was the “prince of numbers,” in death he “mightst in *Numbers* lie” (29), punning of course on the proverbial “honest Ben” topos by suggesting that Jonson’s use of “numbers” enabled his intellectual duplicity.
2. I am indebted to an anonymous reviewer for pointing out that, according to Early Modern English Books Online (EEBO), Francis Mason’s 1613 *On the Consecration of Bishops* was the first instance in English print of the phrase “small Latin.”
3. In this it varies, for example, from Jonson’s “To the Reader” epigram, which is written in iambic tetrameter verses, with ten lines totaling forty feet.
4. Although sometimes mistranslated as “silliest”, *Seeliest* is a Jonsonian coinage referring to the practice of sewing shut the eyes of hawks to keep them from being distracted or frightened before they are set to fly on the hunt (Peterson 153). In this context it belongs to a series of words and images that convey ethical blindness.
5. As noted in Part 1 of this article in *The Oxfordian* (2017), Digges’s translation of de Céspedes novel, *Varia fortuna de soldado Píndaro*, appearing under the title of *Gerardo, The Unfortunate Spaniard* is pointedly dedicated to Pembroke and Montgomery; Mabbe’s *The Rogue or the Life of Guzman de Alfarache* contains dedicatory verses “On the Author, Worke, and Translator” of the book by Ben Jonson (Herford & Simpson VIII: 389). Both books, capitalizing on the Spanish vogue of the period, were published by Foliosyndicate member Edward Blount in 1622.

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