

Shakespeare's Sonnets: The Riddle of Dedication

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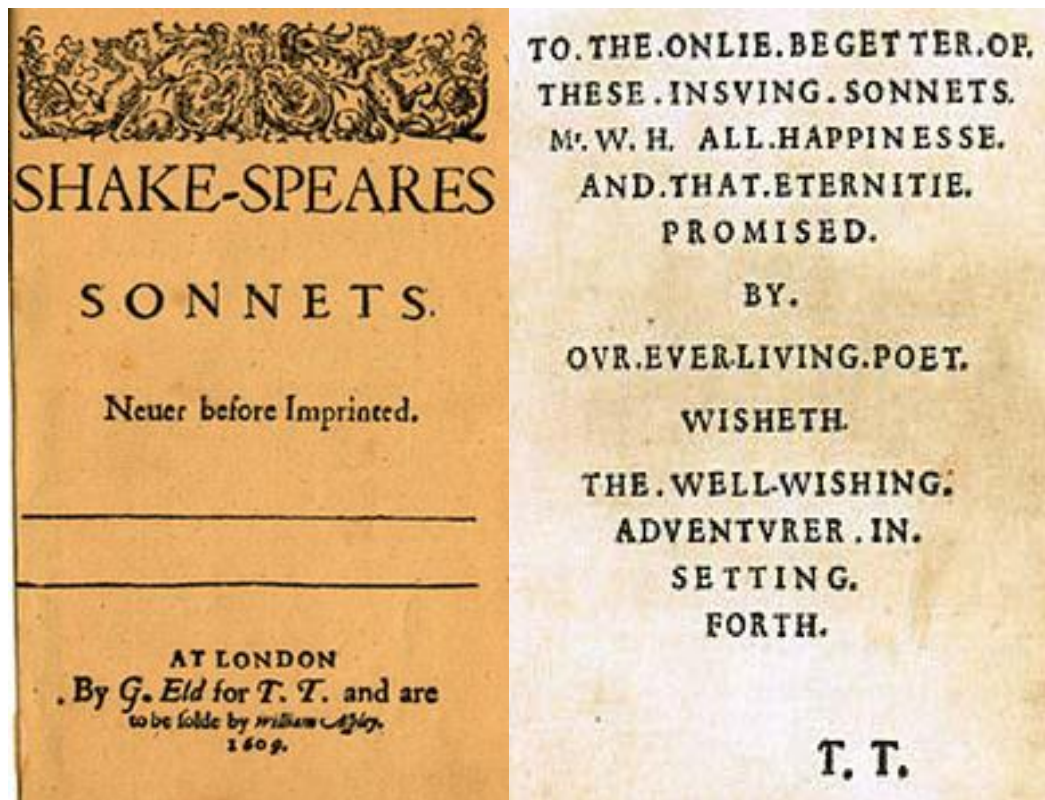
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Exactly four hundred years ago, in 1609, the first edition of William Shakespeare's Sonnets was published - one of the most mysterious books in the history of literature. The list of her many riddles includes an unusual Dedication

Points, points, points

Thirteen copies of this 80-page collection of poetry in paperback format have survived to this day. In it, 154 sonnets are printed right next to each other, and after them a large poem «A Lover Complaint». The book is distinguished by poor printing (worn out letters), as well as a huge number of errors and misprints. However, it is opened by its completed title page and Dedication.

There is an ornament above the heading, under which there is a heading in large print "Shakespeare's Sonnets". Then there is the line "Never before Imprinted", and below is the output indicating that the printer, G. Eld, worked on the book for the publisher behind the initials T.T.; then information about the place of sale of the book; London, 1609.



The next sheet is devoted to Dedication. It is very strange in form: after each word there is a period, there are no other punctuation marks. The lack of proper punctuation makes it difficult to understand, and some words and expressions by themselves cannot be interpreted unambiguously.

Thus, *begetter* can mean "mastermind" (of poetry), «giver» (manuscript for the publisher), and even «creator» (author); *onlie* - "unique" (in number) or "exceptional", "wonderful" (in the sense of merits). The phrase *in setting forth* can be interpreted as "flaunting them" or "publishing them", but also "being at the point of departure" (going let's hit the road).

As you can see, it is a rather clumsy phrase (with a reverse word order uncharacteristic for English -- the subject at the end), and all attempts to make it clear and smooth have so far failed.

Who is "Mr W.H." to whom the message is addressed (Mr is either mister, that is, "lord", or master, which means "son of a nobleman")? The main contenders, by all accounts, are two nobles -- William Herbert, Earl of Pembroke and Henry Wriothlesley, Earl of Southampton. The initials of the first are W.H., and the second is H.W.

What can one say about T.T., who signed the appeal? We have already met him on the title page. It is known that on May 20, 1609, `Shakespeare's Sonnets` were registered with the Printers Company, by the publisher Thomas Thorpe (1569-1635). He had a good reputation, on account of his tastefully designed collections of the best English poets of the time, as well as translations of Latin and ancient Greek authors. Some of them contained graceful publisher dedication. (In that epoch, the author of the book was considered both the one who wrote it and the one who materially embodied it.

Therefore, not only writers, but also publishers often devoted their brainchildren to patrons and mecenatas.)

The question arises: how could the rootless Thorpe turn to the count (both of these persons were part of the upper stratum of the English aristocracy) with a completely inappropriate "mister" or "master"? However, some textual experts are not embarrassed by this: the addressee's name is hidden, and such an address could serve as another means of disguise.

The dedication is still cryptic. To unravel it, you need to recreate the situation in which it was born, to penetrate into the intention of its creator. And this cannot be done without solving a more general problem.

Looking for an author

Shakespearean studies are surprising in that the most important, initial question is actively debated: who exactly was the author of «Romeo and Juliet», «Hamlet» and dozens of other plays, as well as `Sonnets` -- all the texts known as the works of William Shakespeare?

Starting from the end of the 18th century, opinions began to sound louder and more insistently that it could not have been the actor and businessman, who was born in 1564 in Stratford-upon-Avon and who died there in 1616 (his last name was Shaxpere; in the current discussions he is called Shaxper, and the true author -- whoever he is -- is called Shakespeare). So, the crux of the debate is whether Shaxper from Stratford was Shakespeare, and if not, who?

Some of the information obtained about the man from Stratford is shocking: his parents, wife and even children were illiterate, and it is unclear if he even attended primary school. Not a single line was found written by Shaxper's hand, and the will he left showed the squalor of his inner world.

All this came into blatant contradiction with the idea of the Bard, which is given by his works. He was well versed in jurisprudence, diplomacy and court etiquette, naval and military affairs, medicine, and music. He knew many languages, possessed the richest vocabulary. His noble spirit showed a truly worldwide responsiveness, F.M. Dostoevsky called Shakespeare a prophet sent by God to tell us the truth about the human soul.

Shakespeare's identification with Shaxper led to a logical dead end, so other candidates for the role of author began to be nominated -- first the philosopher and lawyer Francis Bacon (1561-1626), then other aristocrats and writers of that time. Now there are dozens of people on the list, but, of course, there are only a few serious contenders.

From New York to Moscow

Among them has long been Roger Manners, 5th Earl of Rutland. The first to point to him in 1893 was the New York lawyer G. Zeigler. In 1912, the Belgian historian S.

Demblon published a large book in which he gave many arguments in favor of Rutland. In 1924, F. Shipulinsky's treatise "Shakespeare -- Rutland" was published in Moscow.

In Russia this version was approved by the People's Commissar of Education A.V. Lunacharsky, as well as some Marxist literary scholars. However, in the 30s, all doubts about the authorship of Shaxper -- a man of the people -- were declared ideologically vicious in the Land of Soviets, and this question was not raised for half a century.

But at the end of the millennium, the book "The Game about William Shakespeare, or the Mystery of the Great Phoenix" [1] by the scientific secretary of the Shakespeare Commission at the Academy of Sciences Ilya Mendeleovich Gililov was published. He made a number of remarkable discoveries and breathed new life into the hypothesis of Rutland's authorship (with the possible participation of his wife Elizabeth, also a poet, and their inner circle). The book aroused great interest (many dozens of reviews), there have already been several reprints, its English translation has already been published (*The Shakespeare Game: The Mystery of the Great Phoenix*. Algora Publishing, 2003) Having completed his scientific feat, I.M. Gililov left the mortal world in 2007.

And in 2008, the voluminous monograph "Justification of Shakespeare" [2] by philologist and translator, professor of Moscow State Linguistic University Marina Dmitrievna Litvinova saw the light. She develops her concept, expanding and complementing Gililov's approach: there were two people behind Shakespeare -- Francis Bacon and the Earl of Rutland, a thinker and poet, who took the pseudonym "Shakespeare", that is, "Stunning with a spear" (it refers to the ancient Greek goddess of wisdom Athena, which was called Pallada, in Greek -- "stunning with a spear").

Litvinova, like Gililov, assigns the leading role to Rutland. After all, Bacon did not possess poetic talent, and the true strength of the Bard, according to the general opinion, lay in metaphor and sound writing. As Vladimir Nabokov said, "Shakespeare's linguistic fabric is the highest of all that has been created in world poetry; in comparison with her, his achievements in drama recede far into the background." Shakespeare often used old plots, remade plays by other authors, but it was his genius who turned them into immortal creations.

Under the tutelage of a philosopher

Bacon published numerous works under his own name, his biography is well studied. And Rutland did not reveal himself and was known only in a narrow circle.

He was born on October 6, 1576, from the age of 11 he studied at Cambridge, in 1588 he lost his father and received the status of "child of the state". The care of his upbringing was entrusted to the 28-year-old Bacon, so his influence on Roger's mental development can hardly be overestimated.

In 1595, Rutland went to the continent to expand knowledge; traveled to several countries and was enrolled in the University of Padua (where Galileo Galilei taught then). Two years later, he returned to his homeland and took part in military campaigns led by the Queen's favorite, the brilliant Earl of Essex. And in 1599, Roger married 15-year-old Elizabeth, daughter of the famous poet Philip Sidney, who died in the war.

At the turn of the century, Rutland's fate took a sharp turn. In early 1601, Essex led an ill-prepared, "operetta" rebellion by a group of nobles. It also included Rutland, who could not help but support his idol and relative (his wife's stepfather). Their performance was immediately suppressed, Essex and his closest associates were executed, the other conspirators were severely punished. Rutland was first imprisoned in the Tower, then exiled to a distant castle, imposed on him a large fine. This catastrophe caused him a deep mental crisis (they feared for his life), which radically influenced his further work.

Another drama unfolded in his family life. The marriage remained platonic, and everyone knew that. The spouses had disagreements, they did not live together for a long time, and in 1610 they parted completely. Their relationship was overshadowed by her husband's jealousy, and poets John Donne and Ben Jonson were involved in their private lives. Roger's health deteriorated, then a tragic ending comes: he dies on June 26, 1612 at the age of 35, and almost immediately Elizabeth voluntarily dies.

In Pluto's helmet

The poets of England mourned the departure of the couple in a collection of poems dedicated to them, but the names of the deceased spouses were not named. Moreover, the publication was conspiratorial: it had a false release date and other attributes that were confusing. However, Gililov managed to unravel this tangle, which became the starting point for his further searches.

Rutland worked incognito. Some powerful forces closely followed the preservation of secrets, purposefully creating a myth about the authorship of the man from Stratford, who became -- for centuries! -- a living mask of a true author. But why was it necessary?

The answer must be sought in the peculiarities of the era and specific people. It was the Renaissance -- the return of ancient wisdom, liberation from medieval dogmas; but, also religious wars, witch hunts and dissidents (in 1600, Giordano Bruno was burned in Rome). In such an atmosphere, many authors preferred to remain anonymous and make the texts allegorical. Bacon wrote that great truths should remain hidden, and he was especially concerned with ciphers.

Bacon's main goal was to reorganize the state on a scientific basis, for which he needed to take a high post in it. An open fascination with literature would interfere with his career, and he talked about the secret Order of the Helmet (Pallas Athena was usually depicted in a helmet and, according to legends, this is Pluto's Magic Helmet, making everyone who wore it invisible). His words: *"Be one person when you are dealing with nature, and another when you are dealing with people. Anyone who has the highest understanding puts on a mask when communicating with them ..."*

That is, according to Bacon's plan, his and Rutland's "Stunning spear" should be hidden by a mask. The eccentric and melancholic Roger must have liked this game. And William Shaxper was initially involved in it, apparently, simply because of the similarity of his last name with the pseudonym "Shakespeare" and his connection with the theater. Then his alleged authorship was elevated to a principle that was strictly followed.

Walking across three seas

In 1611, a large, well-published volume appeared entitled «Coryats Crudities», written by Thomas Coryat of Odcombe, “*the prince of poets, greatest pedestrian in the world*”. Coryat is the real face, jester of Crown Prince Henry. The book describes the Odkombian's journey through Europe, and the first 120 pages were occupied by poetic "panegyrics" (a mixture of praise and ridicule) addressed to him by 56 authors, among whom were the most prominent people of the kingdom.

Gililov also revealed this literary hoax: Rutland was hiding behind the mask of Coryat, he was not averse to laughing at others and at himself. The entire edition is a grandiose Rabelaisian farce, a feast of satire and humor.

As stated in the preface, Coryat left London in May 1608, and in October of that year he returned, visiting 45 cities and covering, mostly on foot, a journey of almost two thousand miles. But Rutland did not leave England that year; his legs hurt, at times he moved around the house in a wheelchair. He used his impressions of his stay on the continent in the 90s, as well as the news that friends sent him in letters. The book contains a lot of valuable factual information about the then Europe, especially about Venice. (The current encyclopedias interpret his «Crudities» as an account of the real adventures of Thomas Coryat. He is described as Tour Heyerdahl of the Shakespearean era.)

Two keys to the cipher

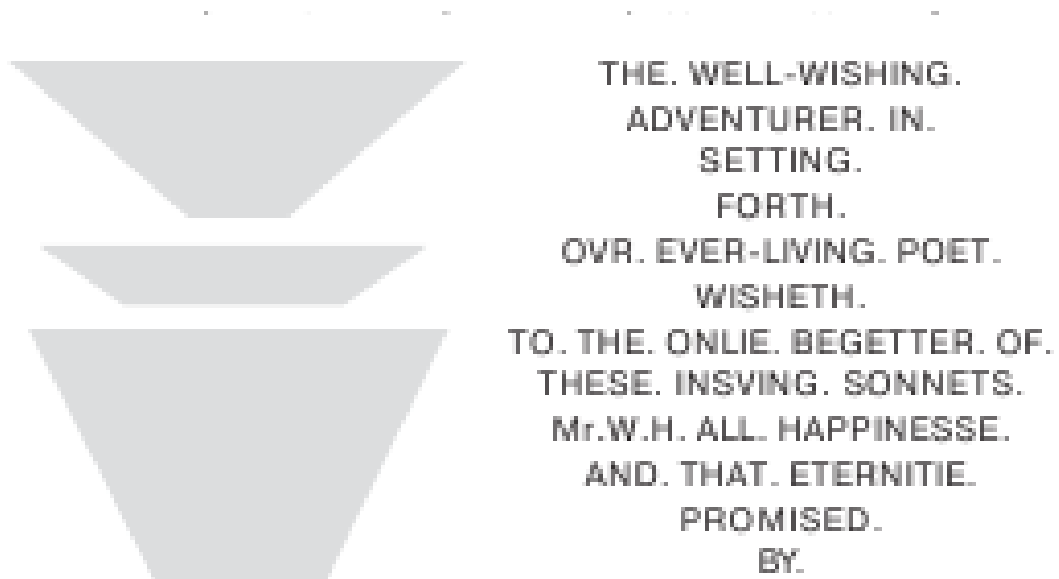
Let's go back to our original problem, the «Sonnets» Dedication. Their English commentator, Catherine Duncan-Jones, noted that this is how the ancient Romans wrote on their gravestones -- in capital letters and with a period after each word. And Marina D. Litvinova noticed that Rutland knew this: Coryat in his opus admitted that he copied many such epitaphs, for which he was even nicknamed "Pedestrian -- Grave Stone".

This means that the connection between the "Sonnets" and «Crudities» has already been revealed, and it has shed light on the form of Dedication. But won't it help you understand its content? After all, the "Sonnets" were being prepared for printing just when the work on the adventures of Coryat was in full swing, they were in the center of attention of the entire poetic community. And this fact could be reflected in the Initiation -- a secret message intended only for their own. Therefore, the first key will be considered the connection with Coryat.

But there seems to be a second clue. It is known that the title pages of books in the Renaissance were often used to encrypt important messages -- drawings and text on them made up a real puzzle, which only a select few were able to solve. Probably, the sheet with Dedication could serve the same purpose.

The text of interest to us (it is shown above) is organized geometrically -- it is divided into blocks in the form of trapezoids tapering to the bottom (as in visual poetry, where the verse forms a certain figure), and under them there is a separate signature T.T. Some information can be encoded in this graphical form. Let's assume that each trapezoid is an integral piece of text, but the blocks need to be rearranged somehow

(there are only three of them, so the number of options is small). Let's try to arrange the trapezoids in the reverse order. Then we get:



T.T.

What have we achieved? First, the phrase seemed to become more natural (direct word order). Secondly, its beginning ("adventurer, getting ready for the journey") points to Coryat, and this is understandable to the entire poetic circle. Thirdly, the Dedication now comes not from the publisher, but from the author of the sonnets, that is, Rutland, and only eternity (or immortality) was promised by Thorpe.

Speaking about the addressee of the Dedication, we noted that the person with the initials W.H. is either the Earl of Southampton or the Earl of Pembroke. In his youth, Rutland was inseparable from Southampton (they were fond of theater together) and dedicated two of his early poems to him. But here he, apparently, turns to Pembroke: by publishing sonnets, Rutland, as it were, summed up his family life, and Pembroke, Roger's friend and Elizabeth's cousin, was the initiator of their marriage. He can be considered "the only instigator of sonnets", because one of their main themes is the relationship between spouses.

Litvinova writes that Dedication, both in form and in vocabulary, resembles an epitaph, and it gives the `Sonnets` something ominous. Indeed, Rutland was entering the final period of his short life and, apparently, was clearly aware of this. He was preparing to "hit the road."

Conclusion

The sonnets seem to speak of the Blond or Fair man and the Swarthy Lady, of the rival poet, but who are they? Were all the sonnets written by one person, or are there more authors? Both Shakespearean scholars and ordinary readers have been puzzling over these riddles for centuries. Now the picture began to clear up; thus, Litvinova has already established that the rival poet is John Donne. There is a hope that other

questions will be gradually removed, and not only about the «Sonnets», but also the entire Shakespearean legacy.

Finally, it became possible to reconcile the artist's biography and work. All the vicissitudes of public and private life are reflected in one way or another in his writings, which now require reading from a new angle. Boris Pasternak noted that "*Shakespeare left a deeper personal imprint on his writings than anyone before or after him.*" On the other hand, through what is written, one can penetrate into many circumstances of the author's life.

One can ask: do not such investigations violate the author's will to remain unknown forever? No, this is how everything was intended: he has hidden himself, but not completely, leaving many clues that should allow future generations to recognize him. For example, in different works, to the point and not to the point, the generic name of Count Rutland "Manners" is found -- not as "manners", "morals", but as a proper name (this is described in detail by Gililov).

We live in a momentous time: humanity is finding Shakespeare.