

The Name 'William Shakespeare'



The original use, meaning and various spellings of Shakespeare's name.

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The name of "William Shakespeare" was first used in print in 1593, not on a title page but on the dedication page of the Shakespeare poem *Venus and Adonis*. The dedication, headed by an 'AA' headpiece, is addressed "To the Right Honorable Henrie VVriothsley, Earle of Southampton, and Baron of Titchfield," and ends with "Your Honors in all dutie, William Shakespeare". The poem had been entered into the Stationers' Register just over one month earlier, on 18 April 1593, and was published and printed in a quarto edition by Richard Field. It was republished in 1594 by Field in a second quarto edition, after which Field transferred his copyright to John Harrison ("the Elder").

That same year (1594) Harrison published the second Shakespeare poem, *The Rape of Lucrece*, also with the name of "William Shakespeare" on the dedication page. Similar to but not quite the same as the *Venus and Adonis* dedication, the *Lucrece* dedication is "To the Right Honovrable, Henry VVriothsley, Earle of Southampton, and Baron of Titchfield," and ends with "Your Lordships in all duety. William Shakespeare", and does not carry a headpiece. The Shakespeare name was not used on any plays, however, until 1598.

In 1594 the first mention of the author in 'non-Shakespeare' literature occurred, and this was in a very curious work *Willobie his Avis*, attributed to a mysterious author of whom nothing is known, in which are the lines:-

Yet Tarquyne pluckt his glistering grape,
And Shake-speare, paints poore Lucrece rape.

This was also the first time that the name of the author Shakespeare was spelt with a hyphen included, as "Shake-speare".

The use of the hyphen in names at that time was not common and, when it was used, it was usually to emphasise a descriptive cognomen or pseudonym: e.g. 'Shake-speare' refers to someone who shakes a spear—a spearshaker. The famous spiritual, mythological and legendary archetypes bearing this moniker are Pallas Athena, Apollo, the Archangel Michael (Apollo's equivalent), St George (a human equivalent of Apollo/Michael), and the Gemini. They are all known as Spearshakers, shaking their spears of light (signifying wisdom) at the dragon of ignorance and vice, piercing the darkness with light: hence a good reason for the contrived legend that Shakespeare was both born and died on St George's Day.

Ben Jonson, who clearly knew what the Shakespeare name meant and to what it referred, says in his eulogy to Shakespeare in the Shakespeare Folio: "he seems to shake a lance, as brandish't at the eyes of ignorance." In the symbolism of myth, the ignorant mind or soul is represented by a dragon with either steely cold or fiery eyes, or just by the eyes, which act as a synonym for the subtle dragon or mind. In the same eulogy, Ben Jonson likens Shakespeare to Apollo, whilst Shakespeare's Muse was known to be Pallas Athena, Apollo's Parnassian partner.¹

William Camden, the King-of-Arms and therefore an authority on names, refers to "Shakespeare" in this respect in his *Remaines* (1614),² where, in a long chapter on "Surnames", occurs the following paragraph:-

"Some (are derived) from that which they commonly carryed, as Palmer, that is, Pilgrim, for that they carried Palms when they returned from Hierusalem: Longsword, Broad-speare, Fortescu, that is, Strong-shield, and in some such respect, Breake-speare, Shake-speare; Shotholt, Wagstaffe, Bagot, in the old Norman, the same with Scipio, that is a stay or walking staffe with the Latines, which became a surname, for that Cornelius served as a stay to his blind father..."

The family name of the Stratford man, William Shakspeare, was never spelt with a hyphen in it, but had at least nine variations of spelling: ranging from Shagspere through Shakspeare to Shakespeare.³ Both "Shakspeare" and "Shakespeare" were used in the Grant for the family Coat of Arms, which depicts "a Speare of the first Steeled Argent".⁴

Camden's "Surnames" chapter carries an 'AA' headpiece, printed upside-down so as to catch our attention and make us take double-note, and begins with an account of how Romulus, first king of Rome, was the first to take a surname, which was "the Sabine name of Quirinus, because he used to carry a speare, which the Sabines called Quiris." The inference of all this would therefore seem to be that the name "Shake-speare" not only refers to a Spearshaker but also to a Spearshaker who is the founder of something monumental and society-changing. This Roman legendary history links us directly to the Shakespeare poem, *The Rape of Lucrece*, which, together with its twin poem, *Venus and Adonis*, announced "Shakespeare" the poet to the world for the first time and founded a Shakespearean 'kingdom', now grown to a worldwide 'empire'. *The Rape of Lucrece* concerns the events that led directly to the end of the tyrannical rule by the Etruscan Tarquins and the beginning of the Roman Republic,⁵ in which the best of what was established originally was restored but in a new and more democratic way, without autocratic kings: that is to say, an 'Instauration' took place.⁶ Amongst other things, this gives a profound insight into the politics of the author Shakespeare.

Also not to be missed is the linking together by Camden of the names "Breake-speare" and "Shake-speare", like twins, and the way they are set apart from the other names in the text. Nicholas Breakspeare is the name of the only Englishman to have occupied the papal throne (as Pope Adrian IV), and he came from St Albans, Hertfordshire.

As for the name 'William', it is derived from the German *Wil-helm*, meaning 'strong helmet' or 'helmet of strength'. In Cabala, Strength (Hebrew: *Geburah*), symbolised by Mars, is equivalent to Judgement, Perception, Justice, Righteousness and Virtue, and associated with Protection. In Freemasonry it is the name of the left-hand pillar, *Boaz*, which "supports" the wisdom. Pallas Athena, the Tenth Muse and patroness of Philosophy, is noted not only for her own golden helmet but also for giving helmets to her philosophical heroes, which have the ability to convey invisibility on the wearer. As Francis Bacon explained: "The helmet of Pluto, which maketh the politic man go invisible, is secrecy in the counsel, and celerity in the execution."⁷ Such were the "Knights of the Helmet" in the Gray's Inn revels of 1595, wherein Shakespeare's *Comedy of Errors* was enacted together with the entertainment called *The Honourable Order of the Knights of the Helmet*, the speeches of which were penned by Francis Bacon. Such were the Rosicrucians, "the Invisible Brethren".

The poet John Marston and writer Joseph Hall, in a two-year exchange of satires in 1597-8, pointed to Francis Bacon as being the author of the Shakespeare poems, *Venus and Adonis* and *The Rape of Lucrece*, and as using the name of another living person, a "swain", to mask his authorship. Moreover, they linked the author of the poems with one or two of the Shakespeare plays that had by then been performed (but not published under the Shakespeare name). Bacon was nicknamed "Apollo" in his lifetime and tributes to him claim him to have been the greatest of all the poets, and one who renovated Philosophy by means of Comedies and Tragedies. Moreover, Thomas Randolph in his elegy to Bacon likens Bacon to Quirinus, recalling what Camden said about Romulus (see above), when he says: "he [Bacon] taught the Pegasean arts to grow, as grew the spear of Quirinus swiftly into a laurel tree."⁸

The first play to have the Shakespeare name attached to it was one of three plays: *Richard II*, when it was republished in 1598 (2nd quarto), or *Richard III*, when it was republished in 1598 (2nd quarto), or *Love's Labor's Lost*, when it was first published in 1598 (1st quarto). It is not certain which of these three plays was published first. On the title page of the second quartos of *Richard II* and *Richard III* the name is spelt "William Shake-speare", whilst on the title page of the first quarto of *Love's Labour's lost* the name is spelt "W. Shakespeare".

That same year, Francis Meres identified a further nine plays as being by Shakespeare. In his *Palladis Tamia: Wits Treasury*, he lists twelve plays (six "Comedies" and six "Tragedies") as being by "Shakespeare", as also the two poems *Venus and Adonis* and *Lucrece*. He also mentions Shakespeare's *Sonnets*, which presumably means that either some or all of them were circulating in manuscript at that time, a good ten years before they were published in 1609 under the title *Shake-speares Sonnets*.

As the Greeke tongue is made famous and eloquent by Homer, Hesiod, Euripedes, Æschylus, Sophocles, Pindarus, Phocylides, and Aristophanes; and the Latine tongue by Virgill, Ouid, Horace, Silius Italicus, Lucanus, Lucretius, Ausonius, and Claudianus: so the English tongue is mightily enriched and gorgeously inuested in rare ornaments and resplendent abiliments by Sir Philip Sydney, Spencer, Daniel, Drayton, Warner, Shakespeare, Marlow, and Chapman...

As the soule of Euphorbus was thought to liue in Pythagoras: so the sweete wittie soule of Ouid liues in mellifluous and hony-tongued Shakespeare, witnes his *Venus and Adonis*, his *Lucrece*, his sugred *Sonnets* among his priuate friends, &c.

As Plautus and Seneca are accounted the best for Comedy and Tragedy among the Latines: so Shakespeare among the English is the most excellent in both kinds for the stage. For Comedy, witnes his *Gentlemen of Verona*, his *Errors*, his *Loue Labors Lost*, his *Loue Labours Wonne*, his *Midsummers Night Dreame*, and his *Merchant of Venice*; For Tragedy, his *Richard the 2*, *Richard the 3*, *Henry the 4*, *King Iohn*, *Titus Andronicus*, and his *Romeo and Iuliet*.

Of the 36 plays printed in the 1623 Shakespeare First Folio, 18 were published before 1623. With the exception of one publication, the first printing of *Henry VI Part 3* in Octavo, these plays were all printed in quarto editions. Altogether there exist 46 quarto editions of these 18 plays. 16 of these were printed with no author's name on them. 14 of them spell the name of the author as "Shakespeare". 15 of them spell the name of the author as "Shake-

speare". One of them spells the name of the author as "Shak-speare". The following is a list of these plays first published in quarto up until the publication of the First Folio, along with the dates of publication and the name of the author.

1. *Titus Andronicus* - Q1 1594, Q2 1600, Q3 1611, all with the author unnamed.
2. *Henry VI Part 2* - Q1 1594, Q2 1600, both with the author unnamed, Q3 1619 by William Shakespeare, Gent.
3. *Henry VI Part 3* - Octavo1 1595, Q2 1600, both with the author unnamed.
4. *Romeo and Juliet* - Q1 1597, Q2 1599, Q3 1609, all with the author unnamed.
5. *Richard II* - Q1 1597 with the author unnamed, Q2 1598, Q3 1598, Q4 1608, Q5 1615, all by William Shake-speare.
6. *Richard III* - Q1 1597 with the author unnamed, Q2 1598 by William Shake-speare, Q3 1602 by William Shakespeare, Q4 1605, Q5 1612, Q6 1622, all by William Shake-speare.
7. *Love's Labor's Lost* - Q1 1598 by W. Shakespeare.
8. *Henry IV Part 1* - Q1 1598 with the author unnamed, Q2 1599, Q3 1604, Q4 1608, Q5 1613, Q6 1622, all by W. Shake-speare.
9. *Henry IV Part 2* - Q1 1600 by William Shakespeare.
10. *Henry V* - Q1 1600, Q2 1602, Q3 1619, all with the author unnamed.
11. *Merchant of Venice* - Q1 1600 by William Shakespeare, Q2 1619 by W. Shakespeare.
12. *Midsummer Night's Dream* - Q1 1600, Q2 1619, both by William Shakespeare.
13. *Much Ado About Nothing* - Q1 1600 by William Shakespeare.
14. *Merry Wives of Windsor* - Q1 1602 by William Shakespeare, Q2 1619 by W. Shakespeare.
15. *Hamlet* - Q1 1603 by William Shake-speare, Q2 1604 by William Shakespeare.
16. *King Lear* - Q1 1608 by M. William Shak-speare, Q2 1619 by M. William Shake-speare.
17. *Troilus and Cressida* - Q1 1609 by William Shakespeare.
18. *Othello* – Q1 1622, by VWilliam Shakespeare
19. **Pericles* - Q1 1609, Q2 1609, Q3 1611, all by William Shakespeare, Q4 1619 by W. Shakespeare. (Not printed in the First Folio but included in the Third Folio.)

In addition there is William Jaggard and Thomas Pavier's "False Folio", a collection of 10 Shakespearean and pseudo-Shakespearean plays put together in 1619 in an attempt to present Shakespeare's work in a single volume. In this False Folio, printed in slightly larger-than-usual quarto size, the Shakespeare name is spelt as either "Shakespeare" (without a hyphen) or "Shake-speare" (with a hyphen). Following the publication, the Lord Chamberlain wrote to the Stationers Company demanding that no more plays belonging to the King's Men should be printed except with their consent.

Ten years previously, in 1599, William Jaggard had printed *The Passionate Pilgrim*, an anthology of 20 poems with a title page stating "by W. Shakespeare", but only five of the poems are considered authentically Shakespearean. An expanded version was published in

1612, this time with the title page stating “by W. Shakespere”. In his *Apology for Actors* (1612), Thomas Heywood protested Jaggard’s piracy, writing that Shakespeare was “much offended” with Jaggard for making “so bold with his name”. As a result, Jaggard created a revised title page without the Shakespeare attribution for the remaining unsold copies of *The Passionate Pilgrim*.

There were several other plays published in quarto before the Shakespeare First Folio was published in 1623, which bear Shakespeare's name on the title page but which were not included in the First Folio. Some of these plays, such as *Pericles* that was included in the Shakespeare Third Folio, are accepted by most Shakespearean scholars as being at least partly by Shakespeare, whilst others are not. This, of course, begs the question as to whether Shakespeare was one person or whether it was the ‘company’ name for a group of writers led by a chief Shakespeare poet. The third and most common argument is that the publishers simply misused the name of Shakespeare in order to boost their sales. Of these plays there are three that bear the name of Shakespeare; the rest use the initials “W.S.”:-

- *A Yorkshire Tragedy*, “VVritten by VV. Shakspeare” (1608)
- *Pericles, Prince of Tyre*, “by William Shakespeare” (1609)
- *The London Prodigal*, “by VV. Shakespeare” (1605)

Eventually, in 1623, the Shakespeare First Folio was published under the title *Mr. William Shakespeares Comedies, Histories, & Tragedies*. Shakespeare’s name is printed several times in the introductory pages. In all instances except one, the author’s name is spelt “Shakespeare”. The exception is in the last eulogy by “I.M.”, where the name is spelt with the hyphen, as “Shake-speare”.

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Endnotes

¹ Mount Parnassus is home to Apollo and Athena, each of whom is associated with a peak of the twin-peaked mountain. The Castalian spring of the Muses gushes from the mountain’s heart, beneath which lies Delphi, the Apollonian oracle centre.

² William Camden, *Remaines, concerning Britaine but especially England, and the inhabitants thereof : their languages, names, surnames, allusions, anagrammes, armories, monies, empresses, apparell, artillarie, wise speeches, prouerbs, poesies, epitaphs* (1614).

³ The baptismal record has “Gulielmus Shagsper”. The marriage bond has “Willm Shagspere”. The first mention of him as an actor in the Mss Accounts of the Treasurer of the Chamber (15 March 1594-5) is as “William Shakespeare”. The same spelling of “Shakespeare” is used on the fine in connection with the purchase of New Place. In letters by others he is referred to as “Shaksper” or “Shackespere”. In the Stratford land conveyances and other legal documents the name appears as “Shakspere”, “Shakespere”, “Shackespere”, “Shackespeare”, “Shakespear” and “Shakespeare”. The burial register of his brother, Edmund, spells “Shakespeare”. William uses “Shackspeare” in his will dated 25 March 1616. His burial register records “Will Shakspere gent.”

⁴ The Shakespeares were granted their coat-of-arms in 1596. Its heraldic description is: “Gold, on a bend sable, a spear of the first, steeled argent; and for his crest... a falcon his wings displayed argent,

standing on a wreath of his colours supporting a spear gold, steeled as aforesaid, set upon a helmet with mantles and tassles". The Latin motto, "Non Sanz Droict," means "Not Without Right".

⁵ The Roman Republic lasted, with many adjustments and power changes, until the time of Augustus, i.e. from 509 BC to 27 BC.

⁶ The rape of Lucretia (Lucrece) by Sextus Tarquinius, the son of the tyrannical Lucius Tarquinius Superbus, the last king of the Romans, followed by Lucretia's suicide, precipitated the revolution that overthrew the monarchy, expelled the Tarquins, and established the Roman Republic.

⁷ Francis Bacon, *Essays Civil and Moral*, "Of Delays".

⁸ Thomas Randolph, Elegy 32, *Manes Verulamiani* (1626).