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Shakespeare's *Sonnets* Dated

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By using echoes in some sonnets to lines in certain plays, emphasizing those echoes which were not later repeated, and by applying dates to those plays, in 1926 Elizabeth Beckwith tentatively dated a third of the 154 in the entire sonnets cycle. Her belief was that an unintentional authorial pattern of usage would be less subjective than other approaches to dating the sonnets. Yet, by use of dates from external allusions later applied by Prof. Leslie Hotson and other scholars, this author suggests that it may be possible to extend the total number of datable sonnets to over half of the cycle. However, Beckwith did not use dates for the plays which were later to become a standard dating scheme accepted by most scholars today, and so adjustments of her dates would change the dates she awarded to many of her selected sonnets. This author suggests that even the standard dating scheme is flawed, particularly if Shakespeare was dead when the Sonnets were published in 1609. He suggests another dating regime that meshes quite well with both Beckwith's 52 and an additional 27. Thus, the result for the 79 sonnets is to avoid certain problems in the distribution that Beckwith's method generated. The net result is what Beckwith termed "a skeleton around which the remaining sonnets can be safely built", but for over half rather than only a third of the cycle. This author suggests a half "skeleton" is more indicative of the chronology for the whole sonnets cycle than only a third.

Keywords: Shakespeare's *Sonnets*, dating Shakespeare's works, Shakespeare's1640 poems, Elizabeth Beckwith

Introduction: Problems of Dating Shakespeare in General

In 1926, a little-known article was published by Elizabeth Beckwith[1] to present her approach to dating some 52 of the Shakespeare *Sonnets*. For each sonnet she would find a line or two which echoed similar lines in a play, and then adopt the date of authorship of that play as a suggested date of composition of the sonnet. Important to her method was her contention that authors "often use a phrase twice and then forget it" (Beckwith, 1926, pp. 229, 242), as she would show Shakespeare did in selecting her echoes. Her methodology was ingenious, but much of its validity depended on whether or not she had a solid dating of the plays, and as we

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[1] See "References" Beckwith (1926). Following her name, Beckwith signed "Cambridge, Mass." An Elizabeth Beckwith is listed (http://oasis.lib.harvard.edu/oasis/deliver/~sch01143) in the Harvard University Library's "OASIS" system, with the following entry for Radcliffe College: "**Series 1, Box 9.** Beckwith, Elizabeth Ann (Mrs. B. M. Nicholds), AB New York University '21, AM' 25, 1923-1925, n.d." Thus, she may be the more famous Elizabeth Nicholds who published in 1933 the celebrated farming memoire, *Thunder Hill*, followed in 1934 with the pamphlet *The Goats of Thunder Hill, Forsaking City Streets for a Rural New York Retreat, Four Women Brave the Complications of a Cowless Dairy Farm*. Although she didn't receive a Ph.D. from Radcliffe, she may have gotten a different degree later, because a 1960 book *A Primer of Social Case Work* is credited to an Elizabeth Nicholds, living in Ohio, but published by Columbia University Press in NY City. Those three publications are listed by searching under her name on Amazon.com under "books."

If for some reason you're having trouble locating Beckwith's 1926 article, feel free to contact the author by e-mail (BEORNsHall@earthlink.net) and he'll happily send you a transcript he's made of it.

know, even today there are differences of opinion about dating individual plays.[2]

This author has long argued that it's difficult to assign a "date written" to a literary work, because there are milestones or "phases" for each work, ranging from conception (or "origination"), revisions, drafts circulated among friends, preliminary rehearsals or private performances, subsequent revamping and edits by others (such as by actors!), to first public performances, first publications, and even subsequent publications, with each version of each work potentially differing greatly from other versions. Some plays and poems may have originated as the author's juvenile exercises ("juvenilia") while at school, and may have been reworked over and over for decades, even circulated "among his private friends" such that the extant texts may have come via copies that friends had in some ways modified or corrected. Others may have been influenced by one principal source early on, and then as the author's voracious reading continued to other sources, even sources for the principal source, those may have influenced the ongoing literary project too. And if the author was a polymath, adept in French, Italian, Latin, and possibly other languages—wouldn't he have been able to access original language sources rather than wait for the first English translations? Especially notable, drama is a collaborative process where a play originated in the 1570s to early 1580s, perhaps for Court performances or for private entertainments, might be modified due to the circumstances of each venue, later re-adapted by other companies for other venues, for other patrons, and a welter of modifications and additions by unknown hands may have been made (including by actors), followed by adaptations in the 1590s and beyond, and all of this likely having been beyond the control of the originating author(s) over a period of decades. Finally, and most worrisome, the late Elizabethan stage world was immensely collaborative, with the famous Henslowe's *Diary* showing numerous examples of playwrights being paid to write works together or adapt older ones, even collaborate on sequels to earlier successes, with those works often published with no author's name, if published at all.[3]

In the case of Shakespeare, nearly all of his plays published up to 1604 had "old plays" that were precursors, often with evidence they had been earlier performed in private venues or by rival play companies to those Shakespeare had been associated with. This was particularly true of the 12 plays listed by Francis Meres

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[2] Hess (2003), Figure B.1, pp. 298-299, features columns comparing dates assigned to each play by E. K. Chambers in 1930, F. E. Halliday in 1952, G. E. Bentley in 1961, and Riverside in 1974 (E. G. Blakemore, Ed.), each listed here in "References". Yes, their dating schemes are remarkably similar (derivative might be a better term), but there are differences. The column for Bentley is divided into columns for first performance and first publication, which neatly skirts the typical need to date "when written". A handy tool is Riverside's listing (pp. 51-56) of "Sources" for each play, thus providing an excellent glimpse at how hollow are the pretences that "dates of authorship" for the plays can be dated with any real "certainty". For most plays, the sources come from the 1560s to 80s or even earlier, and if Shakespeare knew French and Italian, many could have come from earlier sources yet.

[3] For example, on March 8, 1598/9 Henslowe paid Anthony Munday, Michael Drayton, Robert Wilson, and Richard Hathway to write Pt. 1 of *Sir John Oldcastle*, which was published in August 1600 with no author's name, but republished in 1619 with Shakespeare's name on the title-page (if a Pt. 2 ever existed, it is now lost or else folded into *Henry V*). The play's relationship to Shakespeare is doubted, but it may have been a source for *Henry IV* Pts. 1 and 2, and for *Henry V*; or, as is this author's preference, the four authors may have simply dressed up an old MS play that was intermediary from the origination state of those 3 Shakespeare plays (1&2H4 and H5)—possibly the MS was in Shakespeare's own hand, or possibly it was a copy of earlier MSS in a lineage going back to the 1570s to early-80s.

Other examples might be the alleged collaborations of Shakespeare with John Fletcher in *Henry 8* and the now-lost *Cardenio*, and possibly other plays, for which the chief evidences were play lists of the 1650s and 60s naming the two as collaborators. If Shakespeare ever collaborated with Fletcher, this author believes it was in similar fashion to the *Oldcastle* project, where an old MS (possibly derived directly or indirectly from Shakespeare) was later presented to Fletcher for revamping, and then later attributed to Shakespeare long after the Bard was dead and unable to confirm or deny the credit. More to the point, Shakespeare may have been dead, or never had met Fletcher, at the time that Fletcher allegedly "collaborated" on these works—where Fletcher simply "completed" earlier draft plays that may or may not have involved Shakespeare. See Hess (2002), Chapter 7, pp. 313-342, for a description of the "Passive Collaboration" process which this author believes explains much now in dispute.

in his 1598 *Paladis Tamia*,[4] which also happened to include the first ever mention of Shakespeare's "sugared sonnets among his private friends …". Below, in the "References", this author lists four books (Ellis, 2012; Knutson, 2001; Marino, 2011; Schoone-Jongen, 2008) which are admirable examinations of many of the issues alluded to here with regard to difficulty of dating Shakespeare's works, and attribution of works to him (e.g., prior to Meres' list, all Shakespeare plays were anonymous, and the first title-page to ever have Shakespeare's name on it was 1598 *LLL* "good" Q1). Indeed, Marino's general opinion (e.g., 2011, pp. 1-17) was that the name "Shakespeare" on literary works was essentially less about actual authorship than it was for locking down ownership of the best texts in their inventory, used by the Lord Chamberlain's Men under patronage of the 1st and 2nd Lords Hunsdon ("Shakespeare's company", after 1603 the King's Men). Many of their titles may have been acted under earlier companies such as Strange's Men, Derby's Men, Pembroke's Men, the Queen's Men, Oxford's Men, and even possibly as far back as the 1570s to early-1580s Lord Chamberlain's Men under patronage of the 3rd Earl of Sussex, or the Boy's Companies for acting at Blackfriars or at Court. To put it simply, the standard dating system used by most academics today, essentially what was suggested by Chambers in 1930, is a gross oversimplification at best, or a misleading fantasy at worst. [5]

We could go on with much more discussion about the pitfalls of dating Shakespeare's works in general, but when we deal with the 1609 Sonnets, it might be worth starting with the question of whether or not Shakespeare was still living in 1609.

Posthumous Sonnets Project

In 2009, in response to the 400th anniversary of the 1609 *Sonnets*, the President of the Shakespeare

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[4] *Palladis Tamia* was entered in the Stationer's Registry (i.e., copyrighted) on July 7, 1598, and is famous for unusual attention paid to works of Shakespeare, and its list (p. 282) of 12 plays (underlines added):

> "…for comedy, witness his Gentlemen of Verona, his Errors, his Love Labours Lost, his Love Labours Won, his Midsummer's Night Dream, & his Merchant of Venice; for tragedy, his Richard the 2, Richard the 3, Henry the 4, King John, Titus Andronicus, and his Romeo and Juliet…"

Notice that "Henry the 4" covers two extant plays (*1H4* & *2H4*) that were included in the 1623 *First Folio* (*F1*). There is some debate that an MS *Thomas of Woodstock* play was the 1st part of a 2-part *Richard 2* play (see https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thomas_of_Woodstock_(play)), and possibly Meres referred to that combo. Scholars debate if "Love Labours Won" was an earlier name for *The Tempest* (a title never heard of until it appeared in *F1*), another extant comedy, or was a now-lost play; yet it did in fact exist, since in Aug. 1603 a play list had that title for sale. Scholars debate whether any play that didn't get into Meres' list hadn't yet been written in 1598; yet, Meres was clearly using 6 Comedies and 6 Tragedies (including some Histories) to compare with Greco-Roman comedy and tragedy writers, so there may have been many others in 1598, or even earlier, that Meres just didn't use in his comparison exercise.

[5] Riverside (1994)'s listing (pp. 51-56) of "Sources" for each play revealed that for some plays "style elements" or "stylistics" were employed, probably to bridge the great gulf between the early dates of sources and the first dates of known public performances or publication. These included: *All's Well* (54), *Timon* (55), *Coriolanus* (55), and *Cymbeline* (56), which doesn't seem like much, except that other plays were then dated in relation to these, and others in relation to those. Meanwhile, Halliday (1952, pp. 203-204) had endorsed use of the "Feminine Endings" style element "for establishing the chronology (of plays it) is one of the most helpful of the verse-tests." And yet, in the same book, after various discussions of style endings, Halliday admitted (p. 680), "The evidence of verse tests is treated less seriously today". These matters were discussed in Hess (1999, p. 27), which attempted to confront the 1990s revival of "stylistics" by demonstrating that modern stylists are suspect or wrong in much of their methodology and conclusions. In the 1940s "stylistics" were discredited, and remained so for half a century, only to be revived in concert with attempts at "computer-aided" analysis. Such analysis involves setting up a computer "black box" with magical rules and attributes inside, poorly described to the general public, or even to other "experts". The process generates results which have the aura of veracity because "they are computer generated," as if computers have never been wrong or misused. And when we're through with "stylistics", there are other serious problems that we have no space to discuss here, such as whether or not Henslowe's use of "ne" in the margin of his *Diary* meant "new" or just his playhouse at "Newington Butts"; and the issue of whether Meres' failure to list a play meant it didn't exist in 1598 yet. It's obvious why we should be skeptical about modern wizardry concerning "stylistics", and about the standard dating regime which depended on it to a surprising extent.

Oxford Soc. (now Shakespeare Oxford Fellowship, SOF), Matthew Cossolotto, initiated a "Posthumous Sonnets Project", to gather evidence that the author of the *Sonnets* was actually dead in 1609 (or at least perhaps profoundly disassociated with his works?). The most comprehensive of his several articles in that year was a "Letter to the Editor" of *The Oxfordian* (2009, pp. 4-10). The list of evidence he had gathered at that point, in this author's summary from Cossolotto's several articles, included:

Shakespeare scholars fail to agree on many questions, including how the *Sonnets* came to be published in the first place (e.g., were they "pirated" and never intended at all by the author to be made public?) and whether Shakespeare authorized the publication (i.e., were they published without his knowledge and consent?). Scholars tend to agree, but are still unable to explain, the apparent absence of the poet in the publication and proofreading process (i.e., the 1609 *Sonnets* were shot full of mis-wording, oddly placed punctuation, and other errors not corrected until 1640).

The 1609 *Sonnets* does not include a dedication from the poet. If the author was alive in 1609, why didn't he write a dedication to a volume of poetry that he believed would be eternal (per sonnet # 107's line 11, "Since spite of (Death) I'll live in this poor rhyme")?

If the 1609 *Sonnets* had been pirated unlawfully, and if he was still alive at the time, why wouldn't Shakespeare have complained or asserted his legal right to the poems? Because there are only 14 extant copies, there is a possibility that the 1609 *Sonnets* was a failed project, and even may have been recalled by authorities shortly after initial publication—Meres mentioned them in 1598, and two of them were published in 1599 The *Passionate Pilgrim* (*TPP*), but even after their 1609 publication, they were not quoted or publicly acknowledged until the corrected publication of 146 of them occurred in 1640 *Poems by Mr. Wm. Shake-speare*.

Following the publication of the *Sonnets* in 1609, William Shakespeare of Stratford made no documents respecting anything vaguely literary, even having no mention of manuscripts or books his 1616 will. Subsequent records of him in presumed retirement in Stratford show only financial and real-estate dealings—some scholars have even suggested that his palsied signatures may indicate that he was mentally afflicted or disabled.

The title of the 1609 book—*SHAKE-SPEARES SONNETS*—is itself unusual. First, the gratuitously hyphenated (i.e., not forced by an end-of-line) name could mean it was a recognized pseudonym. E.g., "Martin Mar-prelate", or "Tom Tell-troth" were certainly pseudonyms, and the hyphenated "Shake-speare" often continued to be used even up to the last two dedications (by Leonard Digges and "I.M.") in 1623 *F1*. Second, the title implies finality, as if the 154 sonnets in that collection was the end of the line for Shakespeare's sonnet-writing career. If Shakespeare was still alive in 1609, why would the publisher suggest by this title that the poet would write no more sonnets?

The publisher's dedication to 1609 *Sonnets* referred to "our ever-living poet", strongly implying that the poet was dead, or immortal (there may have been one or two uses of "ever-living" for living authors, but the vast number of examples were for dead ones). Several sonnets imply the poet was nearing his death and expected his name to be forgotten, or "buried" after his death (e.g., # 72's "My name be buried where my body is, / And live no more to shame nor me nor you"). This made no sense if the poet's real name was Shakespeare, a name extremely famous in 1609. This author adds that the "funereal arrangement" of the words in the dedication (i.e., dots between each word, as in carvings on tombstones) may also show the author was dead.

These are only the beginnings of Cossolotto's initiative, which has continued since 2009. So, for the purposes of this article, we'll assume that the 154 sonnets were all written by a year prior to 1609, earlier perhaps by 5 years or more.

Because of the manifest differences in the texts of 1609 *Sonnets* vs. 1640 *Poems* (there were 154 sonnets in 1609 and only 146 in 1640), we'll also assume that the 1640 project had its roots in an MS that was earlier and separate from the one used in 1609. Because, whereas the 1609 project has many reasons to assume the author was then dead, the publisher of 1640 *Poems*, John Benson, famously stated in his dedication to the Reader that the collection he had prepared had works which (underline added): "…appeare of the same purity, the Authour himselfe then living avouched; they had not the fortune by reason of their Infancie in his death, to have the due accomodation of proportionable glory, with the rest of his everliving Workes…" Note that we should take this claim of Benson to apply particularly to the 146 sonnets it featured, because much of the rest of the poetry attributed to Shakespeare in 1640 *Poems* derived directly from the 1612 3rd edition of *TPP*, which was disputed by Thomas Heywood's claim that two long poems in it were by him rather than the Bard.[6]

In this author's opinion, the division of the MS of 146 sonnets carefully preserved for use by the 1640 project (versus that of 154 sonnets sloppily used by the 1609 project) dates back to circa 1601-04. Thus, it's likely that fewer sonnets than 146 existed in 1598 when Meres noted them. Shakespeare then went on to write at least 8 more sonnets, some may now be lost, and the survivors are the extra 8 sonnets in the 1609 collection that weren't in 1640 *Poems*. The separate paths of two separate MS versions of the sonnets helps explain why the 1609 texts were so adulterated, why the 1640 texts were not, and why the 1640 texts in general are what are used today for modern *Sonnets* renditions.

Before we press on, let's examine the question "Why did Shakespeare aim to produce about 150-or-so sonnets?" The answer that this author thinks is closest to truth is that there were precisely 150 *Psalms* in the *Old Testament*. As it so happens, in 1599 *TPP*, the first two sonnets were later found in 1604 *Sonnets* (#s 138 & 144) and 1640 *Poems*, plus two more sonnets in *TPP* had been included as incidental poetry imbedded in Shakespeare's 1598 good quarto of *Love's Labour's Lost* (*LLL*) along with a fifth poem which may have been

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[6] Heywood's complaint about 1612 *TPP* was discussed at length in Hess (2014) in *JLAS*. There were four major conclusions:

(1) We don't know the date of the *TPP* 1st ed., because unlike the 1599 date on the 2nd ed's title-page, the sole extant copy of the 1st ed. is missing a title-page and some of the poetry. Hess-2014 proposed a date of circa 1594-1599 for TPP 1st ed. based on the early dating for most of the poems contained within it, plus the earliest evidence of William Jaggard's printing career.

(2) Heywood's dispute, or complaint, was on the last page of his 1612 *Apology for Actors*, where he claimed that he brought the matter of Jaggard's misuse of two of Heywood's poems (first published in 1609 *Troia Britanica*) to the attention of Shakespeare, who was shocked at Jaggard having mis-attributed the poems. In any case, nearly every line in that complaint is garbled by what appeared to be Heywood's hurried amendments made to it. For one thing, Shakespeare was likely not alive (or was effectively retired) in 1612, as we've seen demonstrated above.

(3) Hess (2014) proposed a reinterpretation of Heywood's complaint to mean that the Jaggard mischief had actually occurred for the "by-1599" *TPP* 1st ed., not the 1612 3rd ed. If so, Heywood's complaint had originally been prepared for that earlier occasion, set aside after Jaggard removed the offending two poems in the 1599 2nd ed., then hastily amended for reuse in 1612. In the interval, Shakespeare was either dead or effectively retired, and Jaggard had gone from a newly-begun printer with little influence in circa 1594-99 to become one of the great printing powerhouses by 1608 and later, particularly after he had been named Official Printer for London City by the Bishop of London (Jaggard's shop would go on to print the 1623 *F1* project). In any case, in 1612 Jaggard likely had little to fear from Heywood's accusations, so he reinserted the disputed two poems into his 1612 project, a sort of thumb in Heywood's eye for what had transpired nearly 2 decades earlier about the 1st ed.

(4) By comparing Leonard Digges' (1558-1635) dedication used in 1640 *Poems* with the one he contributed to 1623 *F1*, Hess (2014) suggested that the two dedications were two parts of one long poem prepared over a decade before *F1* was published. Where the short dedication in *F1* oddly had more to do with Shakespeare as a poet, the longer dedication in *Poems* had more to do with Shakespeare and Ben Jonson as dramatists, quite the opposite of what we should expect. Nearly all of the Jonson drama alluded to dated to the 1610-1612 timeframe. Thus, Hess-2014 suggested that Digges' two-part poem had been prepared for a circa-1612 grand project to publish all of Sh's plays and poetry combined—or whatever was not otherwise copyrighted by other stationers—and present it all in one huge project. That project fell through for a number of possible reasons (e.g., the 1612 death of Prince Henry, who may have been the patron of the Grand Project), leading to *F1* and *Poems* having separate publication paths. But it does serve to explain why Jaggard published the 3rd ed. of *TPP* in 1612, because that was the part of Shakespeare's poetry to which he already had full title, and he could publish it without having to negotiate and share profits with other stationers.

adapted from a sonnet.[7] Adding-in those four or five poems undeniably by the Bard to the 146 later in 1640 *Poems* comes right close to 150 (particularly if we count some of the poetry in *Sonnets to Sundry Notes of Music*, which was in *TPP* 2nd & 3rd eds.). That does seem to be more than coincidental, considering the 150 *Psalms*. And if more than coincidental, doesn't it mean that much of the layout for 1640 *Poems* was Shakespeare's intent?

Beckwith's 1926 Article

For such a short article (16 pages), Beckwith packed in a good deal of worthy discussion. She began with Meres' notice of the "sugred Sonnets among his private friend", and noted that the 1599 *TPP* 2nd ed. (and the "by-1599" 1st ed., it so happens) had in it close equivalents to what would be sonnets # 138 and # 144 in the 1609 *Shake-speare's Sonnets* project. She noted that Meres' 1598 notice did not mean that the sonnets cycle was complete in 1598 (this author believes at least 8 of them were yet to be written).

Then in her 2nd and 3rd paragraphs Beckwith noted that in 1898 Sir Sidney Lee had "practically disposed of the guesswork concerning the "Mr. W. H." of Thorpe's dedication" by noting the existence of printer William Hall (note that the dedication actually read "Mr. W. H. ALL.," effectively spelling out Hall's name!). And Sir Sidney had gone on to make "an exhaustive study of the Elizabethan sonnet as a type… showing the completely conventional character of most of Shakespeare's sonnets" thereby rendering "their autobiographical quality even more dubious". This author would go further by comparing Shakespeare's sonnets to French and Italian cycles, where the "conventional character" would be even more emphasized.

Thus far we are still on the first page (p. 227) of her article. She proceeded into the 2nd page (p. 228) to note that in 1913 Raymond Alden had "proved with finality… that the [1609] arrangement of the sonnets is not Shakespeare's, and is neither chronological, nor strictly according to subject…," based on

> "the piratical character of the publication which prohibits the possibility of Shakespeare's final sanction of the arrangement, and the internal evidence of discontinuity which suggests that [the publisher Thomas] Thorpe received the sonnets in groups of two or three and then made a superficial attempt to arrange them by subject."

This of course conforms with what has been argued above in our article, that the Bard had nothing to do with publication or arrangement of the 1609 *Sonnets* project (because he was dead?).

Beckwith continued to describe "the unjustifiability of supposing either that the date of the sonnets must match some corresponding event in the poet's private life, or that the chronology must follow the order of the [1609] edition" (1926).

She proceeded to describe four general methods of determining the date of the sonnets, showing the limitations of each:

(1) Lines which allegedly describe public events of contemporary interest (she noted # 107's "mortal moon" lines and showed that scholars have proposed dates of 1598, 1601, and 1603 for it; but we'll see the best date was likely 1589!).

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[7] Recall, 1598 *Love's Labour's Lost* (*LLL*) good Q1 was the first-ever play to have Shakespeare's name associated with it. The poetry in "by-1599" *The Passionate Pilgrim* (*TPP*) Q1 and its 1599 Q2 was discussed in Hess (2014) (in *JLAS*). In addition to close versions of sonnet #s 138 & 144, the 3 other clearly Shakespeare sonnets or poems which *TPP* contained were from 1598 *LLL*: (IViii) "Did not the heavenly…"; (IVii) "If love make me forsworn…"; and (IViii) "On a day (alack the day)". The last was an 18-line non-sonnet (in *LLL* it has an additional two lines for 20 total), but contains within it what may have once been a sonnet, or could have been intended to be reworked into a sonnet, and it is often listed under *Sonnets to Sundry Notes of Music* in modern collected works of Shakespeare. These five undeniable works of Shakespeare are the only parts of *TPP* which modern scholars grudgingly allow were by the Bard, although Hess (2014) argued that each of the rest could indeed have been by Shakespeare if we follow the simple principle that Deloney, Barnfield, Griffin, Marlowe, and Raleigh were more likely to have "borrowed" from Shakespeare rather than vice versa.

(2) Deciding in advance that either Henry Wriothesley, Earl of Southampton or William Herbert, Earl of Pembroke was the "Mr. W. H." of the sonnets dedication and then interpreting each sonnet as pertaining to the chosen "patron". She felt this approach particularly fails in terms of explaining who the "Dark Lady" would have been, since identification of reasonable candidates depends upon how we date the sonnets themselves (i.e., if dated 1590-1595, they point to Southampton's scandal, but if 1597-1601 to Pembroke's scandal).

(3) Passages paralleled by other authors, such as Sidney's 1591 *Astrophel and Stella*, Daniel's 1592 *Delia*, Drayton's 1594 *Idea*, and Marlowe's 1598 *Hero and Leander* (where the question always arises of who was the borrower, the Bard or the suggested models?).

(4) The "personal opinion of style", which we've already seen above to be discredited, even when backed by the "black box" of a computer (which didn't exist in Beckwith's time).

As it happens, this author agrees with almost everything Beckwith discussed so far, because it actually supports positions independently arrived at. Now, having by mid-page 229 dismissed the four most popular approaches to dating the sonnets, Beckwith proceeded to describe her favored approach:

> "Shakespeare has a habit, to which most writers are more or less prone, leading him often to repeat a word or phrase very soon after first using it, and subsequently ignore it." (1926, p. 229)

She gave a good number of examples, but we'll let the reader indulge themselves with studying and determining whether they're valid or not. For this exercise, we'll assume her approach is valid, and her findings significant—except that she used dates for the plays which didn't always conform with dates Chambers would establish 4 years later—and thus the dating of the plays becomes very important for dating the sonnets.

But, since we've established above that Chambers' approach was likely flawed, what remains is for us to compare a few play-dating systems with Beckwith's, to see if anything brings light on our discussion of how to date the sonnets. Plus, this author will suggest some additional sonnets that he feels are datable independently from dating the plays.

To begin, Table 1 illustrates Beckwith's dates for plays alongside of date systems suggested by others for the same plays.[8] Table 2 illustrates a layout of Beckwith's conclusions, when Chambers-1930 dates are

[8] In addition to the dating systems featured in endnote # 2 above, in Table 1 a column has been inserted for comparison purposes for Gilvary-2010, but not used in this article. Gilvary's was a massive dating effort for the plays that had been underway for at least a decade. Baconian Vincent Mooney Jr., up until his death in 1998, had been taunting Oxfordians around the world with his claim that their theory had thus far failed to produce a dating system for Shakespeare's plays that would have no play written after 1604, when the 17th Earl of Oxford died. As a result, Hess began his study(ies), and independently the DeVere Soc. in England began its own study, drawing participants from around the world. But it took over a decade and the tremendous efforts of Kevin Gilvary to complete the DeVere Soc. project. An early state of that project was reported in Hess-2003, pp. 298-99, as "DeVere Soc.-2000" (about half of the plays were left undated from 2000 until Gilvary inherited the project), so those early findings were considered in the Hess-2003 effort. The participants in the 2000-2010 effort were familiar with the Hess-1999's dating regime, and Gilvary's results list the Hess-1999 dates as if they were well-considered, defensible dates. What they overlooked was that Hess-1999 avowedly wasn't aimed at a definitive dating regime for the plays, but rather it adopted some of the gravely flawed methods of the Chambers-1930 system and Elliot & Valenza's "computer assisted" analyses for the purpose of demonstrating that a parallel Oxfordian dating regime could be established that had at least the same degree of "smoothness" as that which E&V were claiming was a virtue of the Chambers system. In other words, the Hess-1999 system of dates was not pretending to be definitive or even well-considered. But it did insert an important concept which Gilvary's results show, as well as the 2003 Hess results—that there should be a "likeliest date" inside of a "range" of possible dates, rather than pretending all phases of writing a complex literary project could have been accomplished in a single year. Unfortunately, Gilvary's results seem to have taken that goal of a range far too literally to make themselves useful—in most plays there's a beginning-of-range date in the 1560s to 80s followed by a 1590s or later end-of-range date, which tends to ignore the "likeliest date" concept. This shows that even the best of dating regimes have their flaws, limitations, or at least aspects that can be criticized. In the end, no matter how much these projects may attempt to be objective, they all end up as more subjective than their editors might wish, because "data" for dating is itself so inconclusive and subjective!

used.[9] And Table 3 is another way of organizing Beckwith's conclusions into a more graph-like display. Two elements stand out in Table 3, especially in comparison to Table 5:

(1) Based on Beckwith's method, if her bottom line of 52 total is extrapolated to 154 total sonnets, it shows that approximately 118 of Shakespeare's *Sonnets* likely existed in 1598 when Meres' *Palladis Tamia* had the first historical note of the sonnets' existence.

(2) Based on the extrapolation to 154 sonnets total, 146 sonnets is projected for having been reached in 1603-1604.

Note the oddity of Beckwith's conclusions in Tables 2 and 3, that Shakespeare's *Sonnets* under her system appear to preponderantly have been written just when he was also working on his two long poems (V&A and RofL) plus several plays. Is this credible, that the Bard would have overburdened himself in such a short period of time? Possibly this is why her article seems to have gotten little attention? Of course, her system only models a third (i.e., 52) of the whole cycle of 154, forming what she calls a "skeleton" for use for further research. So, perhaps we could achieve more credible results if we found ways to add a few more dated sonnets to the tally, raising it to over half of 154, and possibly showing a more credible distribution.

Adding on a Few More Dated Sonnets

For Tables 4 and 5, Beckwith's data will be applied to an Alternate Dating regime from Hess (2003) (pp. 298-299, the first column of dates labeled "Hess (2002)"). Moreover, additional dated sonnets will be suggested beyond those developed by Beckwith's method. Here we describe the rationale for choosing additional sonnets.

Recall that Beckwith listed four common methods of dating the sonnets, each of them with its limitations. One of them was described as, "Lines which allegedly describe public events of contemporary interest". We can agree that these often lead to debate among scholars, with multiple potential theories of their meaning and dating. Yet, by "contemporary interest", it is rare that "foreign or specialized interest" has been suggested. If Shakespeare was a cosmopolitan man, possibly adept in the Latinate languages, wouldn't he have been likely to note exceptional events abroad? And if he was a man with special interests in medicine, especially a less well-accepted line of medicine, wouldn't that have been notable as well?

Hess (2007) argued from Hotson (1949) that three sonnets can be dated based on foreign affairs, and that their convergence in dating strengthens his arguments:

1589 for # 107 based on the "crescent-shaped" battle formation of the 1588 Armada and many predictions going back for decades that 1588 was supposed to usher-in the end of the world, or at least the fall of empires;

1586-89 for # 112 based on the re-erecting in Rome by Pope Sixtus V of obelisks (called "pyramids" in Elizabethan poetry) found buried in the ruins of the ancient forum; and

1589 for # 113 based on the assassination of King Henri III of France by a fanatical monk, with Henri having been the favorite son of the infamous Catherine de Medici (i.e., he had been a "child of state").

As to the sonnet based on medical knowledge, Hess (2007) argued, from the privately distributed book

[9] Near the end of Beckwith's article (pp. 240-241) she listed her conclusions. She gave a sequence of dates (1591-1607) with one or more sonnet #s in Roman numerals to the right of each date. Her well-conceived article might have gotten better response if she or her editor had transferred that data into a chart, similar to Table 2 here. On the other hand, it would have made it easier to see the oddity of her conclusions, the clumping of so many sonnets into a very few years.

Brazil (2000), that # 119 ("the Apothecary sonnet") reasonably dated to 1574-1576, based on certain books by Queen's Physician Dr. George Baker, which argued in favor of Paracelsan medicine (using chemicals, derived of alchemy and herbalism), which is the ancestor of modern medicine and pharmacy. But in the 16th century, Paracelsans were suppressed in some quarters, and discouraged by the usual physician groups who practiced the "humours" and "bleeding" techniques that have today been long discredited. Brazil particularly noted the illustration on the cover of Baker's 1576 *Newe jewell* (dedicated to the Countess of Oxford), which had examples of the very things described in # 119. But Hess (2007) noted that the 1576 book was essentially a republication of 1574 *Oleum magistrale* (dedicated to the Earl of Oxford). Thus, the article Hess (2012), about the Paracelsan and herbalist interests of the Earl and Countess of Oxford, is worth consulting, as well as the two Hess (2011) articles about Thomas Sackville as "Literary Mentor" to Shakespeare, and the MS poem "*Sackvyles Olde Age*" (which has in it various lines concerning medical and health issues). The arguments and comparisons are complex, so for here let's just say it would take a book to describe them.

Pressing on, because # 137 and # 144 were each included in "by-1599" *TPP* Q1, it seems reasonable that they date to 1597, if not earlier. Hess (2014) suggested the entire *TPP* collection may date to 1594-1598, depending on the usual "who borrowed from whom?".

This author is not the first to suggest that # 18's "darling buds of May" is a reference to the new dating system instituted by Pope Gregory in 1583, adjusting the calendar by 10 days, and thus allowing formerly Summer buds to emerge in May instead. This only applied to Catholic countries, but it fits in marvelously with Hotson's three 1580s foreign affairs sonnets.

Sonnets # 1 to 17 are known as "the Procreation sonnets", because they urge an unwed person to wed and reproduce (the current reading of these sonnets may seem aimed at a young man, but that may simply be later adjustments made as Shakespeare began to circulate his sonnets "among his private friends" in order to disguise the identity of his original "beloved youth", or to match the French and Italian pattern of addressing "Cupid, the little love god"). Of course there are many other theories about the first 17 sonnets. But when we consider that one of the key and most urgent concerns of Elizabethan society 1558 to 1583 was the need for Queen Elizabeth to marry, bear offspring, and thus cement the "Elizabethan Religious Settlement", it seems most probable that Shakespeare's first 17 sonnets were derived from earnest pleas that the monarch does her duty for England's sake. This was both a domestic and international concern, since during that 1558 to 1583 period there was a long list of foreign princes willing to try their luck, from King Philip II of Spain and Archduke Charles of Austria, to less well known suitors like the Crown Prince of Sweden and the half-brother of Philip II, Don Juan of Austria. Now, in 1583 the Queen turned age 50, and shortly before that her change of life potential began looming greatly with each passing year until it was quite unrealistic for her to be considered fertile. Thus, the urgent pleas of #s 1 to 17 more likely were associated with the period 1579-1581, when Elizabeth had an actual marriage contract with the Duc d'Anjou-Alencon (or "Monsieur," brother of King Henri III, who had himself been a suitor for England's throne). The Elizabethan court was starkly divided between those pro the French marriage to Alecon, and those anti. At least one duel was almost fought over the issue, the famous 1579 "tennis court brawl" between Sir Philip Sidney (anti) and the Earl of Oxford (pro). Those two courtier poets were good examples of how blue blood could be aflame over the issue. If indeed this did apply to Shakespeare's first 17 sonnets, quite a range of dates could be selected. But probably the safest would be 1581, when the marriage pact was amicably dissolved, and when Elizabeth's fertility was near its proverbial "bitter end". That year of

1581 would have been literally (and poetically) a simple case of "do or die barren".[10]

Analysis of Adm. H. H. Holland was summarized in Hess (2003, pp. 287-289, p. 288 (item b.18)) which noted sonnet # 130 parodies part of Thomas Watson's 1582 *Hekatompathia* (dedicated to the Earl of Oxford) and a poetry exchange between Oxford and Sir Philip Sidney (died 1586), for which Hess opted for 1583. Holland item b.19 noted from Sir Sidney Lee up to 15 influences on various sonnets from Arthur Golding's 1567 *Metamorphoses* (translated while Oxford lived with his uncle A.G. in the house of Sir Wm. Cecil), particularly noting #s 55 and 60, for which we'll opt for 1570 (although reprints occurred in 1584, 1593, and 1603). Holland item b.21 noted an echo of *3H6* and sonnet # 121 with an Oxford letter to Cecil in October 1584.

Finally, what shall we do with the 8 sonnets (#s 18, 19, 43, 56, 75, 76, 96 and 126) that were in 1609 *Sonnets* but weren't in 1640 *Poems*? Above, this author suggested they should be considered to be sonnets not yet finished before the MS later used for 1640 had been separated from that later used for 1609, and dated it to 1601-04. Certainly, it would be easier to date them if they "hung together" around a common theme. And yet, we've just suggested that # 18, the first of them, can be dated to circa 1583 with the change to the Gregorian Calendar abroad. It appears # 19 is also consumed with exploring "time", but not the seasonal type. Then # 43 is concerned with transitions from day to night. Near its end, # 56 does return to the seasonal concern, as # 75 does briefly at its beginning, and # 76 returns but lightly to times of day towards its end. But # 96 has no particular relationship to time other than the foibles of youth. And # 126 does relate to time as in the approaching end of life and judgment day. So, even concerning "time", there doesn't seem to be a solid linkage between the eight sonnets, other than that they weren't in 1640 *Poems*. Yes, some or all of them could have been "originated" in the 1583 timeframe that # 18 was, then withheld until the 1609 project was underway. Still, the dating for #s 19, 43, 56, 75, 76, 96 and 126 just isn't strong enough to use for this exercise, even if we do assume they could be dated to circa 1601-04.

Conclusion

Instead of being content with Beckwith's 52 sonnets (a third of the 154 total), by adding a few more based on their orientation toward international matters, we can increase dating to 79 sonnets, or more than half of the 154 total of 1609 *Sonnets*. Also, by redating Beckwith's sonnets based on an alternative system for the plays from that established by Chambers in 1930, we redistribute the pattern of the sonnets such that in Table 5 there is less of a pile-up in the 1591-1595 period than there was for Beckwith in Table 3.

Several of the Tables refer to "Extrapolation from 154", which simply means dividing 154 by the grand

[10] Hess (2011) was about Thomas Sackville as Shakespeare's "Literary Mentor" and presented an alternative theory that Sackville's lost sonnets cycle, praised by Skelton in 1560, may be part of a core of sonnets adapted into what became Shakespeare's 1609 *Sonnets*. If so, note that Sackville was the Queen's 2nd cousin through Boleyn blood, and apparently in the 1560s it had been suggested to her that she should consider marrying Sackville, who was 4 years her junior. This is implied by her response, which was a curious backhanded slap at her cousin, for she publicly announced that were she to consider marrying, she would only wed Sackville's father (her Chancellor of the Exchequer, then in his 70s, and her 1st cousin)! There is also the tradition that Shakespeare "would have been a king had he not played one on the stage". Sackville and Thomas Norton penned the revenge play *Gorboduc* for performance at Lincoln's Inn and at Court, and it was later published without their authorization in 1565, the plot somewhat similar to that of *King Lear*, with a kingly father having to deal with three sons whom he had made kings, but who then rebelled against him. If Sackville had acted as one of the four kings in his own play, and had close associations with Shakespeare, he may well have inspired such a tradition.

Another interesting insight into the "French Marriage" issue is Hess (2009), about the wooing of "Avisa" (i.e., Queen Elizabeth) by a panoply of suitors in 1594 *Willobie His Avisa* (*WHA*). Hess suggests dating the "origination" of *WHA* to 1581-1583, between the end of the "French marriage" contract and up to the death of the Duc d'Anjou-Alencon, who is modeled as "the French suitor" in *WHA*.

total (in Table 3, 52 sonnets and in Table 5, 79 sonnets) to yield a percentage, which is then multiplied by other totals to yield projections for how many total sonnets there might have been for any given year. For example, in Table 3 from Beckwith, we can extrapolate that the number of sonnets existing in 1598 was 118, and that circa 1603-04 there were 146 sonnets. And by comparison, in Table 5 from the Alternative Plays Dating, we extrapolate in 1598 there were 129 sonnets, and circa 1600-01 there were 146 sonnets. These two comparisons (1598 and 146) are not very far apart between Beckwith's and the Alternative's results, although some may think 11 sonnets and two years are significant.

The main difference in judging between Beckwith's system (Table 3) vs. the Alternative (Table 5) is how many sonnets were accounted for (52 vs. 79), and the percentage of 154 (34% vs. 51%). So, the question is this, if we are to accept Beckwith's invitation to set up "a skeleton around which the remaining sonnets can be safely built", is it better that the skeleton be limited to only 34% of the body of sonnets, or that it be expanded to 51%? Assuming the rationale for dating each sonnet used is sound in each method, wouldn't the larger number in the "skeleton" be better?

Another difference is the odd distribution yielded for Beckwith's "skeleton", with her system wishing us to believe (Table 3) that fully 115 sonnets were written 1591-1595, during which time Shakespeare also yielded his two long poems (*V&A* and *RofL*) plus assorted plays, and the plague running rampant to boot. By contrast, Table 5 shows only about 30 extrapolated sonnets were written during essentially the same period (1592-1595), while sonnets were being written in the 1570s and 1580s, and were more reasonably distributed throughout, even with major peaks and troughs along the way. So, which distribution looks more realistic?

To conclude this study, consider that Beckwith was working on the problem back in 1926, with only bulky concordances and so forth to draw on. Beckwith's initiative was impressive indeed. Her innovative dating method for the sonnets deserves more attention than it has gotten over the past 90 years. Even though her dates for plays deviated somewhat from the system formalized by Chambers in 1930, she still had a close match. And thus, the peculiar distribution that she generated (i.e., Table 3) should be seen as a failing for the Chambers dating approach for the plays. And that is the most important conclusion that we can make!

Table 1

Dating Systems for Beckwith's Selected Poems/Plays

Poems/	1926	1930	1974	2003	2010
Plays	Beckwith	Chambers	Riverside	Hess	Gilvary
LLL	1591	1594-95	1594-95, 97	1574-76 revs 78-83 88 97	1578-98
V&A	1591-93	1592-93	1592-93	1592-93	--
COE	1592-94	1592-93	1592-94	1574-76 r77 83-87 93	1566-94?
KJ	1593	1596-97	1594-96	1583-86 r89-90 96	1587-98
R3	1593	1592-93	1592-93	1578-83 r92-94 98	1587-97
TAndr	1593-94	1593-94	1593-94	1578-83 r84-86 94	1579-94
RofL	1594	1593-94	1593-94	1593-94	--
R2	1595	1595-96	1595	1583-86 r91 95-01	1587-97
MND	1595	1595-96	1595-96	1576-77 r81-85 92-95	1585?-98
R&J	1595	1594-95	1595-96	1578-83 r91-95 97	1562-97
2H4	1598	1598-99	1598	1578-83 r85 95-96 04	1587-00
AYL	1599-00	1599-00	1599	75-76 r82 89 94	1585?-00

Table 2

Beckwith's Summary Table (After Adjusting Dates and Identifying Plays/Poems)

Sonnet #s [& plays/poems with echoes to lines in those sonnets]		Total/year
1591 – 7, 14, 21, 48, 52, 57, 58, 127, 131, 132, 137, 147		12
	[V&A 1591, LLL 91, COE 91	
1593 – 1, 2, 4, 5, 6, 8, 9, 10, 11, 15, 16, 17, 22, 31, 41, 49, 112		17 *
	[V&A 1591-3, KJ 93, R3 93, TA 93-4]	
1594 – 13, 25, 26	[RofL 1594, TA 94]	3
1595 – 27, 28, 87, 88, 95, 97, 150. [R2 1595, MND 95, R&J 95]	[R2 1595, MND 95, R&J 95]	7
1598 – 71	[2H4 1598	1
1599 – 81	[AYL 1599-1600]	1
1601 – 100, 101, 110	[TN 1601, T&C 01-02]	3
1602 – 12, 107	[HAM 1602]	2
1603 – 3	[MFM 1603]	1
1604 – 30, 121, 125	[OTH 1604]	3
1606 – 113	[MAC 1606]	1
1607 – 63	[TIM 1607]	1
		52 *

Note. * Beckwith's summary table (pp. 240-41) listed sonnet XVI twice for 1593. Thus, her total of sonnets in her study was only 52, not the 53 her conclusion claimed on pg. 241.

Table 3
Graphic Display by Assigned Years of Beckwith's Summary Table

	112											
	49											
S	41											
O	31											
N	22											
N	147	17										
E	137	16										
T	132	15			M							
	131	11			E							
N	127	10			R							
U	58	9		150	E							
M	57	8		97	S							
B	52	6		95								
E	48	5		88								
R	21	4	26	87			110			125		
S	14	2	25	28			101	107		121		
	7	1	13	27	71	81	100	12	3	30	113	63
Years	1591	1593	1594	1595	1598	1599	1601	1602	1603	1604	1606	1607
Totals	12	17	3	7	1	1	3	2	1	3	1	1
Cumulative Totals				39	40				49	50		52
Extrapolations				115	118				145	148		154
									^146			

Table 4

Alternate Dates Given to Plays/Poems for Beckwith's Data & Added Sonnets[11]

Sonnet #s [& plays/poems with echoes to lines in those sonnets]	Total/year
1570 – 55, 60 [per H.H. Holland, but poss. 1584, 93, or 1603 instead]	2
1576 – 119 [R. Brazil]	1
1581 – 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17 [Hess, "Procreation"]	17
1583 – 18 [Hess, "buds of May"]; 160 [H.H. Holland]	2
1584 – 121 [H.H. Holland]	1
1589 – 107, 123, 124 [L. Hotson]	3
1592 – 1, 2, 4, 5, 6, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 17, 48 [V&A]	12
1593 – 13, 25, 26 [RofL]; 52 [COE]	4
1594 – 31, 41 [TA]; 81 [AYL]	3
1595 – 27, 28, 87, 95, 97 [MND]	5
1596 – 49, 112 [KJ]	2
1597 – 7, 14, 21, 57, 58, 127, 131, 132, 137, 147 [LLL]; 150 [R&J]	11
1598 – 15, 16, 22 [R3]	3
1599 – 3 [MFM];	1
1600 –100, 101 [TN]	2
1601 – 63 [TIM]; 88 [R2]; 110 [T&C]	3
1603 – 12, 107 [HAM]; 113 [MAC]; 71 [2H4]; 30, 121, 125 [OTH]	7
	79

[11] For Table 4 and Table 5, E. Beckwith's data is to be applied to an Alternate Dating regime from Hess (2003) (pp. 298-299, the first column of dates labeled "Hess (2002)"). Because that column gives an "origination phase" for each play, followed by key "revisions" periods for each, we use only the last revision date for this exercise. Of course, that has limitations, since the last revision date might be for fairly minor changes vs. major ones done earlier. But as long as we know what choices we've made, we at least can avoid the pretense that Shakespeare wrote a complex play all in a few weeks or even a single year. Moreover, Tables 4 and 5 feature more datable sonnets than those that Beckwith's process generated. Above, Section IV described the rationale for each additional sonnet, nearly all of them relating to Shakespeare's awareness of international affairs of his time. This of course mixes in a different rationale among Beckwith's findings. And to a certain extent it's like mixing "apples and oranges". Still, if Beckwith's method is largely valid, and the method(s) for choosing additional sonnets is largely valid, why shouldn't they be combined?

Table 5

Graph by Assigned Years, Alternate Play Dates Summary Table

			17														
			16														
			15														
			14														
			13														
			12				48										
S			11				17					150					
O			10				12					147					
N			9				11					137	M				
N			8				10					132	E				
E			7				9					131	R				125
T			6				8					127	E				121
			5				6			97		58	S				30
N			4				5	52		95		57					71
O			3			124	4	26	81	87		21	22			110	113
S	60		2	160		123	2	25	41	28	112	14	16		101	88	107
	55	119	1	18	121	107	1	13	31	27	49	7	15	3	100	63	12
Years	1570	76	81	83	84	89	92	93	94	95	96	97	98	99	1600	01	03
Total/Yr	2	1	17	2	1	3	12	4	3	5	2	11	3	1	2	3	7
Cumulative Totals			20				38			50			66			^	79
Extrapolated to 154			39				74			97			129			146	154

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