This section includes four separate parts:

(1) A chart showing a comparison of the evidence for Sheldon with that of four other claimants: the Earl of Oxford, Christopher Marlowe, Thomas North, and Henry Neville. The chart is divided into sections, each introduced by some generally well-accepted narratives about the writer and his work. This narative is then compared with the evidence supporting the authorship of Shakspere, the actor; the four named claimants; and Sheldon.

(2) A presentation of the proof that Sheldon was Shakespeare: this focuses on the specific elements that are key to the case for Sheldon as Shakespeare.

(3) A narrative of the literary life of Sheldon: this matches the biographical data known about Sheldon with the works of Shakespeare.

(4) Frequently Asked Questions: these questions include about Sheldon's 1556 trip to Italy; the matching handwriting between Sheldon and annotations to a 1550 Hall's Chronicle; the use of 'R.S.' by Sheldon; and the evidence for Shakespeare as an older man.

I. Comparison of Sheldon With Other Claimants

1. Bulk of Shakespeare plays written with "one hand" only. See Elliott & Valenza (E&V).[1]

Actor Shakspere	Oxford/Marlowe/North/Neville	Sheldon
	Oxford (1550-1604), Marlowe (1564-93), and North (1535-1604) all died years before the final two plays were performed, after collaboration with John Fletcher (see #17).	Sheldon (1537-1613) began to write the plays around 1560 with the first stage version of R&J. He continued to write until 1613 when he died. Other than when he obviously collaborated – such as the two final plays (see #17), he wrote the plays by himself.

2. The Shakespeare "one hand" did not match any other hand tested in modern stylometric analysis.[2]

Actor Shakspere	Oxford/Marlowe/North/Neville	Sheldon
	The Oxford poems were tested by E&V, and rejected as a match.[3] Marlowe plays also tested by E&V and rejected.[4] North and Neville not tested by E&V.[5]	Sheldon not tested by E&V. However, a legal deposition by him is available for testing. Preliminary review shows strong consistency with Shakepeare plays. See website on Stylometrics.

[1] Ward E.Y. Elliott and Robert J. Valenza, "And Then There Were Norn: Winnowing the Shakespeare Claimants," *Computers and the Humanities* vol.30, no. 3 (1996), pp. 191-245, at pp. 194-95.
[2] Elliott and Valenza, p. 195.
[3] Elliott and Valenza, p. 240.
[4] Elliott and Valenza, p. 219, 226, 233, 239.
[5] Elliott and Valenza, p. 193.

3. **The writer had an "old-fashioned" style. See Jowett,[6] Watt.[7] This "old-fashioned" style can be seen in both Shakespeare's grammar (see Hope)[8] and spelling (see Wilson).[9]**

Actor Shakspere	Oxford/Marlowe/North/Nevillle	Sheldon
Shakespeare editor Jowett suggests that these preferences were "perhaps bacause of his provincial origins in Stratford-upon-Avon."[10]	No explanation provided.	Sheldon's legal deposition included in the website under Stylometrics, was originally written with similar old-fashioned spellings as noted by Wllson. See examples in website.

4. **Francis Meres' *Paladis Tamia* published in 1598 listed twelve plays by Shakespeare.[11] With at least 6 other plays not on the list likely performed around the 1590s,[12] at a minimum 18 plays by Shakespeare had been written and performed by 1600.**

Actor Shakspere	Oxford/Marlowe/North/Neville	Sheldon
Shakspere (1564-1616) was 32 years old in 1598, and the first mention of him is in 1594, in reference to his participation in the Queen's Christmas	Oxford is mentioned separately from "Shakespeare" by Meres for being part of a group that was "best for Comedy." This identifies Oxford and Shakespeare as two separate writers.	With Sheldon, unlike traditional theory, the plays begin around 1560, with the first stage performance of R&J. Evidence for Sheldon strongly indicates he wrote the early history

[6] *Sir Thomas More*, ed. John Jowett, The Arden Shakespeare (2011) p. 449.
[7] Timothy Irish Watt, "The Authorship of the Hand-D Addition in the Book of St. Thomas More," in *Shakespeare, Computers, and the Mystery of Authorship*, eds. Hugh Craig and Arthur F. Kinney (Cambridge Univ Press, 2009), p. 139.
[8] Jonathan Hope, *The Authorship of Shakespeare's Plays* (Cambridge Univ Press, 1994), pp. 20-2.
[9] John Dover Wilson, "Bibliographic Links between the Three Pages and the Good Quartos," in *Shakespeare's Hand in the Play of Sir Thomas More*, ed. A.E. Pollard (Cambridge Univ Press, 1923), p.128; discussed in Watt, p. 139).
[10] Jowett, p. 449.
[11] See *The Shakespeare Allusion Book*, ed. John Munro (The New Shakspere Society, 1909), p. 46-8).
[12] The *Henry VI* trilogy; *As You Like It*; *Twelfth Night*; and *Merry Wives of Windsor*.

festivities 1594/5.[13] There is no full explanation of how he would have been able to write and produce these 18 plays in such a short time, especially while also working as an actor. The only explanation offered is speculation that he adapted the scripts from the early source-plays which he found in playhouse storage.	Marlowe is also mentioned separately by Meres as part of a group that was "best for Tragedie." North is not mentioned by Meres but there is no claim that he wrote all these plays. After publishing 6 volumes of 48 histories of Plutarch's Lives in 1579, he spent much of the next two decades in military service: in Ireland in 1580-2 and again in 1596; in the Low Countries in1586-7 and in the Armada fight in 1588. He also added 15 histories to a 1603 edition of the Lives.[14] There is no explanation of how Neville (1562-1615) wrote all these plays in this period.	plays, *Much Ado*, and *Hamlet, Merchant of Venice* in the 1570s (see #5-9). As *AMND* can be dated to a Sheldon wedding held at Midsummer, 1592 (see #11-12), he continued to write new plays. He died in 1613 after fully collaborating with John Fletcher on *Henry VIII*, leaving behind the outline of the final play *Two Noble Kinsmen* (see #17). And unlike other claimants, he had no other job while writing and publishing his plays in the 1590s. In 1587, he was forced out of his last administrative job as a justice of the peace because of his wife's Catholic recusancy.

[13] See E.K. Chambers, *The Elizabethan Stage*, vol. IV (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1923), p.164.
[14] See Harold H. Davis, "The Military Career of Thomas North," *Huntington Libray Quarterly*, vol. 12, no. 3 (May 1949; jstor/org/stable/3816099), pp. 315-21, at p. 315.

5. **Early anonymous published plays (so-called 'source-plays') formed basis for some of the plays, particularly the early history plays. In particular, Dover Wilson noted the parallels between the source-play *The Troublesome Reign of King John* and both *Richard II* and *King John*,[15] as well as the parallels between the source-play *The Famous Victories of Henry the Fifth* and the plays of *Henry IV* and *V*.[16]**

Actor Shakspere	Oxford/Marlowe/North/Neville	Sheldon
Following Wilson's research connecting the early source-plays and the later Shakespeare plays, an assumption was made that Shakspere was a "reviser" of an earlier "profound historical scholar."[17]	None address the issue.	Evidence stongly connects Sheldon with both the *Troublesome Reign* (see #7) and *The Famous Victories* (see #6). Both of these plays appear to have been written in the early 1570s for the public performances of Leicester's Men.

[15] Wilson, ed. *Richard II*, *The New Shakespeare Edition* (Cambridge Univ Press, 1939, reprinted 1971), pp. ix-x; lxxiv-lxxv; also Wilson, ed. *King John*, *The New Shakespeare Edition* (Cambridge Univ Press, 1936, reprinted 1969), p.viii.
[16] Wilson, *Richard II*, pp. lxxiv-lxxvi.
[17] See Wilson, *Richard II*, pp. lxxiv-lxxvi.

6. **The rare Hall's Chronicle c. 1550 – not the more commonly available Holinshed's Chronicals of 1578/87 – was the primary source for the early history plays.[18] There is a known volume of Hall's (1550) with annotations close to the plot structure of the source-play *Famous Victories of Henry the Fifth*.[19]**

Actor Shakspere	Oxford/Marlowe/North/Neville	Sheldon
See #5. The script of the "annotator" was compared to Shakspere's known signatures, with no match of the two scripts (see Keen).	Although the volume is available on an Oxford website, there is no indication that the handwriting of the annotations is that of Oxford. No other claimant addresses the issue. Oxford & Neville have other documents that they claim relate to the Shakespeare plays but none of the documents cited are known as source documents – such as Hall's Chronicle – for any Shakespeare play. These documents include the Audley End documents for Oxford; the Tower documents for Neville.	There is a close match between a 1985 signature of Ralph 'Raffe' Sheldon and the annotations. In particular, there ia a striking match between a very rare "R" along with a final 'n' and 'l': according to the Curator of Medieval Manuscripts of Huntington Library, there is a "compelling case" that the two hands are the same.[20] The annotations themselves follow the outline of the Famous Victories.[21]

[18] See W. Gordon Zeeveld, "The Influence of Hall on Shakespeare's English Historical Plays," *ELH*, 3, no. 4 (Dec. 1936; jstor.org/stable/2871549), pp. 317-53, at p. 319. This same conclusion is reflected in Geoffrey Bullough, *Narrative and Dramatic Sources of Shakespeare*, vol III (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul; New York: Columbia Univ, 1960) p. 1; 9-10; 15: Bullough conceded that the "days are past" when scholars assumed that Shakespeare relied entirely on Holinshed; rather the most important source for the early history plays was Hall's Chronicle in both its attitude and pattern.

[19] See Alan Keen and Roger Lubbeck, *The Annotator* (New York: Macmillan Company, 1954); the original volume in shown online at www.oxford-shakespeare.com/annotator.html.

[20] See Nancy Peters Maude, *Was Shakespeare a 'Hydden Man'?* (2024), pp. 129-142, footnote 407, p. 133.

[21] See Seymour M. Pitcher, *The Case for Shakespeare's Authorship of "The Famous Victories*," (State Univ of New York, 1961), pp. 231-50; also see Maude, 135-41.

7. **Interspersed in both the early history plays of *King John*,[22] *Richard II*, *Henry IV & V*, as well as in *Hamlet* and the *Merchant of Venice* were plot structures derived directly from the esoteric legal writings of Catholic jurist Edmund Plowden circa 1570s. The most prominent use of Plowden's work is the theory of the King's Two Bodies in underlying Richard II, and referred to in *Henry V*;[23] and his work is also the source of the gravedigger scene from *Hamlet*.[24] Both instances were derived from two cases reported by Plowden in the same legal volume published in 1571 in Norman French.[25]**

Actor Shakspere	Oxford/Marlowe/North/Neville	Sheldon
No explanation for the use of the 1571 legal witings of Plowden.	None address the issue.	Edmund Plowden was Sheldon's brother-in-law. In 1571, when Plowden was publishing his reports, he was working with Sheldon as the co-executor of Sheldon's father's estate.

[22] The *Troublesome Reign* and *King John* included a similar plot device that altered the historic events of the early Plantagenet times of King John to mirror the legal issues of the succession debate of the Tudor era. See Lily B. Campbell, *Shakespeare's Histories* (Huntington Library, 1968), pp. 136-39; E.A.J. Honigmann, *King John*, *Arden Shakespeare* (London: Methuen & Co., 1951, 1981), pp. xxii-xxiv). Edmund Plowden was the lead writer in these succession debates, with a legal tract circulated by manuscript in 1566. See Marie Axton, "The Influence of Edmund Plowden's Succession Treatise," *Huntington Library Quarterly* 37 (May 1974), pp. 218-19; Mortimer Levine, *The Early Elizabethan Succession Question* (Stanford Univ, 1966), pp. 102, 147.

[23] Ernst H. Kantorowicz, *The King's Two Bodies* (Princeton Univ Press, 1957), pp. 7-41.

[24] O. Hood Philips, *Shakespeare and the Lawyers* (London: Methuen & Co., 1972) pp. 76-9.

[25] The theory of the King;s Two Bodies is derived from the 1561 legal case, *Case of the Duchy of Lancaster*, and the gravedigger case is from another 1561 case, *Hales v. Petit*. Both were reported in the same work by Plowden, *Les Commentaries, ou, Les Reportes* (1571): at p. 212 and p. 253, respectively.

8. French novellas from the series of *Histoires Tragiques* (first volume published in 1559) were the primary sources of at least three Shakespeare plays: *Much Ado About Nothing*, *Hamlet*, and *Twelfth Night*,[26] and indirectly the source of *Romeo & Juliet*.[27]

Actor Shakspere	Oxford/Marlowe/North/Neville	Sheldon
No explanation for the use of the French novellas. Although Arthur Brooke translated *Romeo & Juliet* in 1562 (see note 23), none of the other plays had an English translation at the time the plays were written.	Assumption that all claimants knew French, but no case made for a connection between the claimants and the *Histoires Tragiques*.	The first English stage version of *Romeo & Juliet* was performed circa 1560,[28] near to the time when the first volume of the *Histoires Tragiques* was published in 1559, with the novella upon which the play is based. Sheldon was in London at the time, at Middle Temple. The novellas for *Much Ado* and *Hamlet* were published in later volumes in the series (volumes 3 & 5, respectively), first published in 1569 and 1570. This was the same time that Sheldon was with Edmund Plowden (see #7). In 1577, a translation of other early novellas from the same series by

[26] See Frank S. Hook, *The French Bandello* (Univ of Missouri, 1948), p. 18-19: all three from French novellas by Francois de Belleforest in *Histoires Tragiques*; for *Much Ado*, see C.T. Prouty, *The Sources of 'Much Ado About Nothing'* (Yale Univ, 1950); for *Hamlet*, see Harold Jenkins, ed. *Hamlet*, *The Arden Shakespeare* (London: Methuen & Co., 1982), p. 96; for *Twelfth Night*, see Bullough, Narrative Sources, vol. II, p. 270: Bullough could not distinguish between Belleforest or his predeccesors, Italian writers Cinthio or Bandello.
[27] The consensus is that the source of *Romeo & Juliet* was Arthur Brooke's *Romeus & Juliet* (1562), a translation of a French novella by Pierre Boaistuau from the first volume of the *Histoires Tragiques*. However, Brooke, in the preface to his work notes an earlier stage performance of a play with the "same argument."
[28] See Kenneth Muir, *The Sources of Shakespeare's Plays* (Yale Univ, 1978), p. 38.

		writer 'R.S.' It is argued that 'R.S.' is Ralph Sheldon.[29]

9. Detailed information about Jewish Venetian merchants unavailable in England indicates the author had a first-hand source of information.[30]

Actor Shakspere	Oxford/Marlowe/North/Neville	Sheldon
It is assumed that the information came from an earlier source-play. Contemporary critic Stephen Gosson reported that there was a play "The Jew" on stage in London in 1578.	Oxford, North, and Neville all traveled to Italy. However, there is no evidence from any of those trips that would show engagement with the Jewish merchants of Venice. North proponents cite a Travel Journal that includes notes that North gathered on his European trip. The proponents claim that these notes form some basis for the plays *The Winter Tale* and *Henry VIII*. There is no claim related to Jewish Venetian merchants.	In the 1550s, Sheldon's father was establishing a business to produce silk tapestries in England. In pursuit of this, Sheldon traveled to Italy in the retinue of Edward Courtenay in 1556, at the request of English Ambassador Philip Hoby, a close friend of Sheldon's father. Key to the new industry was the availability of silk: the Jewish merchants of Venice were the chief importers of foreign silk into Europe.

[29] See Maude, pp. 160-63.
[30] Ernesto Grillo, *Shakespeare and Italy* (Glsgow: The University Press, 1949), p. 139.

10. In the early 1590s, Shakespeare circulated a series of sonnets in manuscript form. The earliest were directed to the young Earl of Southampton, advocating marriage and children,[31] pointing out specifically the joys of ten children (sonnet 6). The sonnets also lamented the author's "outcast" status (see sonnet 29).

Actor Shakspere	Oxford/Marlowe/North/Neville	Sheldon
In 1590, Shakspere would have been 26 years old. There is no explanation of how such a young man of unknown status could write sonnets providing advice to the noble Southampton on marriage and children, and then circulate such sonnets by manuscript.	Southampton had rejected a marriage with Oxford's daughter Elizabeth after her grandfather Lord Burghley had urged the marriage. There is no explanation of why her father would subsequently write to Southampton advocating the same marriage. Marlowe died in 1593, childless. In 1590, Neville was age 28, with two children. He was a friend of Southampton's, and researchers have found his name encoded into the 1609 Sonnets. There is no indication that he was an outcast: he was appointed ambassador to France in 1599.	In 1590, Sheldon was 53 years old, with 10 children, and a friend of Lord Burghley's. And he was an outcast. By this time, he had been prosecuted for his Catholic recusancy, first in 1580, and after 1587 he was not allowed to work as a justice of the peace in Worcestershire or Warwickshire because of his wife's public papism. He held no long-term government position after this time.

[31] The language of the first 17 sonnets is very close to that of *Venus & Adonis*, published in 1593 and dedicated to Southampton; see Sidney Lee, *Shakespeare's Sonnets* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1905), p. 18.

11. *A Midsummer Night's Dream* was performed in the 1590s, most probably at a wedding ceremony involving a noble couple.[32]

Actor Shakspere	Oxford/Marlowe/North/Neville	Sheldon
No explanation for connection with noble marriage.	Oxford proponents have suggested the marriage of Elizabeth de Vere and William Earl of Derby on 26 January 1595. No explanations for Marlowe, North, and Neville.	Sheldon married his daughter Katherine on 25 June 1592 at Long Compton (see Bodl. MS Wood F.33, f. 139), where his manor house Weston was located. This was the day after the official Midsummer Night. Katherine married Francis Trentham. He was a financial advisor to the Earl of Oxford, and his sister Elizabeth married Oxford sometime in 1591, probably around the Midsummer Night of 1591, as Elizabeth was deeded on 4 July 1591 a valuable property upon the death of Oxford. It is assumed that Oxford and his bride Elizabeth would have been guests of honor for the Sheldon wedding festivities.

[32] See, for example, E.K. Chambers, *William Shakespeare*, vol. I (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1930), pp. 356-63; Chambers discusses six possible couples, inconclusively.

12. While there is no source for the entire play, there are identified sources for the components of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.[33] The source for the *AMND* playlet "Pyramus & Thisbe" was a poem advocating silkworm cultivation in England. It was written by Dr. Thomas Moffett, physician to Mary Sidney, Countess of Pembroke, and circulated by manuscript as early as 1589.[34]

Actor Shakspere	Oxford/Marlowe/North/Neville	Sheldon
No explanation for the use of this poem for this play. There was no source-play for *AMND*.	None address the issue.	As noted in #9, Sheldon's family had a business producing silk tapestries. Dr. Moffett's work would have been of great interest to Sheldon. Also Sheldon was close friend of Nicholas Breton, a noted poet and a member of the Countess of Pembroke's inner circle.

[33] See Bullough, vol. I, p.368.

[34] See Kenneth Muir, "Pyramus and Thisbe: A Study in Shakespeare's Method," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 5, no. 2 (April 1954); also Muir, *The Sources of Shakepeare's Plays* (Yale Univ Press, 1978), p. 73.

13. After Shakespeare published his first narrative poem (and first work under the name William Shakespeare), *Venus & Adonis*, the Puritan satirist Joseph Hall castigated the writer of the work whom he called "Labeo" for what he perceived as a licentiousness. Hall refers to the writer as a "craftie cuttle" disguised under "another's name."[35] He was joined in these criticisms by other writers including John Marston.[36] "Labeo" is thought to be a reference to an early Roman, Antistius Labeo, a celebrated Roman lawyer who retired from public service after a disagreement with the government of Augustus.

Actor Shakspere	Oxford/Marlowe/North/Neville	Sheldon
No explanation why the actor would have been referred to aa "labeo."	None address the issue. However, the proponents of Francis Bacon as Shakespeare point to this instance as evidence of their claim – Bacon had a disagreement with the Queen and temporarily left public office.	Sheldon is a very close match for Antistius Labeo. Like Labeo, he had a serious disagreement with the government over the exercise of his faith, and he retired from public service permanently in 1587.

[35] See Joseph Hall, *The Poems of Joseph Hall*, ed. Arnold Davenport (Liverpool Univ Press, 1949), p. 176.
[36] See John Marston, *The Poems of John Marston*, ed. Arnold Davenport (Liverpool Univ Press, 1961), p. 65.

14. When the Globe operations began in 1599, five players (including the actor Shakspere) were allowed a share of the profits of the playhouse even though none had contributed to the costs of construction.[37] This profit-sharing arrangement was unique to the Lord Chamberlain's Men and the Globe Theatre.

Actor Shakspere	Oxford/Marlowe/North/Neville	Sheldon
No explanation as to why Shakspere's share was equal to the other four players, if, as suggested he was also the principal playwright.	No indication that these claimants had anything to do with the Globe Theatre construction. After Neville returned from France where he had been ambassador in 1599, he became involved in the Essex rebellion and was imprisoned in the Tower until 1603.	The financial arrangement was closely reminiscent of the financial scheme set up by Sheldon's father William when he established the tapestry weaving industry in Warwickshire. The terms of William Sheldon's will set up an arrangment whereby profits from a market fair were to be used for weavers willing to make tapestries in Warwickshire and Worcestershire.

[37] Chambers, *Elizabethan Stage*, vol. II, pp. 415-18.

15. The source of *Timon of Athens* (c. 1607) is uncertain, but it appears related to an anonymous early Elizabethan academic play; the two plays share similarities that are not accounted for by a common source.[38] However, one change that the Shakespeare play makes from the earlier play is to alter the manner of Timon's bankruptcy: in the early play, he loses his ships at sea; in the Shakespeare play, his formerly good friends have suddenly called in loans owed by Timon.[39]

Actor Shakspere	Oxford/Marlowe/North/Neville	Sheldon
There is nothing known about the actor's life to suggest this personal tragedy.	Oxford dealt with debt problems in the 1580s, but not at the scale reflected in *Timon*. North had money problems through his life, apparently related to his position as the younger brother of a baron.	In 1603, Sheldon's friend Thomas Horde suddenly called due a loan he had provided Sheldon. Previously, Sheldon had been very generous to Horde, providing him a home at Sheldon's manor Weston. The amount of the debt was massive, and Sheldon lost much of his land and wealth, with most of Sheldon's land claimed by the Crown in payment of Horde's recusancy fines.

[38] Muir, *Sources*, p. 218.
[39] Bullough, vol. VI, p. 232.

16. **When the first Quarto of *Troilus & Cressida* was published in 1609, the second edition included a preface "A Never Writer, to an Ever Reader, News" which recommends the author 's plays as "such savored salt of wit . . . that they seem, for their height of pleasure, to be born in that sea that brought forth Venus" and warns that "when he is gone and his comedies out of sale, you will scramble for them and set up a new English Inquisition." This preface was added to the quarto after the printing for the first issue was stopped and the title page cancelled, with the page reset to add the new preface.**

Actor Shakspere	Oxford/Marlowe/North/Neville	Sheldon
In 1609, Shakspere was age 45.	By 1609, Oxford and North had been dead 5 years; Marlowe had been dead for 16 years. In 1609, Neville was age 47.	In 1609, Sheldon was 72 years old.

17. **In 1613/4 the two final plays, *Henry VIII* and *Two Noble Kinsmen* were performed. Both were collaborations between Shakespeare and John Fletcher, the successor to Shakespeare as the chief playwright for the King's Men. However, the two collaborations were notably different, with the collaborative work in *Henry VIII* far more active than that indicated in the later *Two Noble Kinsmen*.[40] In fact, the second collaboration was initially attributed to Fletcher, not Shakespeare, and its prologue includes a eulogy to the play's "noble breeder."**

Actor Shakspere	Oxford/Marlowe/North/Neville	Sheldon
Shakspere was age 49 in 1613, and he did not die until 1616. No explanation given for the different circumstances of the two collaborations.	Oxford, Marlowe, North all dead by 1613. In 1613, Neville was age 51, and died in 1615, after the performance of *Two Noble Kinsmen*.	Sheldon died in March 1613. The first performance of *Henry VII* was in June 1613, when the playhouse burned down.

[40] See Brian Vickers, *Shakespeare, Co-Author* (Oxford Univ Press, 2002).

18. The First Folio was published in 1623, with the author named as "William Shakespeare."

Actor Shakspere	Oxford/Marlowe/North/Neville	Sheldon
There is no record that a copy of the First Folio went to the Shakspere family.	No record that any copies of the First Folio held by the families of Oxford, Marlowe, North, or Neville. Also there is no explanation as to why – if one of these were the author – the First Folio was published under the name William Shakespeare.	The Sheldon family not only received a copy of the First Folio, they received what appears – from the bibliographical evidence – to be the first published completed copy of the First Folio, with an additional sheet added to the Folio by the publishers, and the Folio presented as a gift to the Sheldon family. From the very beginning of his career as a playwright, Sheldon worked under a deep disguise, of necessity because of the political danger to the Queen and her administration from the public knowledge of a papist recusant with ties to the militant papist Throckmorton famity.

19. In comments added to the First Folio, the two players who organized the effort, John Heminge and Henrie Condell, described the writer as a "happie imitator of Nature, was a most gentle espresser of it. His mind and hand went together: And what he thought, he uttered with that easinesse, that wee have scarce received from him a blot in his papers."[41]

Actor Shakspere	Oxford/Marlowe/North/Neville	Sheldon
		Sheldon's personal works, including his 1985 legal deposition and his poetry anthology (as R.S.) *The Phoenix Nest*, are notable for their lack of errors and precise execution.

[41] *The Shakspere Allusion Book*, 316.

II. What Proof That Sheldon Was Shakespeare?

Oxford records indicate that Sheldon began his official career working with the Earl of Leicester in 1566, working to produce entertainment for the Queen's first visit to Oxford in August 1566. Then, upon the sudden death of acclaimed court dramatist Richard Edwards in October 1566, the record of the court dramatist goes blank: yet many plays continue to be produced without any named dramatist until around 1583 (John Lyly). See *Was Shakespeare a Hydden Man?*, 104-16. This theory posits that Sheldon was the early unnamed dramatist, working in shrouded secrecy because his Catholic recusancy posed a political danger to both the Queen and Leicester. He continued as chief dramatist for Leicester's Men and its various successors until his death in 1613.

The proof of this theory rests on multiple types of evidence, including:

- **Very near the time of his death, the plays ended (1613/4). See *HM*, 233-42.**
- **After his death, the producers of the First Folio presented the Sheldon family with a Folio that appears through undisputed bibliographical evidence to be the first completed copy of the first published Folio. See *HM*, 48-51.**
- **Annotations on a rare Hall's Chronicle (1550) include unique script formations that closely match Sheldon's handwriting; Hall's was the major plot source for the early history plays. See *HM*, 129-42.**
- **In addition to Hall's, the plays had various other estoric sources for their plots:**
- **writings of Catholic jurist Edmund Plowden that underlie the early history plays (1570s); a manuscript advocating silkword cultivation (c. 1590); along with personal knowledge of Jewish merchants in Venice. On Plowden, see *HM*, 124-28, 143-57, 169-72; on Sheldon and silkworms, 73-81, 90-93; on Venice merchants, 74-76.**
- **Sheldon's wife was of the militant Throckmorton family, and Sheldon himself was a prosecuted recusant, wrongly accused in 1594 by informants of colluding in a plot to kill the Queen: these politically-charged connections prove an irrefutable need for continued secrecy over centuries. See *HM*, 11-13, 174-76, 210-11.**

Among the many other claimants to the plays, none has any of these types of evidence as listed for Sheldon. The case for Sheldon is unique.

However, in addition to these key points of evidence, there are also very important biographical facts which closely match to the Shakespeare oeuvre:

- **In general, he matches an accepted "generic" profile of "Shakespeare": Warwickshire roots; legal knowledge, particularly in property, litigation, and**

local administration; continental travel, specifically to northern Italy; extensive personal hawking experience; deep interest in father-daughter relationships, with nine daughters, all married during his life. See *HM*, 10-16.

- **The first performance of a Shakespeare work was an early version of *Romeo & Juliet* c. 1560: Sheldon was in London at the time, in Middle Temple; just before he entered Middle Temple in November 1556, he had returned from an extended trip to northern Italy (on behalf of his father's silk tapestry business, particularly in Verona and Venice) in the retinue of Edward Courtenay, the Catholic White Rose heir to the English throne whose life, and tragic death in September 1556, closely mirrors that of Romeo Montague. See *HM*, 86-93; 68-72, 80-81.**
- **His early work with Leicester at Oxford paralleled the anonymous play *Wit & Will* (1566/7) acted at court and later printed as the first 5-act morality play, which was the predecessor play of early Shakespeare plays such as *Taming of A Shrew*, *Two Gentlemen of Verona*, and *Love's Labor's Lost*. See *HM*, 117-22.**
- **The sonnets, first circulated c. 1590, contain biographical implications that uniquely match Sheldon. In his fifties, a Catholic, married with 10 children, he was of the age and class qualified to write the first sonnets to the young Earl of Southhampton, extolling marriage and procreation (and the happiness of 10 children). He was a friend of Lord Burghley, whose granddaughter Elizabeth de Vere the Earl of Southampton refused to marry. But the later sonnets include other details that match Sheldon: his "outcast" life; his experience with informants; his knowledge of minute legal procedural issues. See *HM*, 206-11.**
- **The source of the funding of the Globe (1598/9) is unknown, but 5 members of the acting troupe obtained an ownership share without any contribution to the construction costs. This generous financial arrangement followed in scope and purpose a similar arrangement Sheldon's family had with tapestry weavers to finance tapestry production in Warwickshire. See *HM*, 224-27.**
- **At around the same time of the Globe construction, Sheldon had a massive loan from a London man Thomas Horde, equivalent to millions of pounds, for which there is no known or recorded purpose. Horde, a close friend of Sheldon's, suddenly declared the loan forfeit, around 1599, ending with Sheldon's bankruptcy. The cicumstances surrounding this bankruptcy closely track the bitter story related in *Timon of Athens*, c. 1607, a play altered by the writer to have Timon lose his fortune by the sudden demands of former friends for immediate repayment of their loans, rather than – as in the early source play – Timon losing his fortune when his ships are lost at sea. See *HM*, 227-29.**

III. Summary of Theory & Most Frequently Asked Questions

The following is a narrative description of the theory of Sheldon as Shakespeare, with superscripts identifying pages in the book, *WAS SHAKESPEARE A 'HYDDEN MAN'?* (see book below) that provide documentation for the narrative. Immediately following the narrative there are a list of the most frequently asked questions regarding the theory and its documentation.

A. SUMMARY OF THE THEORY

Query: Why Was the First Completed Copy of the First Folio a Gift to the Family of Ralph Sheldon?[48-50]*

From the beginning of Elizabeth's reign in 1559, the Queen and Robert Dudley, allied with the Inns of the Court, seemed intent on establishing a vigorous native English drama both for entertainment and and for the glory of the House of Tudor.[104-5] In the main, they used two troupes, the boy actors of the Children of Paul's and an adult troupe ultimately known as Leicester's Men. But to develop the repertory, they relied principally on one man, Ralph Sheldon (1537-1613), a man hidden from public view because of the political implications of his militant Catholic connections, emerging in 1593 as 'William Shakespeare'. [10-16]

What's the evidence?

<u>Early Plays for the Queen</u>

In 1566, Dudley (now Earl of Leicester and Chancellor of Oxford) organized entertainment for the Queen's first formal visit to Oxford in August. In April 1566, Leicester forced Oriel College to grant a 60-year lease of a residence to Sheldon: the promising College Provost resigned, after being required to evict his brother from

the residence. A first-hand account shows that Sheldon's residence was subsequently used to produce the main play for the Queen, *Palamon & Arcite*, a version of Chaucer's *Knight's Tale* written by noted Court dramatist Richard Edwards.[108-11]

Why Sheldon? The first stage performance of *Romeo & Juliet* was around 1560, according to Arthur Brooke: at the time Sheldon was at Middle Temple in London, along with his brother-in-law Edmund Plowden, organizer of Temple entertainments.[86-7] Sheldon had returned from a trip to Italy in 1556 to develop his family's silk tapestry business[68-80] (silk exports were handled through Verona and silk imports through Venice by Jewish merchants)[74-5] in the entourage of Edward Courtenay, a close model for Romeo Montague.[80-1]

Edwards's play at Oxford was triumphant but had a tragic aftermath: in October 1566, the acclaimed[106-7;115] playwright died suddenly, in his early 40s.[111] Edwards's actual Court position was filled immediately; however, rather than another talented dramatist, the Court appointed William Hunnis, the Queen's Protestant gardener at Greenwich, a man who despite thorough investigation has never been shown to have written one line of stage dialogue.[115-6] The long-time Master of Paul's, Sebastian Westcott, was a skilled musician but never a dramatist.[106] Nonetheless, seven plays were produced by Paul's for the 1567/8 Christmas festivities.[117] After Edwards's death until its Court productions were halted by Puritan outcry in 1581,[177-8;120;167] Paul's remained the premier boys troupe, performing numerous plays, none of which had any identified playwright.[104-6]

So, who replaced Edwards as dramatist and why was he unnamed? In the year after Edwards's death the unknown Court dramatist for Paul's wrote *Wit & Will*, the first five-act comedy/morality play featuring an impudent comic servant boy (Will),[117-9] a prototype character of early comedies such as *Comedy of Errors*, *Two Gentlemen of Verona*, *Taming of A (The) Shrew*, *Love's Labor's Lost*.[120-2] Sheldon remained at Oriel College, but if he was the playwright, why was he unnamed? Westcott was under severe public attack for being a "papist" unfit to educate

boys.[113-4;167] Unfortunately, Sheldon had a similar impediment: he was a recusant Catholic married to a Throckmorton, a known militant Catholic family.[175;241]

- **Unique Access to Sources**

  One distinguishing characteristic of Shakespeare plays is the careful construction from arcane but identifiable literary sources: Sheldon's access to these sources was unique. For example, annotations to a rare volume of Hall's Chronicle (1550) exactly match Sheldon's own handwriting;[129-33] these annotations follow the plot of *Famous Victories of Henry the Fifth*,[137-41] precursor to the *Henry IV&V* plays.[136;96-7)] Plots of four plays – *Richard II*,[150-2] *King John*,[145-7;124-5] *Hamlet*,[154-6] and *Merchant of Venice*[169;171-2] – all have significant twists directly drawn from highly esoteric legal theories and cases of Edmund Plowden, Sheldon's brother-in-law. The French novellas of Francois de Belleforest form the basis of *Much Ado About Nothing* (edition 1574)[159] and *Hamlet* (edition 1576)[156]; what appears to have been Sheldon's ('R.S.')[57-66] own translations of Belleforest were published in 1577.[160-3] These plays all appear to have been originally written in the 1570s, at a time when Leicester's Men was the preeminent English troupe.[105] As with Paul's there is no named playwright for any of the plays performed by Leicester's Men.[105-6]

- **Post-Leicester Evolution**

  Things fell apart in the 1580s. Sheldon was prosecuted for recusancy.[174-6] Mounting Puritan pressure caused retrenchment of the London stage: Paul's was banned from Court;[177-8] Leicester's Men was dissolved in 1583 and the players organized into the Queen's Men under Francis Walsingham.[177] Leicester died after scandal, unmourned.[182-5]

  After Leicester's death in 1588, 'Shakespeare' began his sonnets, venturing into the new poetry style promoted[179-81] by Leicester's nephew Philip Sidney. Sheldon's age (early 50s), marital status, and Court connections made him the perfect man[206-9] to address the young nobleman Southampton[206-8] on the merits of

marriage and procreation (sonnet 6 suggests 10 children, as had Sheldon)[208]. Simultaneously, Sheldon ('R.S.') collected the finest new poetry of Oxford elite poets into *The Phoenix Nest*, published the same year at *Venus & Adonis* (1593), with the same predominant 6-line stanza, dedicated to Leicester and Sidney.[196-205]

A Midsummer Night's Dream – performed most likely in 1592[88n196] – seems a retrospective on Sheldon's beginnings in drama: a burlesque on the early *R&J*,[91-2] with unique sources from a poem on silkworm cultivation[76-7;91-2] and a utopian town near Mantua,[77-80] tracking Sheldon's early trip to Italy to seek out silk for his family's tapestry business.

The unusual profit-sharing agreement of the Globe Theatre – wherein five players shared one-half of the profits without any contribution to construction costs – can be best explained by Sheldon's similar arrangement with the Sheldon family weavers.[224-7] Further, Sheldon's huge debts at the time from sudden collapse of a loan exactly parallels the 'Shakespeare'-altered plot of *Timon of Athens*.[227-9]

- **<u>Finale</u>**

  Sheldon died in March 1613, just before performance of *Henry VIII*, an active collaboration with John Fletcher.[233;235-6] By contrast, the last play *Two Noble Kinsmen* was a collaboration originally attributed primarily to Fletcher, with a eulogy to its 'noble breeder', suggesting it was written largely after Sheldon's death.[233-42] *Two Noble Kinsmen* was 'Shakespeare's' version of the same play Sheldon first produced for the Queen in August 1566.[234]

*All superscripts refer to pages in the author's book, *WAS SHAKESPEARE A 'HYDDEN MAN'?: An Elizabethan Jigsaw Puzzle*, available at no charge at www.hyddenman.com, or for $11 on Amazon.

B. MOST FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

ISSUE NO. 1: SHELDON'S ITALIAN TRIP

The evidence for Sheldon's trip to Italy with Edward Courtenay at the end of 1555 rests on correspondence filed in the Venetian diplomatic files. The correspondence includes communications between Ambassador Sir Philip Hoby and Edward Courtenay, Earl of Devon in November 1555. By letter dated 20 November, Hoby wrote from Antwerp to Courtenay in Louvain, asking Courtenay to meet with "a scholar and countryman of mine named young Sheldon, encourage him in his studies, and show him some kind of courtesy, for that his father, being a very dear friend of mine, may hear from his son's report that my recommendation of him to your Lordship may stand his in some stead. See Calendar of State Papers, Venetian (CSPV), vol. 6, Part I (1955-56), ed. Rawdon Brown (London, 1877), p. 253 (No. 284, 20 November 1555.

QUESTION #1: How do we know that "young Sheldon" is Ralph Sheldon?

ANSWER: The letter clearly refers to Sheldon's father as a "very dear friend of mine": William Sheldon, Ralph's father, and Philip Hoby were long-time friends and close neighbors, both holding lands within 6 miles of each other in Worcestershire; William witnessed Hoby's will a week before Hoby's death on 9 May 1558. In November 1555, Ralph was the 18-year-old heir to William, unmarried, and a scholar who entered Middle Temple one year later. The Sheldon family ancestry has been very thoroughly studied, and there are no

known alternatives to Ralph as the scholar "young Sheldon." See *Hydden Man*, p. 70.

QUESTION #2: While Courtenay indeed traveled to Italy around the end of November, how do we know that Sheldon actually accompanied him?

ANSWER: The day after receiving Hoby's request to meet with Sheldon, Courtenay immediately replies, and promising to "look after young Sheldon, whom he has not yet seen." See CSPV, vol. 6, Part I, p. 254 (No. 285, 21 November 1555). At the time that Hoby contacted Courtenay on behalf of Sheldon, Courtenay had been delayed in his planned trip to Italy, desparately trying to raise more funds for his travel. See CSPV, vol. 6, Part I, p.243 (No. 273, 11 November 1555). By 22 November, however, Courtenay had obtained a line of credit. See CSPV, vol. 6, Part I, p. 255-56 (No. 286, 22 November 1555). Clearly Courtenay, on the day (21 November) when he agreed to look after the 18-year-old Sheldon intended leave for Italy as soon as possible, without incurring any further delay. Given this very tight timing (especially as by 21 November he had yet to meet the "young Sheldon") the sole way that Courtenay could have agreed to "look after" the young man would have been to include him with his entourage on his Italian trip. It seems highly improbable that Courtenay would have broken his promise to Ambassador Hoby, thereby abandoning an 18-year-old Englishman (and fellow Catholic) by himself in Louvain, a place where the young man had only just arrived to seek Courtenay's assistance. See *Hydden Man*, p. 71. Courtenay died suddenly in Padua in September 1556; Sheldon entered Middle Temple in November 1556.

Further, Sheldon's own epitaph upon his death in 1613 supports the timing of the Italian trip, stating that "After he had spent his youth studying at Oxford, he had visited France **and other countries** and lived at Court. He then had married [emphasis added; the following November 1556, Sheldon entered Middle Temple, and he married Anne Throckmorton in May 1557.] According to E.A.B. Barnard, Sheldon married "shortly after his return from those 'tapestry' travels abroad, with Richard Hyckes [the family's chief tapestry weaver] as his mentor." See *Hydden Man*, p. 69.

ISSUE NO. 2: HANDWRITING COMPARISON WITH HALL'S CHRONICLE (1550) ANNOTATIONS

In the book on pages 129-34, evidence is presented regarding a comparison of Sheldon's handwriting (from a 1585 signature of Sheldon's) to script annotating a volume of Hall's Chronicle (1550), the rare book which is the acknowledged source for the early Shakespeare histories. The comparison is largely based on the very unique capital "R" in Sheldon's signature, matching a similar "R" in the annotations, along with a rare, old-fashioned version of a final "n", and similar irregular sizing and spacing in the two hands. Photographs are provided.

QUESTION: Has the handwriting comparison been reviewed by any expert in such matters?

ANSWER: Yes, the author submitted the evidence related to the handwriting comparison to Vanessa Wilke, Curator of Medieval Manuscripts, Huntington Library. Ms. Wilke reviewed the evidence, and by email dated 10 May 2022,

she replied: “It can often be difficult to get much out of signatures, but the oddities of letter shapes, particularly the “R,” “l,” and “n,” seem to indicate that the annotations may very well have been in the same hand,” concluding that the author’s presentation of the evidence showed a “compelling case.” This is reported in *Hydden Man*, p. 133, footnote 407.

ISSUE NO. 3: THE USE OF ‘R.S.’ BY RALPH SHELDON

The Sheldon as Shakespeare theory is based, in part, on a conclusion that Sheldon was also known under the initials of “R.S.,” initials used in both literary publications of Sheldon’s work (primarily in a 1577 translation of Belleforest novellas, and in a 1593 poetry anthology *The Phoenix Nest*) and in other third-party references to him in published works, particularly those by poet Nicholas Breton. An overall view of the methodology and documentation connected with this conclusion is included in *Hydden Man*, pp. 57-66, with additional summaries related specifically the Belleforest translation at pp. 158-63, and to the *Phoenix Nest* on p. 199-200. A further discussion of an R.S. letter published by Nicholas Breton is included at pp. 230-32.

QUESTION: Given that the initials “R.S.” are a very frequent pairing, how can you be assured that the reference is to Ralph Sheldon, and not some other early English writer also R.S.?

ANSWER: In general, there are three parts to this answer:

(1) The subject matter and source material show strong relationship to Sheldon's life, and particularly in the case of the two Sheldon literary works, to the Shakespeare oeuvre.

(2) In the case of the *Phoenix Nest*, the Harvard editor of the 1931 modern edition of the book, Hyder Edward Rollins, thought that the unknown identity of its editor R.S. – referred to as an "Inner Temple Gentleman" in the work – as the major question presented by the work, and he exhaustively investigated all reasonable possibilities – including all known members of the Inner Temple with initials "R.S." – to no avail. He reported on his investigation in detail in his edition of the work.

(3) In the case of both Sheldon literary works there is evidence of deliberate obfuscation of the identity of R.S., especially incontrovertible in the case of the *Phoenix Nest*. In the *Nest*, the fact that Rollins, despite his extensive investigation into members of the Inner Temple, found no evidence that R.S. was, in fact, a member of the Temple, is particularly damning. The poets included in the anthology were all highly regarded Oxford poets, and would have been fully apprised of the identity of the editor of the anthology, who personally obtained the original manuscripts of the original poems included in the collection from each individual poet. Such an elite group would also have been familiar with the connection – or lack thereof – of the editor R.S. to the Inner Temple. The fact that nonetheless the work was published indicates that even if the impression was, at best, misleading, the obfuscation was viewed as benign, and most possibly, necessary. Given the obvious depth of the shrouding of the identity of the writer Shakespeare – a shroud which remains,

even after 400 years – it must be expected that the lengths taken to disguise the writer's identity were exceedingly broad, and even extreme. Especially given the evidence that the R.S. identity was deliberately obfuscated in the cases of the writer's own published literary works, one can fairly conclude – with the other evidence provided – that the masked "R.S." identity was that of the disguised writer, Ralph Sheldon, aka Shakespeare.

ISSUE NO. 4: THE OLDER AGE OF SHELDON

Sheldon was born in 1537, nearly three decades before the actor Shakspere, born in 1564. This obviously affects the dating of the plays and other writings identified to Shakespeare.

QUESTION: Given the large discrepancy between the two men, what evidence would support Shakespeare as an older man (Sheldon) as opposed to a much younger man (Shakspere)?

ANSWER: Actually, as outlined below, there is considerable evidence that indicates that the writer was an older man, recognized as such in contemporary commentaries, and a man with old-fashioned writing practices.

Four examples are cited below:

(1) The 1609 Quarto of *Troilus & Cressida* includes a preface to the play entitled "A Never Writer, to an Ever Reader. News." The preface is effusive in its praise for the author: "So much and much savored salf ot wit is in his comedies that they seem, for their height of pleasure, to be born in the sea that brought forth Venus. Amongst all there is none more witty than this. . ."

There is then a warning that follows: “And believe this, that when he is gone and his comedies out of sale, you will scramble for them and set up a new English inquisition.” The original title page to this Quarto did not include this preface. However, for some unknown reason, while the printing the original Quarto, the printer stopped printing, canceled the title page, reset the type of the upper half of it, and added the new preface before the text. Thus, there are two extant variants of the 1609 Quarto, with the preface printed only in the second, later variant. At the time of this printing in 1609, Sheldon would have been 72 years old. By contrast, Shakspere would have been 45 years old, hardly an age when critics would be alerting readers to his imminent death.

(2) In June 1984, *Notes & Queries* published a letter from L.C. Horne that discussed a little known volume of poetry, *Envies Scourge, and Vertues Honour* published in 1599 (STC 15107.7) by unknown writer, ‘M.L.’ The article prints part of the text (Sigs a8^{v}-B1^{R}):

My selfe is sted a reverend with have blamed
Without desert, whereof I am ashamed.
Pardon sweet wit (which hast a liberall part
    of pure infusion in thy happy braine)
My sorrowing sobs have bloodlesse left my hart,
that giddy rage so cleare a spring did staine,
Let worthlesse lines bee scattered heere and there,
But verses live supported by a speare.

As noted by Horne, the work is dedicated to to Thomas Paget, Treasurer of the Middle Temple in 1599, it clearly echoes the satires of poets Joseph Hall and John Marston in the late 1590s. These satires (see *Hydden Man*, pp. 212-17)

chastised a so-called “Labeo” for the lascivious nature of the writer’s more recent works, with specific indications that the satire referred to Shakespeare and his 1593 work, *Venus & Adonis*. This later poem by M.L. – with it references to “sweet wit” and “speare” – would seem to be also be about Shakespeare, and seems to offer an abject apology for an earlier attack that is unidentified but in the same vein as those of Hall and Marston.

What most puzzled Horne, however, about M.L.’s verse is its use of the word ‘reverend’ – a term that Horne noted “normally implied a fairly advanced aged in the recipient” and also had a religious connotation. As this certainly would not apply to the actor Shakspere (who, in 1599 was 35 years old), Horne could not understand the use of the term to the writer Shakespeare. Of course, as applied to Ralph Sheldon, who in 1599 was 62 years old (and a revered member of the Middle Temple), the use of ‘reverend’ to describe the man whom M.L. previously “blamed without desert, whereof [M.L. is] ashamed” makes far more sense.

(3) The analysis of the “Hand D” Addition to the play *The Booke of Sir Thomas More* provoked more discussion about the writer Shakespeare’s old-fashioned writing practices. In support of “Hand D” as the work of Shakespeare, the eminent Shakespearean editor J. Dover Wilson, compared the spelling in the Hand D portion of *Thomas More* with that of other plays in the Shakespeare canon. According to Wilson:

> These spelling [of 370 specified words in Hand D] are, for the most part, unusual forms for writers of the period. They are old-fashioned; and it is unlikely, to say the least of it, that any two authors would be equally old-fashioned in the spelling of all these words. It is, therefore, very encouraging to find parallels in the quartos for every one of them. The accumulation of coincidences is by this time growing into an impressive pile. Can we

crown it by citing a spelling from both the Addition and the quarto which is not only old-fashioned but very old-fashioned?

Wilson answers affirmatively, citing the example of the use of "scilens" appearing once in Hand D Addition and eighteen times in *2 Henry IV*, and nowhere else in Elizabethan drama. Of this, Wilson wrote: "When coincidences accumulate, every additional one increasing the probability of the case, it only remains to decide the point at which probability passes into certainty." [This work of Wilson originally published in Dover Wilson, "Bibliographical Links between the Three Pages and the Good Quartos," in *Shakespeare's Hand in the Play of Sir Thomas More*, ed. A.E. Pollard (Cambridge University Press, 1923), p. 128; reported and discussed in Timothy Irish Watt, "The authorship of the Hand-D Addition in the Book of Sir Thomas More," in *Shakespeare, Computers, and the Mystery of Authorship*, eds. Hugh Craig and Arthur F. Kinney (Cambridge University Press, 2009), p. 139.]

This commentary by Watts is cited in The Arden Shakespeare edition of *Sir Thomas More*, ed. John Jowett (2011). Jowett notes: "Some of the items discussed [by Watt] show a charecteristic that has been noticed elsewhere of Shakespeare: that he is old-fashioned in his linguistic preferences." Jowett attributes this charecteristic as "perhaps because of his provincial origins in Stratford-upon-Avon" (Jowett, p. 449). It might be more logical to attribute this charectaristic of the writer to his advanced age, rather than a provincial dialect.

(4) In a highly technical analysis of the use of the auxiliary "do" in the language of the Elizabethan playwrights, Jonathan Hope (*The Authorship of*

Shakespeare's Plays, Cambridge University Press, 1994) found a startling anomaly.

In the early Middle England, questions could be formed without – or with – the used of the auxiliary verb "do." That is, the question could be "Went you home?" or alternatively "Did you go home?" – with the latter version (in Hope's terms, the "regulated" version) becoming the preferred modern usage. (Hope, 11). Hope compared this usage by Shakespeare and five other Elizabethan playwrights. From this, Hope expected that increasing usage of the more modern form ('do' or 'did') would indicate a later date of birth for the named playwright. (Hope, pp.17-20).

Here Hope found his anomaly: although Shakespeare and Marlowe apparently were both born in the same year (1564), Shakespeare had a far lower rate of usage of the modern form than Marlowe. And overall, Shakespeare's use of the modern form – with a strong preference for not using the 'do' verb – was very much lower than any of the other playwrights, all of whom were born after 1564. Although Hope noted that "individual variation" from a "central trend" might be expected among the six playwrights, he concluded: "Given the isolation of Shakespeare [as shown on a graph of the results with Shakespeare at the far end of the graph], it might be inferred that Shakespeare is the anomaly here" (Hope, p. 20).

Hope provides no explanation for this anomaly. He compares the usage across the plays, but finds no variation over the range of the plays (Hope, pp. 21-2). He tries to reconcile the reputation of Shakespeare with the finding: "It can also be pointed out here that despite the picture painted in literary studies

of Shakespeare as a dramatic and linguistic innovator, this is one linguistic feature which could well have struck his contemporaries as old-fashioned" (Hope, p. 21).

Maybe this anomaly can best be explained in another way. Maybe the writer Shakespeare was not the actor Shakspere but rather Ralph Sheldon, a man who was – in fact – 27 years older than Marlowe, and much older than any of the other playwrights sampled?
