Someone Ought To Write a Book About This

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It looks less and less likely that I will get around to the major project on names toward which my thinking, research, and publications for the past several years seem all to have inclined me. As a sexagenarian, I have little time left in the profession, my every third thought now being on retirement, and, with this, there is the diminishing store of energy. Some young member of the Society may wish to undertake this project, which I envision as a book-length study, and to take advantage of suggestions I offer here for its content and scope. It would introduce those who care about Early Modern English culture (1500-1700) to the many ways names were disguised or encoded in the expression of that period, in literature in particular, though certainly not exclusively so. I have in mind the verbal plays on names, especially the puns and quibbles, the visual or pictorial puns (rebuses), and the scrambled letters (anagrams). The book would consist largely of a gathering of examples of such treatments that could serve in the way of a primer to convince scholars that this practice was indeed widespread and to alert them as to the signs of its presence, revealing habits of reference that have not hitherto, in my judgment, sufficiently informed the way we read texts.

The names of chief concern to me are those of real people, not those of purely literary or fanciful creations. When present in literature, these are names of those, typically, that have had some connection with the literary work itself—they hide/reveal the authors or others who have helped produce the works or the real subjects of topical comments or situations. Disguised names encouraged and made possible the joy of detection and recognition, especially the satisfaction of identifying some one being incriminated for major or minor faults, as in satire. But names of real people served as the grounds for such ingenious and playful manipulation in various contexts of life in this period, not just in what we would call literary contexts.

Let me illustrate first with what should be a familiar passage, Shakespeare's epitaph:

GOOD FREND FOR IESVS **SAKE** FORBEARE,
TO DIGG THE DVST ENCLOASED HEARE!
BLESTE BE YE MAN YT **SPARES** THES STONES
AND CURST BE HE YT MOVES MY BONES.

There you have it (in my emphases)—"SAKE SPARES"—a play on the name of the famous man herewith interred. The few examples that follow, all of my own detection, are included here to suggest how distinctive, sometimes peculiar, are the ways they treated names.

1. Henry Chettle, the man who in 1592 produced a book (*Groatsworth of Wit*) attacking an actor-turned-playwright as an "upstart Crow" and "the onely Shake-scene in a countrey," offered a generous apology in his very next book. Those scholars who think this apology was not directed to Shakespeare, and there are quite a few, might well ponder the words in Chettle's expression: he "did not," Chettle says, "so much **spare**" one particular playwright as he wishes he had.

2. This same book contains a beast fable filled with badgers, foxes, sheep, and dogs, used as a cover for some story of religious persecution in 1592. When we take the context of the fable into account, of puritans and other left-leaning separatists and the government's response to such threats, we should be able to notice that the "**yoonge** whelpe" (that is, young dog) that harries an innocent badger must be Richard **Young**, the most active and vicious of Archbishop Whitgift's persecutors of religious dissidents.

3. The puzzling way Elizabeth's favorite courtier, Christopher Hatton, signed his personal letters to her with what looks like four triangles makes good sense when we understand that the triangles are **hats**, one of the plural forms of which, **hatten**, stands for his name. That there are **four** of them suggests part of the first name, the Christo**four**. A **chi** suggesting the first syllable in **Christ**opher is usually visible in one or another of these triangles.

4. Very few have accepted the suggestion made over a century ago by F. G. Fleay that a 1592 account of "A young Heyre or Cockney, that is his **Mothers Darling**" (emphasis in the original text) refers to **Thomas Lodge**, a London writer of some note in the 1590s. What we have here, surely, as I have argued in an *ELN* article, is a phonetic anagram in the London speech of the time for his name—**Motha's Do'leg**—or something very close thereto. (The name **Lodge** was often then anagrammatized, especially to **Goldey.**)

5. R. B. McKerrow could see why the fish on the device (emblem, woodcut) on the cover of the first quarto of *Hamlet* would fit as part of a rebus for its publisher Nicholas **Ling**, a **ling** being a fish, but he could not interpret the honeysuckle in the woodcut. Several Elizabethan spellings of **honeysuckle**, which are there in the *OED*, show that it could well have served in several ways as an anagram for **Nicholas**—for one, **honisocle = Nicholes.**

6. There seems to be some doubt as to whether this same Ling was the publisher of the 1600 poetic miscellany *England's Helicon*. There need not be. The title presents an anagram of his name: **Nichola(e)s Li(e)ng.** In many ways titles at the time hinted at the names of the authors or publishers.

7. As a final example of the kind of material that, fleshed out into full detail and comment, would constitute the substance of the book I have imagined, I note here briefly the most complex rebus or set of rebuses from the English sixteenth century that I know anything about. In the margins of a MS poem dated 1588 in praise of *The Faerie Queene* that my colleague Joseph Black recently found in the Edinburgh Library is an elaborate set of drawings. The name of the poem's author appears nowhere. But if one "reads" carefully these drawings, which are of **toes** and **mazes** and of **hares**, and many other elements, if one understands that the Elizabethan name for the **hare** was **Wat**, then one can see in the various interconnected rebuses, of which there are at least six, that the author must have been covertly declaring himself to be **Thomas Watson** ("**Wat's–in Toe–maze**"). The poem and these rebuses are described and analyzed by Black and me, respectively, in *Spenser Studies*, Volumes 15 and 16.

The book would offer, say, one hundred (a nice round number) of the best and most representative examples of names disguised or coded in the period, and present them in such a way, if we understand the practice of hiding or revealing names, as can become readily available to us as readers of that culture today. The examples as presented would have no connecting discourse, be separated from each other on the pages by white spaces. They together would constitute, by implication, an account of many of the possibilities used at the time for such treatment. They might well, I can imagine, move from the simple to the complex in treatment. They might be presented in clusters of examples—of plays on names in heraldry, in shop signs, in printers' devices, in titles of literary works, in the opening several lines of literary works, in the scrambled versions of names that occur in various contexts, especially in literary satire, and in the attributions of authors of printed works. There might also be, I imagine, one cluster of examples of what would be labeled *dubia*, especially for those illustrative of efforts of anti-Stratfordians to find various names encoded in the works we attribute to Shakespeare.

There might be as well, perhaps in an appendix, brief accounts of important modern studies that help us understand these practices, the comments of McKerrow on rebuses, for example, in his study of printers' devices, of Franklin Williams on the various ways names and initials in the front parts of books were versions of real names and initials. And there might be, printed in full, probably in an appendix, whatever comments writers at that time made about these practices, George Puttenham on anagrams, William Camden on rebuses, and Thomas Blount on the art of "Devices," to name the most obvious; and there might be relevant material from the French, on which accounts and practices the English apparently relied for descriptions of what they were doing and for models to be imitated. An introduction to this primer might well attempt to lay down some basic principles about this way with names. It might comment, to suggest some topics, on the fluidity of spelling, on the abbreviations and contractions practiced in writing that might well factor into name manipulation, and on some of the relevant distinctions between the secretary and the italic hands. When Will Kemp refers in 1599 to a place he calls **Cullen**, we need to

recognize that he has split **d** into **c** and **l**, which split easily recommends itself in the italic hand, in order to produce his anagram for **Lunden**.

The hundred examples would come from wherever they can be found, scattered haphazardly as they are throughout the primary literature and scholarly comment on this period. I had in mind that about twenty would come from my own published work. Twice that many at least could come from the pages of *Notes & Queries* where this kind of material has often found a place. Gathered together in one book, these examples ought to elevate the consciousness of us all as to this habit of mind and practice. As it is now, discussions of particular examples, many of which are brilliant in their ingenuity and convincing in their argument, are all over the place throughout the vast library of published work, unable to make the necessary general impression. And many examples lie undetected because scholars are unaware of how pervasive and distinctive the practice was, or else are unwilling to believe that it was so large a part of the mind set of the period. The examples in this book, the patterns of treatment they reflect, will encourage scholars to take seriously suspicions they have that real names are being suggested through a kind of code in texts they study.