

Anatomy of an Historic Literary Breakthrough:

The Long-Sought Solution to Shakespeare's *Sonnets*: Hank Whittemore's *The Monument* and the Coming Shakespeare Earthquake

It is surely mere coincidence that Hank Whittemore's groundbreaking study of Shakespeare's *Sonnets*, *The Monument* (published April, 2005), appears in print on the 100th anniversary of the publication of Albert Einstein's revolutionary paper on what is now known as the Special Theory of Relativity, but it is certainly fitting. Although in quite distinct fields, the theories put forward in the authors' respective publications resolve a host of fundamental contradictions and conundrums in their respective disciplines, with remarkably simple and economical solutions that, however, require suspending belief in most commonly held views of their respective subject matters and accepting conclusions that appear at first glance to be preposterous and basically impossible. Just as Einstein began with only a few supporters in the community of physicists after his paper was published in September of 1905, Whittemore has won support for his solution to the Great Shakespeare Sonnet Conundrum from several notable scholars and lay Shakespeare enthusiasts, but has yet to convince the broader community of Shakespeare scholars or the general public, in the several months since the publication of *The Monument*. But since Whittemore's solution to the mysteries of *Shakespeare's Sonnets* is just as powerful and well-supported by evidence as Einstein's solution to the crisis in physics at the turn of the last century, there is every prospect that it is only a matter of time before the central thesis of *The Monument* becomes the new orthodoxy by which Shakespeare, his life, and his works—all of them—will be understood.

History in the Making

Because of the above, Whittemore's *The Monument* will some day, probably rather sooner than later, come to be hailed as the most important work of Shakespeare scholarship ever written, just as many feel Einstein's 1905 paper to be for physics. By rights it should share this honor with Thomas Looney's 1920 book that first identified Edward De Vere, 17th Earl of Oxford as the flesh and blood man behind the "William Shakespeare" alias. Perhaps the eventual wide circulation of Whittemore's book will restimulate interest in Looney's groundbreaking work, on the shoulders of which *The Monument* stands, but in the end, it will be *The Monument* that will be far more widely read, and which will finally put the great Shakespeare controversy to rest. It will do this by presenting an airtight case for exactly what *Shakespeare's Sonnets* are about, what each line of every sonnet means in the context of a unified theory of what the entire 154 sonnet cycle is about, and in so doing reveal that only one person in Elizabethan England could have been the author, and that person was *not* William Shaxpere (aka "Shakespeare") of Stratford-on-Avon, the putative author bequeathed us by tradition, but Oxford/De Vere, recognized by contemporaries and historians alike as playing a central role in the Elizabethan Renaissance in drama and in literature in general, but who left us very few literary writings in his own name.

The remainder of this preface will seek to justify these admittedly bold claims. Or rather, it will seek to set the context for the reader to appreciate the power of the argument that Hank Whittemore makes, which argument will in fact justify these claims.

The Present Muddle

I believe that few Shakespeare scholars would argue with the assertion that the *Sonnets*, taken as a whole, could be aptly characterized by the famous phrase coined by Winston Churchill in a totally different context, “a riddle wrapped in a mystery inside an enigma.” Many scholars over the years have fancied themselves to have resolved one or two of the outstanding mysteries embedded in this sonnet cycle; only a very few have felt they had really made plain what the entire cycle, and every sonnet in it, meant in a coherent way, and these few have failed to persuade very many others. Yale professor John Hollander in the latest, heavily revised edition of the *Complete Pelican Shakespeare*, states this reality as succinctly as anyone. Referring to the metaphor employed by William Wordsworth, that the sonnets were the “key” to Shakespeare’s heart, Hollander writes, “We would have to conclude that what in fact he [Shakespeare] unlocked [with the “key”, the *Sonnets*] was a cabinet containing a coffer with its own lock whose combination no one has been able to discover.” He goes on to observe that “the sonnets as a whole are a great puzzle,” and that “with the key of the sonnet Shakespeare unlocked a chest...full of enigmas of various sorts,” that Hollander goes on to catalog.

Some of the principal mysteries, for which few scholars even claim to have explanations, include:

- are the sonnets about real people, with real relationships to the real author, or are they purely fictive devices;
- why are sonnets 1-127 written about and to a man;
- who is that man;
- who is the “dark lady” of 128-152;
- who is the “rival poet” of 72-76;
- is the order of the sonnets as published the one intended by the author, if so, why, and if not, is there a different, intended order, and if so, what is it
- why did the cycle appear in 1609;
- why was it totally ignored by contemporaries and vanish from history almost as soon as it appeared;
- who is the dedicatee with the initials “W.H.”;
- if the author was William Shaxpere of Stratford and the young man the Earl of Southampton, as many believe, how could a commoner write like this to and about a leading lord;
- how could Shaxpere have even had any kind of relationship to Southampton;
- and the list goes on.

And when one gets down to the issues raised and problems posed by specific sonnets, quatrains, couplets, lines, phrases and specific word usages, the questions become legion.

These myriad mysteries have confounded generations of scholars. “Plausibility” has ruled the day. Those willing to propose solutions to one or more of these mysteries have inevitably been unable to find one unifying solution that resolves them all. They have been reduced to arguing that it is “plausible” that the meaning of such and such is this or that. The result is a “solution” for one mystery that is unrelated to, incoherent with, or even contradictory to, the “solutions” for

other mysteries. The term which I believe best describes the nature of these efforts is *ad hoc*, as contrasted with systematic. Only a handful of scholars have risen above the others and at least attempted to find a unifying theme, but at the expense of ignoring passages that didn't fit.

The good news is, this is as it should be. The inability of scholars to come up with one unifying understanding that knits all the sonnets together into a coherent whole, and which explains all of the mysteries by that same understanding, is the means by which we can know that all existing attempts to comprehend the *Sonnets* are failures.

Otherwise put, we have a reliable metric for knowing when we've got it right. When a single overarching explanation is able to make sense out of every sonnet, even every line of every sonnet, and by the same token resolves every mystery mentioned above, based on one coherent, internally consistent, self-reinforcing principle of how to understand the *Sonnets*, with nothing left out that can't be thusly consistently understood, we will know we've got it right. Something so intricate, so varied, so variegated, so almost infinite in "plausible" *ad hoc* explanations for tiny facets of the whole, as are the 2155 lines that comprise the sonnet cycle, either has no solution at all, or it has at best one. If one is shown to exist, the search is over, there can't be another one waiting to be unearthed. This kind of 100% coherence is the proof and guarantee of correctness.

For if indeed a theory meets this almost unimaginably rigorous requirement, its very ability to do so proves it has to be correct. This is because the likelihood that a totally erroneous theory could exist that by mere chance would "coincidentally" appear, falsely, to satisfy the number of specific things to be gotten right, which number is well over 10,000 (2155 lines, easily 8,000 important words in context, plus hundreds more combinations of lines into couplets and quatrains, a coherent meaning for every one of which must be shown) is easily one in trillions, probably closer to one in sextillions. Imagine solving a very large, dense crossword puzzle. Now try to imagine the odds against their being another solution involving entirely different words, each one also matching the definitions, that coincidentally also worked out as a crossword. The odds against that are effectively infinite. The analogy fits the sonnet case very well. For an erroneous solution to the sonnets, such as Whittemore's, to "accidentally" or "coincidentally" appear to solve everything, and yet be totally wrong, is about as likely as a roomful of monkeys at typewriters starting to type out the works of Shakespeare and other great writers, by mere random key strokes, as the tale is told in a famous short story.

The choice for scholars, and for the general public, then, is to decide on two, and only two, underlying issues, in order to appreciate Hank Whittemore's breakthrough. The first is to accept at least the possibility that there may be such a "unified field theory" solution, and to be willing to grant that *if* such a solution is claimed, the proper course is to give it a fair hearing and decide for oneself if it really satisfies the criteria above. The alternative is to make the assumption that "naw, there can't be a solution" and that the sonnet cycle will be taken *ex hypothesi* to be an unintelligible *mishegas* that was never meant as a coherent work. While many scholars have come to this conclusion, one would hope that in the face of Whittemore's claim to have found a unified solution, they would suspend their disbelief at least long enough to give Whittemore's presentation a fair hearing.

The second issue is to adopt a rigor with respect to Mr. Whittemore's interpretation, and all other competing exegeses. That rigor is to demand that at least to start, any analysis limit itself to what's actually in the text of the sonnets. This is intended to rule out speculation and the "plausibility" defense, the method of taking isolated lines and quatrains and speculating on what they might mean. As the reader will discover, Whittemore begins by focusing on what is actually

said in a number of “signature” passages where rather clear meanings are so near the surface they all but jump out at any reader willing to just read what is written, without the blinders of prior misguided efforts to overlay the actual text with speculative interpretation. Most amazing is how many of these passages exist in which rather clear meanings have been overlooked in the rush to create “plausible” speculations about what they *might* mean.

With these two decisions made—to give Whittemore’s reading of the *Sonnets* a fair and open-minded hearing to judge for oneself if he has, in fact, resolved everything with one overarching theory, and to examine through Whittemore’s eyes what is actually being said in a number of crucial passages and to eschew speculation about them—the reader will be prepared for a most singular journey through seemingly familiar territory now visible through totally different lenses.

“Hidden in plain view”

What is amazing is not that Whittemore has at last solved a 394-year-old literary mystery, but that no one had solved it previously. Edgar Allen Poe’s great short story of the purloined letter comes to mind. In *The Purloined Letter*, the Paris police are trying to recover an incriminating letter in the possession of a high government official. After the police have searched his office at night in vain, the hero of the story is asked by the police inspector to help. He does so, and solves the problem by “thinking out of the box,” and intuiting that the official has probably “hidden” the letter in plain view, the last place police investigators are likely to look, since they expect that something so important to the official would of course be “hidden”. In fact, the letter, in a tattered envelope, is in the official’s letter holder. In the same manner, the sonnet cycle, taken as a whole, contains numerous passages whose meaning is right there, “hidden in plain view”, unrecognized by scholars who never thought to look for it there, choosing instead to “read into” such passages concocted “plausible” speculations. Whittemore’s method has consisted in part in being able to recognize the true and obvious meaning of these key passages, which are all coherent and consistent with each other, and using the revelations so extracted to create a hypothesis that then permitted him to dig deeper into less obvious passages and begin to turn his hypothesis into a theory.

Delivering a lecture in 2003, Mr. Whittemore asked his audience if they had ever seen examples of a type of black and white visual trick drawing, which when first looked at looks like the face of a hag facing left, but which, if stared at long enough, suddenly “flips” in the mind to be the picture of a beautiful woman facing right. Looked at longer, the drawing flips back again. There are many pictures of this genre, including Escheresque drawings of black and white diamonds in a parquet pattern that alternately appear to be recessed or protruding. Whittemore used this to illustrate the “flip” required to be able to suddenly see, clearly, unambiguously, what previous generations have missed. Once the reader reads Mr. Whittemore’s explanation of what he sees in these crucial passages, he too will then read the original lines and “flip” and the true meaning will jump out, and prompt the mental exclamation, “how could I not see this before, how could hundreds of the best scholars not see this before?”

The Scientific Method

There is an accepted popular term for the kind of “flip” that Mr. Whittemore will induce the reader to make: “paradigm shift.” The term comes from Thomas Kuhn’s 1962 book *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, one of the most profound studies of its type ever written. Kuhn makes several points relevant to the present discussion. First is that science advances in

two different ways, along two distinct tracks. There is the incremental advance of science within each discipline where each scientist expands the discipline within each scientist's small niche. Each discipline operates according to accepted basic principles that all trained scientists within that discipline typically accept. However, in the history of science, all disciplines have come to points of crisis, where certain observations, certain facts, can't be explained within the existing assumptions and basic principles. Ultimately, someone comes up with an entirely or largely new understanding that turns some important aspects of the previous "prevailing assumptions" on their head: a "paradigm shift". Three that come to mind are Copernicus's overturning of the Ptolemaic system, Einstein's overturning of the Newtonian universe, and, less dramatic but just as true a paradigm shift, the hypothesis of continental drift, first proposed in 1915 by Wegener, but not generally accepted for decades until other discoveries led to the fuller theory of plate tectonics on the earth's surface, which revolutionized paleogeology and our understanding of earthquakes and volcanoes.

Mr. Whittemore has discovered the new paradigm that resolves all of the issues concerning the *Sonnets*, by shifting the conventional paradigm by which the *Sonnets* have been studied heretofore. Certainly no scientific discipline ever had even a fraction of the number of unanswered questions and mysteries as the discipline of Shakespearean sonnet analysis; if ever a field of study cried out for a "paradigm shift," it is this one.

Kuhn's second important point is that such paradigm shifts are almost always made by people only loosely connected to the established "experts" in the discipline, or perhaps not connected at all. Einstein was not a professor, was largely self-educated, and was way outside of the mainstream of the scientific establishment of his day when he developed relativity theory. Kuhn documents dozens of similar examples. And he explains the reason why. It goes to the heart of the creative process. Creativity requires combining disparate ideas in ways not previously thought of, of "thinking outside of the box," to use today's popular phrase; above all, not to be bound by the limitations of the underlying assumptions of the prevailing discipline, as at least some of those very assumptions are bound to prove wrong. Yet, the social pressures to conform within academic and scientific disciplines is very strong, and few who are within the confines of such disciplines ever find the psychological strength to escape the shackles and truly think freely about contrary basic assumptions. The 9/11 Commission's 2004 report made the same point concerning the intelligence community when it accused it of "group think."

So it should be no surprise that it is an individual like Hank Whittemore, a relative newcomer to the arena of Shakespeare studies, with no academic "credentials" in the field, who was finally able to see what has lain "hidden in plain sight" all these centuries. He brought to the endeavor a fascinating background that might very well become the stuff of biography after this present book achieves the public acclaim that is bound to come, having been an actor, an xx, an xxx, an xx, and many other occupations on the way to his present avocation.

Finally, Whittemore's work constitutes the first true "theory" of the *Sonnets* of which I am aware. By theory, I mean an attempt to explain the *Sonnets* by one unified explanation. Others have proposed theories for specific sections or passages of the *Sonnets*, or for one or the other of the general mysteries I listed, but none I know of have claimed to have found a single unifying thread, conception or idea that unlocks every line of every sonnet, and resolves the mysteries. (The one exception is A.L. Rowse, who proposed that the *Sonnets* are intended to be historical, with which conclusion Whittemore would wholeheartedly agree, but in his execution of his hypothesis, Rowse fails to attempt to explain the meaning of every sonnet in terms of his general hypothesis.)

Birth and Growth of a Theory

Mr. Whittemore was long intrigued by the *Sonnets*, precisely because scholars had been so singularly unsuccessful in making sense of a body of poetry generally held to be one of the greatest in any language. After years of fruitless attempts at coming up with his own explanation, he finally noticed some passages, groups of lines within certain sonnets, of a sort that I call “singularities,” where a plain meaning somehow suddenly jumped out at him. He quickly formed a conjecture, that led him to apply the same meaning to other central passages, and like doing a crossword puzzle, each successive, successful application of his conjecture to new passages allowed him to unlock yet other passages previously not intelligible. His conjecture became a hypothesis, a clear statement of the suspected architecture of the entire sonnet cycle, and what it was all about. This occurred in the late 1990s.

He then proceeded to test the hypothesis by applying it systematically to every line of every sonnet. Early on in this phase, Whittemore wrote up a 5-part summary of his hypothesis and evidence supporting it, and announced it on an Oxfordian listserv, which generated about as much excitement as the sound of one hand clapping. I happened to be one of the few who followed up and requested a copy of the 5-part report.

This was in 1999. I was bowled over. The possibility of solving the *Sonnets* by this hypothesis was exhilarating and exciting. I told Whittemore at that time that *if* further research confirmed his hypothesis, and *if* he could apply it successfully to every line of every sonnet, he would have achieved something stupendous. The operative word was *if*, because if his hypothesis was found to break down, say, on the “dark lady” sonnets, or fail in some other way, it would be proven wrong. It wasn’t enough to account for, say, 50% of the sonnets and/or mysteries. Or even 90%. It needed to account for 100%.

Well, five years and thousands of hours of work later, Mr. Whittemore has completed that task, glossing every single line of every sonnet, examining the usage of every important word, including how the same word is used in the plays to help determine its meaning in its sonnet context. His hypothesis of 1999 has become a full-blown theory. Applying the new paradigm, Whittemore unlocked clear meanings for sonnet after sonnet, until he had accounted for all 154, without finding a single sonnet that failed to yield convincing readings consistent with his theory. While a few handfuls of lines in a number of sonnets have proved challenging, where a definitive reading is still elusive, there is no significant instance of a sonnet, a quatrain, or even a single line, that doesn’t “fit” within his new paradigm.

That fact, I argue, is the proof that he has solved this 400-year-old literary mystery. To reiterate the point, I find it inconceivable that a theory so logical, so compelling, so coherent and so closely fitting the text of the *Sonnets*, could somehow be all wrong. Because, as the reader will shortly see, Whittemore’s thesis cannot be partly correct. It is all or nothing, either totally correct, or totally wrong.

The honest reader is obliged, therefore, to judge for himself how well he thinks Mr. Whittemore’s theory does in fact account for every sonnet. What is not sufficient is to arbitrarily take any particular line, couplet or quatrain and state, in isolation from Whittemore’s overall thesis, “I reject Whittemore’s reading of this,” or “I think this passage means something else,” in favor of a “plausible” or *ad hoc* proposed meaning for that passage taken by itself. As long as the meaning of the line as presented by Mr. Whittemore is consistent with how he derives the meaning of every other line, Mr. Whittemore’s theory is supported. The reader must decide whether Mr. Whittemore has successfully demonstrated that his theory accounts for everything,

not whether the resulting reading of any particular line is agreeable to the prior prejudices of the reader. If Mr. Whittemore's theory passes the test of coherence, it must be accepted as the first, and probably the last, coherent reading of all the *Sonnets*. That coherence will be powerful, essentially irrefutable evidence that no alternate readings can be correct.

The remainder of this introduction will open the curtain on Mr. Whittemore's methodology by examining a few of the passages "hidden in plain sight" referred to above, demonstrating how their plain meaning has been overlooked until now.

Tongue-Tied by Authority

In closed, highly censored societies, exemplified by mid-19th century Russia, a style of writing often develops which has come to be called "Aesopian." To use the Russian example, the problem faced by the rising crop of generally youthful students, radicals and revolutionaries was an extremely severe censorship which made it impossible to openly publish what this generation wanted to say. Fortunately for them, the censors were generally literalists, who read for surface meaning and never looked for any other level or layer of meaning. As a result, the radicals developed a sort of coded way of expressing their real ideas, which appeared on the surface to be about innocuous topics of no concern to the censors, while imparting an entirely different, subversive meaning to the cognoscenti of the "movement" of that era who knew the code. Probably the most famous of such "Aesopian" works was Chernyshevsky's *What Is To Be Done*, which inspired an entire generation, including the future Marxist and founder of Russia's Social Democratic Party, Plekhanov, and V.I. Lenin, who plagiarized the title for a work of his own 50 years later.

Elizabethan England was nothing if not a tightly censored environment for writers. Writers of things not approved by the censors could not be legally published. All works had to be registered before publication. Thus, any writer who wanted to appear in print and say things unapproved by the censors had two choices: to find someone to publish his work illegally, no doubt using a pseudonym, or publishing anonymously; or to adopt the same "Aesopian" method later used in 19th century Russia (and many other contexts).

With this in mind, let us turn to one of the most singular lines in the entire sonnet series, line 9 of sonnet 66, "And art made tongue-tied by authority." More conventional sonnet interpreters understand this line correctly (at least partly so) than almost any other line in the entire cycle, namely, as a reference to censorship. But who is being censored, and why? Conventional readings answer this poorly if at all.

To properly approach these questions, it must be recognized that this phrase does not exist in a vacuum, and that the phrase "tongue-tied" appears three more times in succeeding sonnets, as follows:

Sonnet 80, line 4: To make me tongue-tied, speaking of your fame!

Sonnet 85, line 1: My tongue-tied Muse in manners holds her still,

Sonnet 140, lines 1-2: Be wise as thou art cruel; do not press
My tongue-tied patience with too much disdain;

In sonnets 80 and 85 especially, the context appears to be the same as in 66, that the author is inhibited from speaking his mind, is "tongue-tied," by the authorities. The interesting question for all other interpretations of the *Sonnets* is, why would the putative Shakespeare, who had two long dramatic poems in wide, popular and continuous circulation, and whose plays were being widely performed, including at the Court, and a few of which by the late 1590s were even finally being published, be censored in the writing of love poetry. Did any of the lyric poets, including

Oxford's rival Phillip Sydney, face censorship for their poetic works? I suppose, if one's hypothesis was that this was homo-erotic poetry, one could concoct the explanation that it was either censored, or the poet knew it would be censored, because of public disapproval of homosexuality. I shall dispense with the homosexual argument below, and believe it has no possibility of being the cause of the poet's being tongue-tied.

Other than the homosexual explanation, what in the *Sonnets* as we know them now could possibly have run afoul of the Elizabethan censors? Are the sonnets seditious? Not apparently. Is the poet discussing some abstract general condition of art being censored? The reference in sonnet 66 might be so construed, but the references in 80 and 85 (and 140) are unarguably in the first person. The poet is clearly saying that he is tongue-tied; his art, his Muse, is tongue-tied. I challenge the reader to come up with a convincing hypothesis as to why the sonnet cycle as it was eventually published, or any subset of individual sonnets, would run afoul of the Elizabethan censors, based on conventional readings of the *Sonnets*.

The only convincing explanation is that the sonnets themselves were written to pass censorship, and the poet is complaining that he can't say plainly what he would like to in them. So, it is something the poet wants to say publicly, but is constrained by the authorities from so saying it that is at issue. In other words, the *Sonnets* are the product of his being tongue-tied. The sonnets are his attempt to still say what he wants to say, but in ways that the authorities won't recognize and censor: the Aesopian method.

If this is so, the next question is, what is it he is trying to say that he is constrained from telling? Well, the answer to this question is the guts of Whittemore's thesis, which I will refrain from trying to summarize here. However, there are repeated clues that it concerns someone who is, or should be, famous, which succeeding generations, even millennia, will acknowledge.

Not "gilded monuments... shall outlive this powerful rhyme"

One of the most singular features of the sonnets is the repeated reference made in so many of them to the sonnets—to the entire set of them—as the vehicle that will both proclaim the fame of the subject and outlive not only both the poet and the subject, but all other monuments to all other historical figures! Quite a heavy claim! In fact, utterly extraordinary. A compilation of some of these, identified by sonnet number and line, follows:

17 1 Who will believe my verse in time to come,
17 14 You should live twice; in it and in my rhyme.
18 12 When in eternal lines to time thou growest:
19 14 My love shall in my verse ever live young.
55 1 Not marble, nor the gilded monuments
55 2 Of princes, shall outlive this powerful rhyme;
60 13 And yet to times in hope my verse shall stand,
60 14 Praising thy worth, despite his cruel hand.
63 13 His beauty shall in these black lines be seen,
63 14 And they shall live, and he in them still green.
74 3 My life hath in this line some interest,
74 4 Which for memorial still with thee shall stay.
81 9 Your monument shall be my gentle verse,
81 10 Which eyes not yet created shall o'er-read,
81 11 And tongues to be your being shall rehearse

81 12 When all the breathers of this world are dead;
 81 13 You still shall live--such virtue hath my pen--
 81 14 Where breath most breathes, even in the mouths of men.
 107 11 Since, spite of him [death], I'll live in this poor rhyme,
 107 12 While he insults o'er dull and speechless tribes:
 107 13 And thou in this shalt find thy monument,
 107 14 When tyrants' crests and tombs of brass are spent.

Collectively, these lines reach out to us like a message from the grave spanning four centuries, with a spine-tingling message: there is something in and about these sonnets that cries out to be told. The author/poet, only the greatest dramatist in history (and who knew he was great), had something he couldn't say in plain English, about himself and even more so about the object of these sonnets, the young man to whom most were clearly addressed, that succeeding generations would come to know of and consider highly important. "When all the breathers of this world are dead, You still shall live...even in the mouths of men" to come. "Thou in this (the sonnets) shalt find thy monument." "Not marble, nor the gilded monuments of princes, shall outlive this powerful rhyme." These are powerful assertions. Lest there be any doubt of this message, sonnet 55 is dedicated to this and no other theme:

55 1 Not marble, nor the gilded monuments
 55 2 Of princes, shall outlive this powerful rhyme;
 55 3 But you shall shine more bright in these contents
 55 4 Than unswept stone besmear'd with sluttish time.
 55 5 When wasteful war shall statues overturn,
 55 6 And broils root out the work of masonry,
 55 7 Nor Mars his sword nor war's quick fire shall burn
 55 8 The living record of your memory.
 55 9 'Gainst death and all-oblivious enmity
 55 10 Shall you pace forth; your praise shall still find room
 55 11 Even in the eyes of all posterity
 55 12 That wear this world out to the ending doom.
 55 13 So, till the judgment that yourself arise,
 55 14 You live in this, and dwell in lover's eyes.

"Your praise shall still find room/Even in the eyes of all posterity/That wear this world out to the ending doom" even after wars yet to come have destroyed the statues to all other famous people. The loved one's fame will last till the Second Coming! This is heady stuff! There is something really important here, in the author's view.

But what in the world could be so important about the author/poet, the subject of the poems, and their relationship, that cannot be openly stated at this time, and that yet generations to come would wonder at, seeing the sonnets as a timeless memorial and monument to...whom? The *Sonnets* never even identify the male subject to whom most are written by name. No theory that warrants serious consideration can overlook these lines or pretend they are not important. Any serious theory must adequately explain why the author believes these sonnets will be a timeless monument to Southampton to outlast all other monuments. By this criterion alone, no previous scholar measures up; no scholar of whom I am aware even attempts to explain why Shaxpere of

Stratford, the supposedly famous actor and playwright, would write such poems and claim they will outlive all other monuments to every other famous person in history!

It should be clear, parenthetically, why Whittemore chose *The Monument* as the title for his book—the author/poet is clearly and repeatedly describing the entire sonnet series as just that, a timeless monument and memorial to the unnamed subject of the first 126 sonnets.

Like the treasure buried by pirates, who leave a map, the sonnets are a map, their true meaning the treasure. We only need to learn how to read the map to unlock the treasure. As the main problem in reading a pirate map is knowing where the map is situated geographically so does one need, for the same reason, to properly situate the sonnets, recognize their context, discover “where” they are and what and when they refer to, and the map can then be followed to the treasure.

Could the poet’s love object be a fictive “Beatrice”-type device? Why would generations to come care a whit for such a character? Could the young man be just anyone? Why would someone relatively unknown be expected to be seen as famous, as extremely famous, decades and centuries later? Can the relationship be homosexual? How impossible that an Elizabethan would think that he could glorify a sodomic relationship in any age! Our possibilities are narrowing for who the loved one could be, and what about him, the poet, and their relationship, could be so extraordinary. In fact, these lines all but cry out that the buried secret must relate to matters of state, and therefore must involve the monarchy, which was the soul and center of Elizabethan society. What else could possibly carry enough importance to warrant such strong assertions?

Some Historical Anchors

Sonnet 107 has long been associated in the view of many scholars with the spring of 1603, chronicling the peaceful accession of King James after Queen Elizabeth’s death, and the release from the Tower of London on James’ orders of the 3rd Earl of Southampton, imprisoned since February of 1601 for his role in the Essex Rebellion, as Essex’s right hand man, and condemned to death but unexplainedly never executed. Whittemore shares this assessment, which is at the foundation of his understanding of the *Sonnets*. A smaller, but still sizeable, circle of scholars agrees that the male subject to or about whom the first 126 sonnets are addressed, the “fair youth” of sonnets 1-26, is also Southampton, a belief which Whittemore has also validated. With the known connection between “Shakespeare” and Southampton represented by the extraordinary dedications to *Venus and Adonis* and *The Rape of Lucrece*, the argument for a Southampton identification as the male subject of the sonnet cycle is strengthened to the point of certainty.

All the more surprising, then, that none of those who both understand 1603 as hailing Southampton’s release, and who see the *Sonnets* as written to and about him, appear to have made another very small leap that might have set them on the path that Whittemore took.

The small leap that scholars have not made is to recognize the overweening importance of sonnet 27, following on the heels of 1-26, which are permeated by a sense of well-being and gentle chiding of the subject (Southampton), by the poet/author. Sonnet 27 is possibly the most singular sonnet in the entire cycle. The tone abruptly changes from that of the previous 26 sonnets, and basically stays changed for the next 80 sonnets. Something awful has clearly happened. Southampton suddenly becomes to the poet as a “jewel hung in ghastly night.” The poet/author is in grief. The succeeding sonnets merely confirm the total change in tone. If the sonnets are about and to Southampton, and 107 is about his release from the Tower, it amazes

me that no one I am aware of has suggested that sonnet 27 refers to the day that Southampton went into the Tower, and was probably written by the grief-stricken author that very night. With 27-106 so nicely framed, if they are looked on as referring to the period of Southampton's confinement, all manner of possibilities for what they might mean pop out. Understanding these 80 sonnets as the chronicle of Southampton's incarceration from 1601-1603 represents one of Whittemore's first insights that began to unlock doors permitting other insights.

It should be noted here that if the youth is Southampton, then we have certainly taken an important first step toward a possible explanation of why the author/poet is making such grand claims for how his sonnets will live in the minds of men to the end of time—Southampton was a major historical figure of his day, involved in an infamous rebellion that terminated what seemed to be a very promising political career, who had a relationship to the Queen, and who went on after his release to resume that career under James I. That a sonnet cycle dedicated to him and his life would involve matters of state should be a given. If additionally the poet/author is, as claimed above, the 17th Earl of Oxford, the first lord of England, who was a well-known figure and once an intimate of the Court and of the Queen, the case is strengthened that we are looking at historical figures and important issues of politics in contemporary England.

What of the poet/author? Shaxpere, the shadowy figure from Stratford about whom vastly too little is known to jibe with being the author behind the “Shakespeare” name, and about whom what little is known doesn't jibe either? If the author of the *Sonnets* were the traditional candidate, someone whose public identity was never in doubt, the supposed well-known actor and playwright, then something is very awry in the state of Denmark...and England. Why would the poet/author of the *Sonnets* make frequent mention of going to his grave unheralded, unnoted, to all intent unknown? Shakespeare unknown? While his two major poems were still being reprinted and widely read? With his plays the rage in London and also at the Court? And why would he, a commoner, be writing sonnets to a convicted traitor, and expecting the traitor to be rehabilitated and become famous to future generations?

If the poet/author is a top nobleman (the only station from which anyone could have written the dedications), whose identity as “Shakespeare” and as the author of the sonnets is not publicly revealed, we have the only context that promises a possible solution to the riddle of what it is that the sonnets both conceal, and state for future generations (and that future generations will care about and admire monuments to). Sonnet 76's famous line 7, “That every word doth almost tell my name,” confirms that “Shakespeare” is not the author's real name, as nothing in the sonnets suggests “Shakespeare”—clearly there is some embedded mystery about the author's identity, which can at best be “almost told” in each sonnet.

The unraveling of this mystery, of the secret message that, once “out,” will make these sonnets a timeless monument to Southampton, the solution to this elaborate “pirate's treasure map,” is the subject of *The Monument*, so I will leave this line of discussion for the book. The point here is simply to establish that the *Sonnets* are very clear that there is something so monumentally important about the subject (the poet/author), the object (Southampton), and their relationship, that mankind to come will sit up and take notice, but which cannot be openly stated at this time, and must be “buried” in the sonnets. The *Sonnets* are the vehicle through which the author/poet is reaching out to posterity, the vehicle by which he seeks to *evade* the authorities, who have tied his tongue and prevented him from saying plainly and openly what he therefore is compelled to say, in a hidden, disguised fashion, in the *Sonnets*—again, the Aesopian method.

The sonnets must therefore have been written on two levels simultaneously, a surface level intended to fool the censors and other non-*cognoscenti*, and a deeper level that the author/poet

assuredly assumed would be understood by those contemporaries “in the know,” and eventually by all of posterity.

Shakespeare’s “Invention”: the Secret Code

Turning again to sonnet 76, line 6, we find another quite singular line, one of the most important clue-providing lines in the entire cycle, in which the poet/author is explicit about what he is doing, asking (the passage starts on line 5), “Why write I still all one, ever the same,/And keep invention in a noted weed.” The phrase “noted weed” is generally admitted to mean a disguise, or a particular set of clothes. So the author/poet is telling us in so many words that what he is writing in these sonnets is not what they seem to say, that he has an “invention” buried in the sonnets that is in disguise.

Sonnet 103 provides a further clue, where the author/poet is clearly saying that the subject of his poetry (Southampton) is clearly much greater in worth than the poetry itself. In lines 6 and 7 he instructs the subject to look in the mirror and gaze on his own face, which he will discover “over-goes my blunt invention quite.” In other words, Southampton’s real face, and real life existence, is far superior to the author/poet’s “invention,” but since the preceding 5 lines establish clearly that it is the author/poet’s poetry, as embodied in the sonnets, which is inferior to the real flesh and blood Southampton, the word “invention” clearly refers to the poetry. Or rather to the real, underlying meaning of the poetry, the meaning that is “disguised,” kept “in a noted weed.” The “invention” is the ability to hide the real story underneath a veneer that most readers, including the censors, are supposed to take as if it is all there is. Lines 5 and 6 clearly mean “Why do I write...and keep my writing (the sonnet series) in a disguise.” This line tells exactly what the poet/author is doing: creating an “Aesopian” vehicle to tell future generations some very important truths the author is not at liberty to disclose to his own generation.

The entirety of sonnets 76 and 105 strengthen this interpretation, and go on to make an astounding statement, one that is about as “hidden in plain sight” as it were possible to be, somehow overlooked by generations of scholars. Sonnet 76

- 1 Why is my verse so barren of new pride,
- 2 So far from variation or quick change?
- 3 Why with the time do I not glance aside
- 4 To new-found methods and to compounds strange?
- 5 Why write I still all one, ever the same,
- 6 And keep invention in a noted weed,
- 7 That every word doth almost tell my name,
- 8 Showing their birth and where they did proceed?
- 9 O, know, sweet love, I always write of you,
- 10 And you and love are still my argument;
- 11 So all my best is dressing old words new,
- 12 Spending again what is already spent:
- 13 For as the sun is daily new and old,
- 14 So is my love still telling what is told.

And 105:

- 1 Let not my love be call'd idolatry,

2 Nor my beloved as an idol show,
 3 Since all alike my songs and praises be
 4 To one, of one, still such, and ever so.
 5 Kind is my love to-day, to-morrow kind,
 6 Still constant in a wondrous excellence;
 8 One thing expressing, leaves out difference.
 9 'Fair, kind and true' is all my argument,
 10 'Fair, kind, and true' varying to other words;
 11 And in this change is my invention spent,
 12 Three themes in one, which wondrous scope affords.
 13 'Fair, kind, and true,' have often lived alone,
 14 Which three till now never kept seat in one.

Few scholars analyze these two sonnets together, despite their striking similarities and overlapping themes. 76 makes the dramatic, counter-intuitive claim that every sonnet is “ever the same,” “far from variation or quick change,” “barren of new pride” (content), and the poet rhetorically asks “why write I still all one, ever the same...[just] dressing old words new.” 105 continues this refrain, and becomes more specific about what this “same” content is: “all alike my songs and praises be to one, of one, still such and ever so,” “one thing expressing, leaves out difference,” and then the extraordinary “‘Fair, kind and true’ is all my argument, ‘Fair, kind and true’ varying to other words (recalling “dressing old words new”),” and “in this change (“varying to other words”) is my invention spent” (the same “invention” kept in a “noted weed” in 76).

These are sonnets about “you,” about “love,” (sonnet 76: “And you and love are still my argument”—two themes, obviously related) and about “fair, kind and true,” “three themes in one.” And the “two themes” of 76 and the three themes of 105 are somehow really the same subject, the subject of every single sonnet.

Unraveling what these “themes” really mean is the key to deciphering the code, understanding the “invention” (recall that in the dedication to *Venus and Adonis*, Shakespeare first announces this “invention,” describing the poem as “the first fruit of my invention,” and indeed, Whitemore has found that his code for the *Sonnets* significantly unlocks previously hidden meaning in *Venus and Adonis* (and *The Rape of Lucrece*, and *Phoenix and Turtle*) as well.) But the poet/author is explicit: every sonnet is about “you and love,” and about “fair, kind and true,” which are evidently three personages as well as “three themes,” because they “till now never kept seat in one” (as opposed to being three characteristics of one person, the beloved, which would be unified in the one person).

Sonnet 38 reinforces this interpretation, and makes clearer still that the loved one is one member of the trinity of “fair, kind and true.” “Thou thyself dost give invention light” reads line 8, confirming that “thou” is the subject and inspiration for the “invention.” And, foreshadowing 76, the poet writes that his Muse needs only one subject, namely pouring “thine own sweet argument” into “my verse.” If “fair, kind and true” of 105 is all his argument, and “thine own sweet argument” is poured into his verse, it follows that the “thou” of 38 is subsumed in “fair, kind and true.”

To give a teasing foretaste of the gems to be discovered in the full text of *The Monument*, I shall note a couple of supporting singularities: “ever the same” (76, l. 5) is the exact wording of Queen Elizabeth’s motto, which she often used when signing her name—suggested again in 105 by “ever so.” “Still one” and “to one, of one” suggests Southampton’s motto, “one for all and all

for one.” So, the constant theme would seem to involve Southampton, and Queen Elizabeth, and presumably the poet/author himself, at the very least.

In these two sonnets, then, Shakespeare here “confirms” Whittemore’s premise, namely, that the entire sonnet series, at least through 105, is about one single theme, with a starting presumption that that theme is the life, or some portion(s) of it, of the loved one (Southampton), the relationship between the poet/author (whose identity cannot be publicly revealed), and likely involving Queen Elizabeth. Any explanation that proposes more than one theme, or worse, denies that there are any consistent themes to be found at all, is compelled either to ignore these lines where the author/poet describes what he is doing with his “invention,” or to torture a contrived meaning out of them that defies sense.

The Aesopian Code

I provide the above instances, stealing slightly from his thunder, to demonstrate Whittemore’s method. Whittemore began by looking for just such singular lines and passages as those reviewed above, whose meaning, when for once viewed without the tinted glasses of preconception, all but leapt out at him, leading him to wonder why he was apparently the first person to ever see those meanings. Then he began “connecting the dots,” using the clear meanings in the first passages that he analyzed to gradually unlock other passages, treating the entire sonnet series as one huge crossword or acrostic puzzle, where every correct word discovered helps one figure out other ones.

Early on in his work, it suddenly hit him: a great number of the words used throughout the *Sonnets*, starting with the “fair,” “kind,” and “true” of sonnet 105, had to be code-words for concepts, or people, their surface meanings being the disguise, their code meanings being their true meaning. He quickly assembled a list of 30 or so such words, adding among others, “time,” “sun,” “beauty,” “sweet,” “friend,” “moon,” “rose,” and so on, that recurred in many sonnets, intuited what they might mean, and tested his hypothesis of what each might mean in every line in which each of these words occurred. Immediately, entire lines, couplets, quatrains and whole sonnets came alive with a clear meaning, that fit into one coherent conception of what each was about. Whittemore had finally found the “key” that Wordsworth pined for, and which has eluded readers and scholars for the last 200 years since the *Sonnets* were rediscovered.

Understood as a long, coded message, and approached as any competent code-breaker would approach it, the sonnet series finally began to yield its true meaning and message. Explaining the code, and applying it to every line of every sonnet, is the primary substance of *The Monument*. I only seek here to make clear that his method began with an effort to read and take seriously every line and passage where clear meanings were “hidden in plain sight”—relatively uncoded and more accessible—which led him to a point where he suddenly realized that the *Sonnets* as a whole were written in a consistent code, which merely had to be broken and deciphered to unlock the real meaning hidden in the sonnets. He had the code basically cracked by 1999, but insisted in spending the intervening 6 years refining his translation of all coded words, researching the use of these words in every play in which they appear, in order to deepen his appreciation of how Shakespeare tended to use these words, and wrestling with the coded meaning of certain passages that didn’t initially yield clear meanings as readily as others.

Love Poetry? Oh, Pleeese!

Most scholars have concluded that “love,” understood as romantic love, or erotic love, for the loved one, is what the *Sonnets* are mainly, if not exclusively, about. Sure, the word “love”

appears frequently enough, and clearly, the poet/author “loves” his subject, the young man (whether he “loves” the “dark lady” is open to question). No assumptions have done more mischief to the cause of understanding the *Sonnets* than this one. In place of a lengthy digression to try to prove this point, let me just observe that if this sonnet cycle belongs to the genre of Dante’s sonnets to Beatrice, Petrarch’s to Laura, and in England, Drayton’s, Daniel’s, and Phillip Sydney’s sonnet cycles, among others, the burden of proof is on he who makes such a claim, because almost nothing about the sonnets ties them to this tradition of lyric love poetry in the form of a sonnet cycle. Among many other differences, the “love” being related appears like no other love ever described in print, before or since.

The mystery starts at the beginning, where sonnets 1-17 urge the loved one, in no uncertain terms, to beget himself an heir. If the loved one were female, this would be strange indeed, since there is not a hint that the author/poet seeks to be the presumed lover’s partner in baby-making. But of course, the loved one is clearly male. This is even more curious. The theories that see romantic love as the theme are more or less compelled to conclude that the author/poet is either the actual, or the would-be, homosexual lover of the young man. Excuse me? Has the homosexual ever lived (at least prior to today’s climate of male homosexual couples desiring children), who urged his homosexual partner to beget himself an heir with some, any, female, in order to pass on his “beauty” and other fine qualities to posterity? I submit this is so peculiar that sonnets 1-17 definitely refute once and for all the homosexual conjecture. It is too preposterous for words.

The importance of the consistent message of these 17, that Southampton must make himself an heir, is generally overlooked. While the surface words used (see Whittemore’s code for their true meanings) appear to refer to the importance of passing on his beauty, what sense does that really make? Why would a man care about another man passing on his good looks to offspring, and feel as strongly about that as the poet clearly does in these sonnets? The reader must stand back and reflect that in Elizabethan England (as in so many pre-modern societies), the issue of leaving heirs behind, especially male heirs, was one of the most important issues any man faced, especially any nobleman, who risked having his House being divested of his entire fortune in land and wealth on his death, absent male heirs. And the royal house no less, in fact more so, shared this concern, to ensure smooth dynastic succession—witness Henry VIII’s obsession with creating a male heir, and the issue that absorbed popular attention in England from Elizabeth’s accession well into the 1580s, would she leave an heir to the throne. In light of the poet’s later assertions that the sonnets tell a story of over-arching importance for all succeeding generations, the hypothesis that the poet had a political, rather than a narcissistic, reason for Southampton to create an heir would appear far more promising.

The Homosexual Conjecture

What of the homosexual conjecture? Kathryn Duncan-Jones provides the best argument I have seen that salvages the notion that the theme of the *Sonnets* is “love” while eschewing the homosexual conjecture. In a passage from her website tackling the homosexual issue, and citing a passage from Montaigne that presumably refers to a kind of manly admiration among men, rather than erotic love in the modern sense, she writes:

“This passage (from Montaigne)—which obviously parallels the core despair of the sonnets—is not homosexuality in the erotic way, but something entwined with the pursuit of spiritual, cultural and masculine ideals: rebirth in an admirable brother. It's beside the point to say that sodomy was a mortal sin in the

Renaissance. By focusing on sexuality or impiety, we kill this manly virtue with a modern misinterpretation.”

Duncan-Jones’ effort is admirable as far as it goes, for recognizing the impossibility of the homosexual explanation. But it founders on her seeing the *Sonnets* as about the ups and downs of the poet’s relationship with a “depraved nobleman” and a “promiscuously tormenting Dark Lady”—essentially still the conventional view. What fails to occur to Duncan-Jones and others is that the sonnets are *not* about the “love relationship” itself—its claimed ups and downs, fickleness and betrayals—but about the life and fortunes of the loved one. The distinction is crucial.

That the sonnets are about the loved one, but not about the supposed “love” relationship between poet and subject, is reiterated throughout the first two-thirds of the sonnet series. Sonnet 103 clearly states:

103 11 For to no other pass my verses tend

103 12 Than of your graces and your gifts to tell;

All the sonnets, this says, are about Southampton’s “graces” and “gifts.” Many other passages convey the same message: the sonnets are the author’s paean to Southampton. Their subject isn’t the author’s “love” for Southampton, the sonnets are not about the quality of that love. The sonnets read nothing like the previous major sonnet cycles known to a literate audience in Shakespeare’s time, from Dante to Petrarch, and in England, Sidney, Daniel and Drayton, all of which are about the quality and intensity of the poet’s love for his archetypal woman-cum-goddess. The *Sonnets* are about Southampton, and the concern of the author is not the author’s love for him, but a concern for Southampton himself, and the necessity to tell a story that evidently needs telling in these sonnets because it is being told nowhere else. Shakespeare, whoever he is, is obsessed with creating a written record of secrets about Southampton that must be told, even if only for posterity

Is There Any Other Kind of Love?

Duncan-Jones does open the door to a perspective that is so obvious, once first noted, that the failure of any scholars that I know of to at least explore it is baffling. She describes the poet’s love for the youth as “rebirth in an admirable brother.” “Brother?” Uh-oh. What’s this? Is Duncan-Jones saying that romantic or erotic love for a man, or a woman, is not the only kind of love that a man can feel toward another man or woman? She doesn’t explore it, and that’s a shame. What if the emotional tie to the youth is brotherly? Surely, siblings who are close to each other describe their feelings for each other as “love.” In fact, as any parent knows, “love” is just as applicable to sibling-sibling, parent-child, and child-parent relationships, as to husband-wife romantic love. Surely, the possibility that the “love,” at least that for the youth, is akin to intra-family love, ought to have been examined long since by the community of Shakespeare scholars over the years, but apparently this view was too far “out of the box” for any scholars to have come up with it.

Moreover, if the love is “brotherly,” it needn’t imply blood relationship. Men have banded together in “brotherhoods” since time immemorial. What if Shakespeare was involved with Southampton in some scheme or activity that had to be kept secret from the authorities? Let’s posit that part of the scheme involved the youth marrying and creating an heir. Then, in sonnet 27, something goes horribly awry with this scheme, and the poet is despairing of ever seeing his “brother” again. Most of the next 60 sonnets seem all, in various ways, to refer to problems the

youth has—not “love” problems, but some other species of problem, such as being under penalty of death, among others.

Even more persuasive on the face of it, but if, and only if, one can at least temporarily push aside the apparent “impossibility” of it, should be the hypothesis that the poet’s “love” for the young man is fatherly—that Shakespeare is the actual father of the youth. In fact, as Whittemore so masterfully develops, this is precisely the solution to the mystery of why most of the poems are from a man to another man, a generation younger. Read from this perspective, all references to “love” for the youth fit the actual text of the sonnets far better than any of the *ad hoc* theories that postulate constant fickleness, viciousness, reconciliation within a romantic “love” relationship, and then a repeat of the cycle. Whittemore shows convincingly that the passages that have been interpreted this way, are actually praising the youth, while acknowledging that the youth has made some grave mistake—not spurning the poet’s love, but some more grievous error, which may have put his life in jeopardy—and that the poet shares some responsibility for the mistake—and it is the secret reality of their relationship that cannot be spoken of openly, that makes the poet “tongue-tied by authority,” and that compels writing the sonnets in code as an Aesopian work. If the youth is Southampton, surely his arrest, imprisonment, and condemnation to death, would more than qualify as a grievous mistake—and if the poet/author were involved with him, he, too, may share some portion of blame for this mistake.

The possibility that the poet/author could be Southampton’s biological father is an illustration of the importance of putting aside pre-conceived assumptions. On the face of it, to traditional scholarship, it is simply impossible, as the traditional candidate for the poet/author, Shaxpere of Stratford, was only a child when Southampton was born in 1574. I liken the mental shift required here to that required to accept that mass, length and time are not constant, but vary with one’s speed relative to the speed of light, the core “impossible” aspect of Einstein’s theory of special relativity. Two radical shifts are required if “Shakespeare” is to be Southampton’s father.

First, of course, it requires abandoning Shaxpere as the historical Shakespeare. The case for Edward de Vere, the 17th Earl of Oxford, is extremely strong, and the case for Shaxpere extremely weak, and while belief that Shaxpere is Shakespeare persists in most of academia, for all the reasons identified by Kuhn that explain the inherent conservatism of entrenched scholarly communities, interest in, and support for, the view that Oxford must be the real Shakespeare is steadily growing among the general public, and even in some corners of academia. The reader is encouraged to delve into the large and growing literature on this subject, which cannot be further discussed here.

What Whittemore adds to this debate, however, is arguably the most important evidence yet uncovered validating that Oxford was, in fact, Shakespeare. Everything comes back to the *Sonnets*, taken as a primary evidentiary source. If, in fact, the only possible coherent reading of the *Sonnets* requires the father-son hypothesis, just as the only coherent reading of a host of physical observations and laws required the mass, length and time variability hypothesis for Einstein, then no matter how implausible at first glance, that hypothesis must be taken as likely true, and all previous assumptions contradictory to that discarded as false. Whittemore’s theory reveals that not only must the author have been Southampton’s father, but also that he had to be Oxford, the first lord of England, the first peer on the court that tried and convicted Southampton and Essex in 1601, and the person solely responsible for behind-the-scenes negotiations with the Crown that ended up sparing Southampton’s life—although at a terrible price.

In short, if the story revealed in the *Sonnets* is true, then Shakespeare is without any doubt a pseudonym used by Oxford, and Southampton is Oxford’s son, for starters. (And there are many

more revelations that follow from these, that I will not anticipate here.) So, either the *Sonnets* are one fantastic lie, that appear to tell the tale (in sonnets 27-106) of Southampton's arrest through his release by James I in 1603, but don't really, which is quite preposterous, or they are what they appear to be, once their true meaning is decoded as Whittemore has done, a chronicle of Oxford's relationship to his unacknowledged son, centering on that son's near-fatal entanglement with the Essex Rebellion, and his ultimate release.

The second problem, once Oxford is recognized as the father, is how Southampton, who was raised by the 2nd Earl of Southampton until his death when Southampton was 8, could have in reality have been Oxford's son, not the 2nd Earl's. This further conclusion that flows from Whittemore's reading, and is essential to it, is not as yet accepted by the majority even of those who accept Oxford as Shakespeare, based on pre-publication presentations of Whittemore's conclusions. With *The Monument* now in print, Oxfordians (and everyone else) can for the first time see the power of Whittemore's explanation, and support for his thesis among Oxfordians has already begun to grow. Suffice it to say that Whittemore covers this base, showing who Southampton's mother had to have been, and how and why the baby had to have been raised as if he was the 2nd Earl's own, but I will not anticipate Whittemore's thunder any further on this issue.

The Great Detective Mystery

What an enormous difference shifting the underlying assumption makes! If the "love" is fatherly, everything in every sonnet is immediately seen in a different light. I am reminded of Edgar Allen Poe's *The Murders in the Rue Morgue*, where the clues simply didn't make any sense. There were plenty of them, in fact, they were all over the place, but the police couldn't construct any plausible theory of the case that could account for them all—until the hero discarded the underlying assumption that everyone had naturally made, namely, that the perpetrator was a human being. Once this assumption was discarded, determining that the murderer was an orangutan was child's play.

In the *Sonnets*, once the assumption is made that the relationship between the poet and the youth is not romantic or erotic love, but fatherly, every sonnet takes on a different hue, and passages become intelligible that previously required *ad hoc*, concocted speculations to be made sense of.

The method of the protagonist in *The Murders in the Rue Morgue*, the method of Sherlock Holmes, the methods used in Agatha Cristy's novels, and in truth of any good detective, in fiction or real life, is the method required to decode the *Sonnets*. It requires the ability to think as free of pre-conceptions, of previously held assumptions, as possible—to mold oneself to approximate as closely as possible Kuhn's ideal profile of the successful "paradigm shifter," the "outsider" who sees old clues with fresh eyes. It requires the intellectual courage to see passages in the *Sonnets*, to take them for what they appear to be, or mean, and to explore where those meanings appear to lead, irrespective of how those meanings relate to traditional interpretations of the *Sonnets*. And when this leads to creating new meaning for a passage, this new meaning becomes a new clue, a new word filled in in the crossword puzzle, that helps unlock the next passage, the next word in the crossword. If the new clues begin to build on and mutually support and validate each other, one has the potential beginning of a new paradigm. This is the essence of the creative process that Kuhn so ably discussed with respect to great scientific breakthroughs—being able to free oneself from the shackles of previous assumptions, being open to

unexpected, sometimes counter-intuitive, sometimes even impossible-seeming hypotheses, and being willing to explore these until they are either validated, or shown to be false solutions.

The result of consistently applying this method to the literally thousands of “clues” in the sonnets, when Whittemore finally completed applying his code to all 154 sonnets, was stunning. Absent Whittemore’s thesis, these clues apparently lead in a hundred different directions, which is why they have provided fodder for a hundred different scholarly analyses over the years. Only by discarding a series of blinding assumptions that have condemned traditional Shakespearean scholarship to chasing its tail in the pursuit of *ad hoc, sui generis* explanations for individual and small groups of sonnets, never being able to even imagine a scenario that might explain the entire sonnet series in a coherent way, was Whittemore able to make his breakthrough. His code, which he was able to expand significantly in the course of his analysis, turned every sonnet into an “open book,” clearly readable by anyone, as a chronicle of the author during a certain stressful period of his life. The reading of the sonnets confirmed that they were in the precise order intended by the author, it confirmed the identify of the “loved one,” aka the “fair youth,” as Southampton, and it revealed unmistakably who the “dark lady” and the “rival poet” were. It explained why there is a totally dramatic change of tone, from happy to black, in sonnet 27, and why starting with sonnet 107 there is another major change in tone, to relieved but wistfully sad. It identified the historical events, to which the author was clearly very close, that most of the sonnets were written with reference to.

Whittemore Raises the Bar

Prior to Whittemore’s breakthrough, there was a pretty low bar for would-be sonnet scholars to step over. Writing commentaries and exegeses on Shakespeare’s sonnets has been a thriving cottage industry for most of the 20th century, and part of the 19th as well. All that was required was, well, not much more than a pen, typewriter or, more recently, a computer keyboard, and the ability to find a publisher, which might require that one be some sort of professor or someone with a name for himself in Shakespeare studies. There were really no standards, no criteria, by which the public could judge the competing claims of each of these theories.

It is far from my intent, for this would take a book or three, to review in depth the corpus of previous attempts to make sense of the *Sonnets*. I want merely to note a few of the more exceptional efforts, and then suggest the criteria by which all such efforts need to be judged in the wake of Whittemore’s discoveries. First, I note that there are those who are content to merely expatiate on some of the sonnets, taking them more or less as isolated poems. These can be readily dismissed as they make no pretense to account for all the sonnets. Others, of whom Helen Vendler (*The Art of Shakespeare’s Sonnets*) is the best example I know of, make the valiant effort to explain each sonnet, but treat each, and the corpus, as nothing but a literary exercise, and she expends enormous effort identifying all manner of claimed literary devices, with no thought to coherence, or underlying meaning. Most of her proposed devices seem so outlandish, so improbable that any poet would consciously construct what she thinks she sees, that the effect is often droll.

Yet others have attempted to construct a continuous narrative of the supposed ups and downs of the poet’s rocky relationship with his beloved (more accurately, with both of them, the young man and later with the dark lady), one in which each sonnet supposedly tells of ups and downs, swings of mood and affection. Katherine Duncan-Jones (*Shakespeare’s Sonnets*) is somewhat less fanciful, providing a short summary of what she thinks each sonnet is about, and makes a serious effort to look for historical references, and concludes, along with many before her, that

107 is about James' accession, and Southampton's release. She finds a few other possible historical references in the next 20 sonnets as well. But it appears that despite seeing Southampton referenced in 107, she fails to conclude that he is the "fair youth" referenced throughout. And she is fatally hampered by seeing the author as Shaxpere of Stratford.

I believe the most interesting and significant effort (and perhaps the only one) to see the sonnets as based on history is that of A. L. Rowse (*Shakespeare's Sonnets*). As far as I know, Rowse is unique among Whittemore's predecessors in sharing his belief that the sonnets are the chronicle of real-life events, and he also shares the view that the young man is Southampton. (Others have seen a few isolated historical references, and/or have thought the young man was Southampton; Rowse actually identifies a specific span of years, *a la* Whittemore, within which he believes all the sonnets were written.) Taking the second quatrain of 107 by itself, he makes a plausible case for 1594, the peace being the end of 20 years of civil war in France.

Unfortunately, Rowse fails to set himself the task that Whittemore set for himself—not just to cherry-pick a few explanations, but to account for everything. In his discussion of 107, Rowse makes no effort to explain what the other 10 lines of the sonnet refer to, including why the poet says his love was released. And the same failing pervades his analysis of every other sonnet—he attempts to make sense out of selective passages, and is silent on the rest—which typically do not fit his dating. He dates all the sonnets to the early to mid 1590s, when the putative author Shaxpere of Stratford, was himself just in his late 20s to early 30s. When all turns black in sonnet 27, Rowse merely thinks Shaxpere has traveled to the country on tour as an actor, and is away from his beloved, and makes no account for why the term "ghastly" is affixed to night, or why this separation causes grief.

Looney's 1920 discovery that Edward de Vere, the 17th Earl of Oxford, had to be the real life person behind the Shakespeare alias, was based on creating a list of 16 criteria, drawn strictly from the plays, for the characteristics that any candidate for being the real Shakespeare, would need to exhibit. Only the Earl of Oxford came close, and he didn't just come close, he fit the profile exactly.

I propose that sonnet interpretations need to be similarly approached. I believe that anyone from here forward proposing to explain the sonnets needs to be able to answer a long list of questions. In this case, the list of just the important questions would be far more than 16. A complete list could be almost endless. I don't propose to create such a list here, but rather seek to suggest the type of questions that any interpretation would need to resolve. The list would start with the list of mysteries with which this essay began, and would include all of the issues so far addressed, plus many others. At the very least, the following must be accounted for, in a coherent, consistent way:

1. Are the sonnets about real people, with real relationships to the real author, or are they purely fictive devices?
2. If about real people, are they actors on the historical stages, involved in major historical events?
3. Why are sonnets 1-127 written about and to a man?
4. Who is that man?
5. Who is the "dark lady" of 128-152?
6. Who is the "rival poet" of 72-73?
7. Is the order the one intended by the author, and if not, is there a different, intended order, and if so, what is it?

8. Why did the cycle appear in 1609?
9. Why was it totally ignored by contemporaries and vanished from history almost as soon as it appeared, especially if the author were the well-known Shakespeare?
10. Who is the dedicatee with the initials “W.H.”?
11. Who is the “onlie begetter” mentioned on the title page of *Shakespeare’s Sonnets*?
12. If the author was William Shaxpere of Stratford and the young man the Earl of Southampton, as many believe, how could a commoner write like this to and about a leading lord, how could Shaxpere have even had any kind of relationship to Southampton?
13. What is the “invention”?
14. What is meant by every sonnet “almost tells my name”?
15. What is meant by saying that the invention “is hidden in a noted weed”?
16. What is so important that the author thinks it will live in public memory to the end of recorded time, especially if all he is writing about is a torrid, private love affair?
17. Why is the author “tongue-tied by authority”, especially if all he is writing about is a torrid, private love affair?
18. What is the single theme referred to in “dressing old words new” and “just telling what is told”?
19. What is meant by saying every sonnet is about “fair, kind and true”?
20. Why does the poet urge the young man to procreate in 1-17?
21. Why do the entreaties to procreate cease in 18?
22. What accounts for the sudden change from 26 to 27, when all seems to go black for the loved one?
23. Why does the author repeatedly bemoan that he will die unrecognized, even unknown, especially if he is the well-known playwright William Shakespeare?
24. What is the monument that the poet mentions repeatedly, and why would he call the sonnets a monument?
25. How are the frequent references to what a contemporary audience would understand as metaphors for Queen Elizabeth, such as “moon,” to be understood—how can traditional explanations account for such references?
26. [Hank, we should fill in a few more such items, say, up to 30]

There is a species of optical artifact called a stereogram. A stereogram is a picture, often a photograph, that appears when looked at normally, to be just that, a scene of whatever is depicted. But if one is able to relax one’s visual focus, and focus several feet beyond the picture, such that the picture itself is now out of focus, the eye suddenly “flips” and sees a very different picture, in 3D, that has been embedded in the original photo. For those who have never seen a stereogram, this may sound strange or mysterious, and the first time one successfully “sees” the 3D picture beneath the surface picture is quite an experience. This metaphor corresponds remarkably well to the nature of the *Sonnets*, where the surface meaning can be one thing, and right there, just as much and fully “there,” is an entirely other meaning that may have no relationship to the surface meaning. With the *Sonnets*, as with a stereogram, the real purpose is the underlying, not the surface, meaning. And once one has seen the 3D picture, one never reverts to the surface photo as anything but the disguise for the real content. The same is true with respect to Whittemore’s sonnet thesis. Once the reality is once seen of their being about

Southampton, and Shakespeare, aka the Earl of Oxford, his father, and focused on the years 1601-1603, one never again will revert to any other way of seeing them.

To invoke one final metaphor. The present state of scholarship on the *Sonnets* is akin to the notion of celestial mechanics inherited in the Middle Ages from Ptolemy, that posited that every heavenly body followed a trajectory that looked like an epicycle. Each body had its own epicycle, but it proved possible to create epicycles for every body they could track. There was no coherence to the sum or the totality of all the epicycles, and no explanation for why one body would have one epicycle, and another another, and certainly no true knowledge about the distances or velocities of these bodies could ever have arisen from this view of the heavens.

Then, with a single, dramatic paradigm shift, Copernicus found a completely alternate explanation for the same data, and modern astronomy was born. Suddenly, all heavenly bodies were found to follow a uniform rule based on having roughly circular orbits around other bodies. Kepler could never have discovered anything about orbital trajectories in a pre-Copernican world. Copernicus' theory, as amended by Kepler and supplemented by Newton, replaced an *ad hoc*, dead-end theory with a lawful theory that not only simplified, but made coherent, the laws of celestial mechanics, and permitted every motion in the heavens to be understood according to one set of laws.

I believe that history will judge Mr. Whittemore to be the Copernicus, Kepler and Newton of Shakespearean sonnet interpretation, all rolled into one. It has been the burden of this essay to implore the reader to open his mind to making a "paradigm shift," to be willing to accept, even if provisionally, the perspective that Mr. Whittemore has adopted, and to follow where that leads—to accept the premise that every sonnet is in the precise order intended by the author, and that every word and phrase of every line has a precise meaning consistent with the meaning of every other word and phrase in every other sonnet. If the reader will only, even if just as a thought experiment, permit himself to stop thinking of the sonnets as romantic love poetry, accept that sonnet 27 refers to Southampton's first day in the Tower, and sonnet 106 his last day, and picture the poet as Oxford, the first nobleman of England, trying to save Southampton's life, he will see all manner of wondrous new meanings in these "old" sonnets. If the reader decides to accept this approach, his mind will be open to seeing the power of Mr. Whittemore's rejection of Ptolemaic interpretations of the *Sonnets*, and his discovery of the Copernican-Keplerian-Newtonian laws that open up a simple, coherent, and extremely productive and satisfying understanding of Shakespeare's monument to Southampton as captured in his 154 published sonnets.

Peter Rush
Leesburg, VA
July 14, 2005