

THE POET'S HAND

Why do we still search for relics of the Bard?

BY ADAM GOPNIK

Although the Upper West Side, like every neighborhood in Manhattan, has lost a little of its distinctiveness over the past twenty soul-crushing, real-estate-lifting years, some specific, residual flavor of the place clings to its odd corners and company. Only a few decades ago, it was a gray place of strange, sober quest—the Village-dwelling Jane Jacobs called it “a surly kind of slum”—where documentary filmmakers filled vast basement spaces with editing chambers, and self-taught philosophers pursued solitary studies in the local cafeterias. Now its streets are mostly condo and co-op corridors, where the prices go up and the well-heeled, pushing their kids in broad-shouldered strollers, go by.

For the past six years, though, in an eighth-floor apartment on Eighty-sixth Street, around the corner from Barney Greengrass, something of the old bookishly quixotic spirit of the place has been kept alive, as two Manhattan rare-book dealers have been spending their days studying, line by line and word by word, a sixteenth-century quadrilingual dictionary that they bought one night on eBay. They have managed to convince themselves, and hope soon to convince the world, that it was once the favorite reference book of the poet and playwright William Shakespeare. They believe that he kept it on his desk and scribbled in its margins, learned French by turning its pages, and was inspired to poetic flights by delving among its Latin synonyms.

George Koppelman and Daniel Wechsler are the two book dealers, and their knight-errantry with Shakespeare began on the morning of April 29, 2008. “It was right here in this room,” Koppelman said one recent afternoon in the library of his bright, lived-in six-room apartment, “because we have our late breakfast here. I’m retired, though I work, and my wife is retired, so around about nine-thirty or ten I got up, as I usually do,

and got on the computer, and I went to eBay for some reason. I don’t know what I entered, but up popped this current auction for ‘an early Elizabethan dictionary with contemporary annotations.’”

He paused and smiled and looked just discernibly over at Wechsler; Koppelman, in his early seventies, is the older of the two, a former I.B.M. software developer with a dreamy, at-long-last love of books and poets. (“I can’t believe that I’m actually here with a booth of my own and good books to sell,” I heard him say at the Armory book fair, earlier this month.) They met many years ago at a once legendary, now vanished Upper West Side used bookstore called the Book Ark, recognizing each other immediately as “lif-ers” in the love of old books. Both men have become successful in the demanding trade of rare-book dealing: Koppelman’s firm is called Cultured Oyster Books; Wechsler’s is Sanctuary Books, with a fine office on Madison Avenue stuffed with old manuscripts and modern firsts. Koppelman is an instantly identifiable New York type—the escapee from the sciences enraptured by the glorious approximations and inexactitudes of poetry. Wechsler, in his mid-forties, is sharper-edged, more worldly, and more acutely aware of the minefield they have entered. I have at times had the impression that Wechsler can be impatient with Koppelman’s enthusiasms, while Koppelman is grateful for Wechsler’s precisions.

“So I looked at the seller’s listing and it was very prominent that he said there were contemporary annotations,” Koppelman said. “And I looked at the date. The book was printed in 1580, and I thought, Hmm, an interesting year.” Koppelman has a slightly breathless, treble-pitched New York accent—the old-style New York intellectual’s accent, where even neutral sentences can end in exclamation points. Wechsler’s voice is more watchfully professional. They are alike yet different. If a movie were made

of their quest for Shakespeare, Koppelman would be played by Wallace Shawn, Wechsler by Paul Giamatti.

“The seller had scanned and displayed about fifteen or sixteen of the annotations,” Koppelman went on. “I looked at a couple and noticed that two of the annotations were ‘drought in summer’ and ‘yeoman of the wardrobe.’ And my first thought was that these sound like poetic fragments. And then I looked them up and I found that ‘drought in summer’ was basically used as ‘summer’s drought’ in ‘Titus Andronicus,’ one of Shakespeare’s early plays. Later, we realized that ‘summer’ is a very, very common word in Shakespeare—he must have used it a hundred times—but ‘drought’ only one time.”

Intrigued, they settled on a bid of forty-three hundred dollars—the eBay listing was from an established Canadian dealer—and won the book. They had, they confess freely, intimations of immortality in the pages. A week or so later, the book arrived, bubble-wrapped, and they set to work exploring it in Koppelman’s library. The book, a second edition of John Baret’s *Alvearie*, is not exactly a dictionary in the modern sense. It is, rather, a polyglot’s helper: a word appears in English and its equivalents are usually offered in French and Latin and Greek, often with a proverbial expression, or a citation from a classical author. It is a compendium of allusions. Baret, a Cambridge don, explains in a preface that his book began as a compilation of student definitions of “harde words.” He calls it a beehive, because his students went out into the world to search for words and the way they were used, and brought them back: “Thus within a yeere or two, they had gathered together a great volume; which (for the apt similitude betweene the good Scholers and diligent Bees in gathering their waxe and honie into their hive) I called then their *Alvearie*, both for a memoriall by whom it was



COURTESY CANADIAN CONSERVATION INSTITUTE

A scholar at Guelph University believes that, in the "Sanders portrait," he has come upon the best mirror left of Shakespeare's face.

made, and also by this name to encourage others to the like diligence.”

Baret's *Alvearie* (the term is a variant of “apiary”) was published by the London printer Henry Denham, and its constellation of potential Shakespearean associations begins within the network of friendships that brought Shakespeare, on his arrival in London, in the fifteen-eighties, into the new world of London printing for profit—putting him in the right place at the right time to have acquired this book. Shakespeare's “lost years,” the time between his unheralded (and still undated) arrival in London, sometime in the late fifteen-eighties—presumably after the birth of the twins Hamnet and Judith to his much older wife, Anne, in 1585—and his emergence in public as a poet and playwright, in the early fifteen-nineties, are a pet area of projection. Still, it seems certain that although he worked in the theatre, he lived in circles of ink. The printer Richard Field, a fellow-Stratfordian of around the same age, whose family was closely associated with the Shakespeares, was very likely a companion in Shakespeare's early London scuffles. Field had worked as an apprentice to the French-born printer Thomas Vautrollier, who published the translation of Plutarch that Shakespeare drew on heavily for his Greek and Roman plays (at times so explicitly that it would have awakened our era's Plagiarism Police); Field also had a hand in printing two more classics of the fifteen-eighties—a new edition of Ovid and the 1587 Holinshed history of Britain—that became bedrock to Shakespeare's imagination. And it was Field who, in the early fifteen-nineties, now working alone, proudly printed Shakespeare's first two long, carefully manicured poems, “The Rape of Lucrece” and “Venus and Adonis.” The two men were, in every sense, *paisans*.

Although it was Henry Denham, not Field, who printed the *Alvearie*, the London world of commercial publishing was small, so that Shakespeare's undoubted friendship with Field in his printing shop, on Ludgate, would easily have led him to Denham's printing shop, nearby on Paternoster Row. (Some have even proposed that Shakespeare started life in London working for Denham as a proofreader. Of course, it has also been proposed—with equal plausibility and

sometimes better authority—that Shakespeare was a lawyer's clerk, a schoolmaster, and a clever entrepreneur who invented a business valet-parking horses for the gentry who came to the theatre.)

What's sure is that Shakespeare was, like many self-taught people, a bookish guy. Never having gone to university—as his critics pointed out spitefully—he got himself educated in modern languages and modern literature by buying or borrowing books, and burrowing inside them. Nor is a dictionary an implausible candidate for his annotating attention. Shakespeare loved words for their own sake, for their aura and affect, their rhythm and nuance, as much as for their narrow denotations. Though scholarly counting by computer has begun to explode the old notion that Shakespeare used or invented an incomparable number of words in English, it's certain that he made up, at a minimum, hundreds of new phrases, or was the first to disperse them broadly. Many are hard, others disarmingly modern and plain: “better days,” “strange bedfellows,” “sorry sight.” He loved words for their music as much as for their point; he was always intoxicated with the overtones of language. That's why he could invent the Lear-Carroll-style nonsense poem, both silly and sublime, as in Feste's “The rain it raineth every day,” or the speeches of Poor Tom in “King Lear.”

Koppelman and Wechsler, encouraged by all that they had learned about Shakespeare's place among the publishers,



spent several years combing through their *Alvearie*, studying both the book and the annotations that fill its pages. They are self-publishing their findings now, timed to coincide with Shakespeare's four-hundred-and-fiftieth birthday, in a book whose title, “Shakespeare's Beehive: An Annotated Elizabethan Dictionary Comes to Light,” exquisitely balances on a colon their ambition with their discretion. Only when one holds a copy of the Baret in one's hands does one appreciate

how oceanic this effort was: printed mostly in close-set Gothic type, the book is very difficult to read today, and its endless columns of words, with the innumerable annotations that surround them, provide a deep challenge to ordering.

Over time, Koppelman and Wechsler divided the annotations into two kinds: first, what they called “speaking” annotations, handwritten notes squeezed into the corners and margins of the book, mostly in an italic hand—that is, in the new kind of cursive that was just being adopted in England from Italy, displacing the “secretary hand” of Shakespeare's own signatures. Then, there were the “mute” annotations: marks and lines and circles made in the margins or around words.

Some of the connections they espied between the Baret and the Bard seem a little far-fetched. For instance, alongside the word “Faine” the annotator has added, in his cramped hand, the phrases “We are faine to use” and “I was faine to seeke.” Koppelman and Wechsler are impressed that the three words “fain,” “use,” and “seek” are found together in a passage from “*Much Ado About Nothing*.” (“We have beene up and downe to seeke thee; for we are high proofe melancholie, and would faine have it beaten away, wilt thou use thy wit?”) They add that this “may or may not be a coincidence.”

But some of their finds are genuinely arresting. Scholars have puzzled over Hamlet's lines “Oh that this too too solid Flesh, would melt,/Thaw, and resolve it selfe into a Dew,” because it's odd that “resolve” should indicate what happens to something that “melts.” In Baret, “Thawe” is defined specifically as “resolve that which is frozen”—and the annotator has made a clear “mute” annotation beside its suggestive poetic pairing.

Other connections are still more striking. Koppelman and Wechsler's favorite may be a descriptive passage from one of the Field-published poems. The Baret annotator is quite taken with the name of a small English bird, the “dive-dapper” or “douker,” and marks its “definition with a little circle, just below the use of a slash at a Diver, or Didapper bird,” they write. “Directly in between these two Baret entries he adds the spoken annotations ‘dowker’ and ‘dobchicke,’ two variations on the dive-dapper's name, with lines connecting them to the printed text.”

Then they present this passage from Shakespeare's "Venus and Adonis":

Upon this promise did he raise his chin,
Like a divedapper peering through a
wave,
Who being lookt on, ducks as quickly in:
So offers he to give what she did crave.

The passage has been singled out by the Shakespeare scholar René Weis as typical of Shakespeare's love of his native landscape: "To see a little grebe or divedapper on a pond or in a still corner of the Avon endows the image, and indeed the creature, with a particular kind of imaginative life. The only way Shakespeare could have learned to distinguish ducks from grebes, to know that one of the dive-dapper's characteristics is its extreme shyness, was through patient bird-watching on the river." Koppelman and Wechsler point out that he could also have learned it, or had his memory of it reinforced, by reading Baret, so that Shakespeare's well-documented love of Warwickshire nature was entangled with the words and names he found and underlined and italicized in his dictionary. "Who else besides Shakespeare would have been so interested in a local bird that he would have expanded on its meanings in a dictionary and then included it in a poem?" Koppelman asks.

They are struck, too, by the annotator's fascination with the capital letters "W" and "S," which he carefully doodles in the margins of the book, copying their Gothic forms precisely from the printed matter, in a way that he does not with any other capitals. But if Koppelman and Wechsler have a smoking gun, or a blood-stained dagger, it lies in the "trailing blank"—the final, empty page—of their copy of the *Alvearie*, upon which someone has scribbled in a period hand what the authors call a "word salad" of French words and English equivalents. Shakespeare students have long struggled to explain where Shakespeare learned his French, though he had enough to write a couple of scenes in the language in "Henry V." Possibilities have included the Vautrollier family, with reinforcement, perhaps, from the Huguenot family with whom he lodged in later years, on Silver Street. But a bilingual dictionary is not a bad support—one scene in "Henry V" is essentially a dictionary-bound "teaching scene," in which each French word offered is explained by



"Our next award is for spectacular failure."

an English one—and here, on the trailing blank, the annotator is clearly struggling to associate French words and phrases with English ones. "We fully expect that this assessment will not just be upheld, but upheld rather generously in our favor, so overwhelming is the totality of the linguistic evidence," Koppelman and Wechsler announce, a little defiantly, in their book.

They find a great deal of nourishment in this word salad, which they see as clustering around moments in Shakespeare's various Falstaff plays. The annotator has written on the trailing blank the word "Bucke," with a hyphen connecting it to another word, "bacquet" (basket), and turning it into "Bucke-bacquet." In "The Merry Wives of Windsor," from around 1598, "Buck-basket" is used six times. "Bucke-basket," they point out, is a peculiar phrase, odd to have isolated in a scholarly work like a dictionary. Then, in a spooky piece of reverse engineering, Wechsler entered an apparently ran-

dom, nonsense phrase from the trailing blank—the word string "lowse... *Un pou... lou lou*"—as a search term into Google Books, and got back, of all things, an end note from an obscure nineteenth-century French translation of "The Merry Wives of Windsor." The phrase in French turns out to be an attempt by the translator to render a complicated Shakespearean pun, playing on the likeness of the name of a kind of fish called the "luce" to that of the prominent Lucy family—the family in whose park the young Shakespeare may very well have poached deer. It seemed to Koppelman and Wechsler beyond chance that their annotator, struggling to distill French from his bilingual dictionary, would have stumbled on exactly the same sequence as a later translator did, struggling to turn a Shakespearean pun back into French.

"It isn't any one of these," Wechsler says. "It's the totality of them." Koppelman adds, "It's like someone walking

down the beach for a little while and picking up all these wonderful pebbles and saying, 'Look, there are all these pebbles on the beach.' Someone else walks down the beach and says, 'Look, when the water is at low tide I get this kind of pebble, a little further up I get that kind of pebble.' And he's thinking about how these pebbles weren't really so random. They are in certain places for a reason."

The counter-arguments they will confront are, as they realize, formidable. First, there is the problem of paleography: the handwriting just doesn't look like Shakespeare's. This is, admittedly, a vexed area. The existing samples of handwriting that are agreed to be Shakespeare's come down to six signatures and, maybe, the

words "By me" preceding it on his will—only thirteen letters. Still, the annotator writes mostly in italic, while Shakespeare's six existing signatures all are in the earlier secretary hand. Indeed, the one extended piece of composition that *might* be handwritten by Shakespeare, the so-called Hand D, in the manuscript play "Sir Thomas More"—one short passage in a doomed collaborative script, never produced, probably because its subject was politically vexatious—is also entirely in secretary.

Koppelman and Wechsler insist that many people in the period wrote in both hands; that the hand of the annotator (particularly on the trailing blank) is actually mixed, italic and secretary; and that, in any case, the circumstances of the

annotations, crowded in margins, would have left no room for the loopy, space-consuming secretary script. They also make a complicated case for a much greater degree of variability in Elizabethan handwriting than would be expected today: how someone made a "G" or an "S" was less fixed than it tends to be now. Still, whatever the degree of variability, this looks more like an italic hand than anything of Shakespeare's that survives, particularly if one counts Hand D.

Koppelman and Wechsler are aware, at least sporadically, of a deeper catch: since Shakespeare wrote Elizabethan English, *any* work of Elizabethan English is going to contain echoes of Shakespeare. Mark up an Elizabethan dictionary more or less at random, and you would be bound to find patterns of cited words that evoke passages in the plays and the poems, especially when the volume is a thesaurus designed to point from one word to others like it. Shakespeare and the annotated Baret do seem to speak a common language—but that's because they spoke a common language. We don't know how many dive-dappers and dabchicks are dabbling and diving in books of that age.

Finally, there is what might be called the argument from Inherent Improbability: it seems fantastically lucky that, of all the thousands of possible annotators of a single dictionary of the time, it would be the one in the world you would most want to be the guy. We live in an Elizabethan world of our own reductive devising, populated by the Queen and Ben Jonson and the Dark Lady and the Bard and a theatre full of groundlings. But the real Elizabethan world had a lot more people in it than that, and countless more possible Baret annotators. Shakespeare is a prime candidate only because we don't know the names of all the other bird-loving, inquisitive readers who also liked their dabchicks and their French verbs.

None of this discourages Wechsler and Koppelman from their pursuit. Nor does it discourage them in their eventual ambition to sell the Alvearie to a good home—the Folger Shakespeare Library, in Washington, D.C., appeals to them—for a good sum. For how much, exactly? "Really, the only word that makes sense is that it's priceless," Wechsler said. "My wife would be upset



"Why do you always fall for these totally unobtainable types?"

with me if it turns out that it was Cephalus Browne's copy"—Cephalus Browne is an imaginary Elizabethan actor whom they jokingly propose as an alternative annotator—"and meanwhile the Colorado Rockies owner had offered you this amount for it." Given that a sterling copy of the First Folio sold not long ago for more than five million dollars, an authenticated autograph manuscript might be worth many millions more.

"But I will always think that this was his copy," Wechsler said. "Always. Whether or not this is given credibility in the scholarly community. But, of course, I hope it will be. I don't want to be some guy mumbling and grumbling on Eighty-sixth Street! But negativity from the scholarly community? Hey, they can't agree on anything. Why should they choose this book to get their start?"

The irony is that Koppelman and Wechsler have one immovable quibble. Since they feel that their discovery, if ever accepted, would vindicate the image of Shakespeare as a self-educator, they worry that the Oxfordians—who doubt that William Shakespeare wrote the works of Shakespeare—would find in the Baret some strange ammunition for *their* unending cause. Wechsler pauses to reflect. "If the scholarly community says, 'No way, guys,'" he muses, "and the Oxfordians say yes, and offer to buy it for a price? I would still say no. I'm extremely uncomfortable with that idea. That's worse than mumbling on Eighty-sixth Street for me."

What drives people to search for bits and pieces of Shakespeareana four hundred and fifty years after his birth into a middle-class Midlands family? The easy answer is the disproportion between the mountainous heights of his reputation and the fragmentary shards of his biography: the tallest mountains produce the most abominable of snowmen, Yetis crowd the slopes of Everest. Certainly, metaphors of snowmen come to mind on a freezing, biting, burning cold morning in Guelph, Ontario, a recent and necessary destination in the search for birthday relics. For, during the same period that Koppelman and Wechsler have been combing through the Baret, a scholar and his students at Guelph University—originally an agricultural institution, famous for its veteri-

nary school—have become convinced that they have found the best mirror left of Shakespeare's face.

The so-called "Sanders portrait," which sits in a vault in the university library's rare-book room, lived under a bed for most of the past century, the property of an English-speaking Catholic family in Montreal, who had brought it over from England in the early nineteenth-century, shortly after they emigrated to Canada. Lloyd Sullivan, the eighty-one-year-old retired Bell engineer who owns the picture and is chiefly responsible for its ascent to scholarly seriousness, recalls seeing it as a child. "I used to bring my grandmother tea and English biscuits, and she let me pull this big brown paper bag from under her bed—there was a big rope around it—and out would come the portrait!" he says, chuckling. He has the distinct, now disappearing accent of the old Montreal English ascendancy: faintly British, with amused, interrogative upward-turning endings. "The first time I ever touched it, it was just like electricity going up my arms—and, I know it sounds strange, I had the idea that the portrait and I had a destiny."

The portrait had come out from under the bed several times—its removal from England by the Sanders family was the cause of a minor court battle—and in the nineteen-sixties it was displayed as a portrait of Shakespeare at Eaton's department store, once the cathedral of Anglo-Québécois civilization in Montreal. But there are many "portraits" of Shakespeare, and this one, if noted at all, had previously been placed very definitively in the second or third rank, particularly compared with the so-called Chandos portrait—a swarthy piratical Shakespeare, complete with earring, which, from the time when the first great Shakespeare scholar, Edmond Malone, blessed it, in the eighteenth century, has been the favorite of the British. (Heavily repainted, it now looks later than the early seventeenth century, although it became the first accession of the National Portrait Gallery, in London: N.P.G. 1.)

The Sanders portrait bears the date "1603" in its upper-right corner. Taken out of its vault, it is the most instantly appealing of all the candidates; the sitter it shows is not bald, worn, and tetchy-

looking but inward and poetic. This Shakespeare is a youngish man, his hairline receding but its central tuft still piled up in a topknot; without the constricting ruff of the more famous pictures, he is casual at the collar and comfortable-looking. He wears a handsome silver-embroidered doublet, but doesn't seem to be taking his fine shirt too seriously. For what is unforgettable in the image is the sitter's amused half-smile and sideways glance—the look not so much of reason as of wry self-inspection. It is Shakespeare as we would want him to be: a man of little outward solemnity and huge amused inward resources, a listener and a watcher. This Shakespeare is also, one can't help feeling, a very *Canadian* Shakespeare, civil and agreeable, and, indeed, he has become the icon of Shakespeare in Canada, appearing on the cover of each play in the complete Canadian edition of Shakespeare that Oxford University Press has just begun publishing.

Daniel Fischlin, an English professor at Guelph, is both the editor of that series and the man chiefly responsible for the past ten years of research into the picture's origins. "I never thought I'd be this implicated in the story, but you know how things creep up on you," he says. He is a forceful, sincere, rather Dudley Do-Right-looking scholar, a little bemused, one senses, at finding himself out of graduate seminars on Patriarchal Patterns in Donne and right in the middle of a detective story. "When we did the first exhibition of the portrait, in 2007, it was very clear to me that there was something in the image itself that was appealing. There were three vectors to pursue. One was the science, and the science itself couldn't have made the picture, but it could have broken it." He explains that if any one test of the wood or paint surface had come back "wrong," or modern, it would have exploded the whole. "The second was the internal evidence of the portrait itself—what does the portrait tell us? There's lots that it does tell us. And the third was the genealogical evidence—how far back can we trace it? To me it reduced to the most commonsensical question: let's go back grandfather by grandfather and see where we end up."

The science, undertaken by the Canadian Conservation Institute, came back



"I've only been gluten-free for a week, but I'm already really annoying."

positive. (One should add the proviso that, however objectively and conscientiously the testing was done, it was still being done at the behest of those who hoped that it would come back positive.) The wood panel on which the portrait was painted could not be earlier than the late sixteenth century; carbon dating showed that a label on the back was also from the period—no later than 1640. The paints in the picture, and the ink on the back label, were all exactly right for the period as well.

The genealogical work was still more striking. The Sanders family, Fischlin claims, can be precisely traced, and is closely associated with Shakespeare's circle of friends. "The Sanders family were English Catholics, presumably clandestine, who lived not far from Stratford, and immigrated to London and lived within the same few streets as Shakespeare, near the corner of Silver Street and Muggle," Fischlin says. What's more, they were linked to John Heminges, Shakespeare's fellow-player and one of the eventual editors of the First Folio of his collected works; a Sanders was a fellow-member of the humbly named but proud Grocers' guild. "Impossible that they would not have known each other," Fischlin says.

The date on the picture is auspicious. The year 1603 was when Shakespeare would most likely have sat for a portrait, since it was the year the new King James elevated Shakespeare's company to be his personal troupe. "One of the first things James does—smart guy that he was—is to make Shakespeare's company the King's Men," Fischlin says. "He was a Scottish king, unpopular or unknown, and he sends this message: I know who's cool in London, the Shakespeare people." And it was not long before, in 1596, that Shakespeare received a coat of arms from the College of Arms, making him at least a legal gentleman. (The coat of arms shows a shakable spear, and bears the French motto "Not without right," which Ben Jonson teased onstage, inventing a country bumpkin whose heraldic motto is mocked as "Not without mustard.")

With the year of elevation in mind, Guelph invited Jenny Tiramani, an expert on Elizabethan dress, to examine the picture. "She has done a very close reading of the doublet, mapping it onto the sumptuary laws of the period," Fischlin explains; hers is the "internal evidence" he has in mind. She determined that the sitter could have been shown in the kind of doublet that the Sanders sitter wears—

rich and silver-threaded—only if he were newly "uplifted," without being actually ennobled, as Shakespeare and his fellows would have been in 1603. Fischlin's most recent research, last summer, leads him to suspect that the portrait was painted in a workshop, once again near Silver Street, run by an artist named Peake—who happened also to have close ties to King James's Office of the Revels, the people in charge of picking and producing shows for the King to see. Fischlin thus closes a circle of adjacency and relation: the *where made? by whom? what for?* are all neatly explained within a few square blocks.

That early-seventeenth-century label on the picture's back is now largely illegible, but in the early twentieth century it still could be made out, and its inscription was recorded by an otherwise skeptical British art historian. It announced that the image was of "Shakspeare/Born April 23=1564/Died April 23-1616/ Aged 52/This Likeness taken 1603/Age at that time 39 ys." There is no other reference to Shakespeare's birth date until the eighteenth century, when the record of his baptism was discovered in Stratford by an aging actor working for the editor Nicholas Rowe. If the materials testing is sound and the label really is from the early seventeenth century, then that birth date alone, the Sanders enthusiasts argue, is strong evidence for the portrait's authenticity. No one in London in the period, they insist, could have known the birth date unless there was a source for it, and the only plausible source would be the poet or his family.

Yet, just as the Baret has one immediate, daunting flaw—the hand is not the poet's—the portrait has, to its doubters, one overwhelming problem: it does not look much like Shakespeare. Only one true image of Shakespeare is known to exist, and that is the famous engraving made by a young artist named Martin Droeshout, which sits at the front of the Heminges & Condell First Folio. We can be certain that the Droeshout engraving looked like Shakespeare because his friend Ben Jonson says that it did, in a dedicatory poem placed right beside it. It shows—thirteen years, at most, after the Sanders image was painted—a different-seeming man: bald, high-domed, with a smutty

little goatee and mustache. Academics make various hand-waving gestures about the different standards of fidelity in the period; standards of likeness, like standards of spelling, were broader then than now. But the standards weren't infinitely elastic. If the inventory of features in the Droeshout engraving had not resembled those of the man whom it is intended to represent, then Heminges and Condell would not have used it, and Jonson would not have praised it as a likeness. They were Elizabethans, not idiots. Besides, the Stratford monument, the bust set above Shakespeare's tomb after his death, is obviously of the same man as the Droeshout engraving.

Can the Sanders portrait be brought into line with the Droeshout engraving? In the past year, the people at Guelph have collaborated with Jean-Pierre Doucet, a retired Ottawa biochemist. Using a software program called FACE-OFF, which allows one to rotate, manipulate, and isolate features, Doucet claims to have identified thirteen significant similarities between the Droeshout and the Sanders. In particular, both Droeshout's Shakespeare and the Sanders Shakespeare have the same anatomically unusual "attached earlobe" on the left side of the head. Doucet believes it is the smile on the Sanders portrait that throws us off; smiles are such a powerful signifier that they alter our response to the rest. With the smile digitally erased, and the two Shakespeare faces sized to match and superimposed, the two men seem, to Canadian eyes, at least, to be one.

Still, the Canadians have not attempted a similar search for matching patterns between the Droeshout and the Chandos, or any other candidate portraits. All portraits we wish to claim as Shakespeare may look more or less the same. Perhaps the strongest argument against the identification is, again, the same as that against the Baret, and that is the one from *Inherent Improbability*: could it be that, of all the thousands of Elizabethans—or, in this case, Jacobean—whom got themselves portrayed, the one that survived the centuries should be a portrait of the one we would most desire to see? What's too good to be true isn't. Fischlin, though, would flip the objection on its head. He thinks that much of the skepticism is

marked by distaste for the notion that an important portrait might have made its way over the sea to the colonies. "A small agricultural college in Canada, and a picture that sat in an ordinary house in Montreal for much of the century?" he says. "That offends certain British ideas of decorum."

What does it matter what he looked like, anyway? "Reader, looke not on his Picture, but his Booke," Ben Jonson firmly concludes his dedicatory poem, right alongside the Droeshout engraving in the First Folio, and it seems the epitome of skeptical wisdom. Who cares if Shakespeare scribbled in the margins of one book or got painted in a nice new shirt in another? A conference was held earlier this month at the Folger Library—where Koppelman and Wechsler dream of depositing their Baret—on the whole question of Shakespeare's life and its relics. Among the speakers was the Harvard professor Stephen Greenblatt, who offered a defense of the turn he took toward biographical criticism in his 2004 book *Will in the World*: "It expressed an intuitive understanding that literature was not a self-enclosed system of signs but rather that it was a way of being in the world, a form of agency, a human act."

We like lives because we live them. Nor need we worry that Shakespeare has been posthumously annexed by celebrity culture. He sits happily right at the start of it, the subject of that potent, at times

poisonous cocktail of show business, glamour, and surprising seriousness. He stars in a story recorded in a private diary from 1601: a fan invited Richard Burbage, the leading man of Shakespeare's troupe, to pay her a late-night visit; Shakespeare overheard and went there first. The diarist reported, "Shakespeare caused returne to be made, that William the Conqueror was before Richard the Third." Meanwhile, students at Cambridge were teasing each other for putting pictures of "Sweet Mr. Shakespeare" in their studies. To build too high a wall between life and work is not to "get" the time. It is to miss a vital part of what the time was actually like—reflected in the Folio, which is, after all, a collection of great writing *and* a book with a great big picture of the guy who made it, a dedicatory poem ornamented with biographical detail, a tribute to a man. We do look on his picture, even when we read his book.

Lloyd Sullivan, at least, feels vindicated, and he has arranged to sell the portrait, at last, out of the family—to an unnamed Canadian millionaire—with an eye to keeping it in Canada: "I'm eighty-one, and I've been a slave to this project for forty-two years." Soliciting expertise didn't come cheap, it seems. "I used up my savings—anytime you mention Shakespeare, the price goes up five times. I can't take it any further. My main objective is for



Karin

"I'll take the bottom bunk."

the portrait to stay here—in Guelph, ideally. I mean, what do we have in Canada? Maple syrup. The beaver. The flag. The Montreal Canadiens. Imagine: everyone will make a side trip to Guelph to see the only true-life image of William Shakespeare in the world!”

Asked which is his favorite Shakespeare play, Sullivan laughs and says, “‘Henry the Fifth,’ the movie, I saw in Montreal when I was a boy. ‘Hank Cinq,’ we called it.” He laughs again. “It’s the only one I’ve ever seen.”

Well, we call it Bardolotry, but aren’t we all Bardolaters of a kind?” In the Beinecke Library, at Yale, the Shakespeare scholar David Scott Kastan sits surrounded by the most famous forgeries of Shakespeare ever made

public—the now highly valued originals of the non-originals, William Henry Ireland’s late-eighteenth-century Shakespeare papers. They include, as it happens, “Shakespeare’s” heavily annotated copy of Spenser’s “Faerie Queene.”

William Henry Ireland was the ne’er-do-well son of a pompous antiquarian and Shakespeare-lover named Samuel Ireland. In the early seventeen-nineties, desperate to win the approval of a father who held him in contempt, the boy forged a couple of ingenious if innocuous “Elizabethan” documents—wills and deeds. Overwhelmed by the intensity of his father’s gratitude, he began to compose more, until, as so often happens, the con ran away with the con man. Under desperate pressure to continue feeding his father Shakespeareana, William Henry invented ever more recklessly, in-

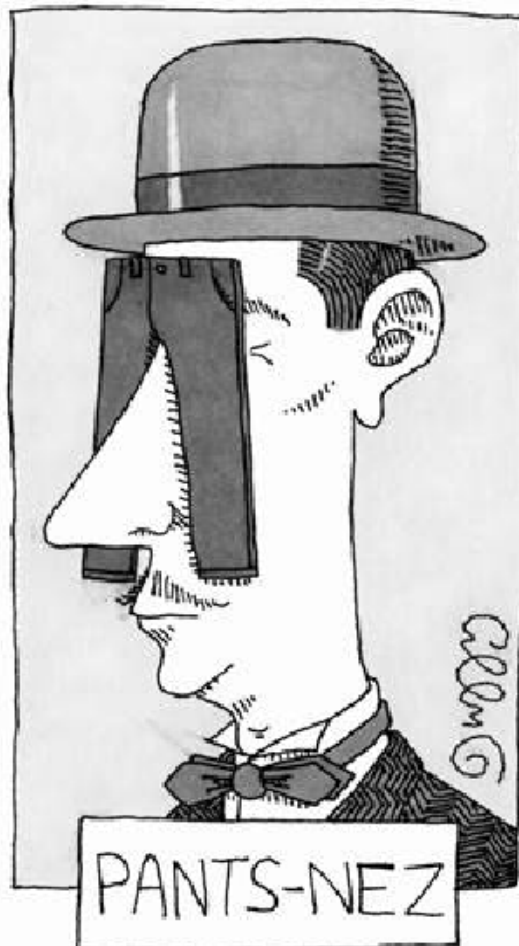
cluding an entire new play and a scribbled self-portrait. After a year of celebration—Boswell himself came and fell on his knees before the “Miscellaneous Papers”—the great Malone blew the absurdity away in a single peevish volume. To complete the tragedy-farce, the world was left with the impression, encouraged by Malone, that Samuel was the real author of the fraud. So, in pursuit of his father’s love, William Henry managed to break his father’s heart *and* ruin the old man’s reputation without raising his own, a true parable of fathers and sons.

Kastan, a gentle humanist whose most recent book, “Will to Believe,” is an attempt to apply both common sense and sympathetic sensibility to the vexed question of Shakespeare’s religion, moves around the room of books, splayed open, defenseless, on foam stands. He taps a page here, points to an annotator’s oddity there, confident in his touch and familiar in his movements, like a dance teacher correcting the poses of a classroom of six-year-olds. The lightly foxed paper of the calf-bound books exudes a smell of decaying wool.

“When we talk about Shakespeare and the search for his relics, we should always keep the image of William Henry Ireland at least a little before our eyes,” he says. This is, first, because since the same kinds of argument that were made in favor of those “Shakespeare papers”—there were just too many examples, the paper was obviously old, what possible motive could someone have had for forging stray bits of wills and letters?—are the kinds of argument we make now in defense of the Shakespeare papers and discoveries we want to accept.

The human will toward ingenious deception is matched only by the human gift for ingenuous self-deception. Ireland’s Shakespeare forgeries look ridiculous now—the handwriting full of absurd Gothic flourishes, the letters full of absurd fake-archaic spellings—but they didn’t then. “Here’s a kid trying to make Daddy proud, and he works really hard to make things almost credible,” Kastan says. “He understands that the paper is different, and the writing is different, and the spelling is different. It’s a simplistic notion of the period, but he’s paying attention.

“As with all these projects, there’s this fetish quality. So little is known that



we seem to want some object there. It's my thinking about rare-book libraries. Some part of me is always anxious about the fetish-making that goes on here." He explains that he always has his students look at the original texts in their original covers. "Intellectually, what would actually be different if we didn't have the books? But it's pretty wonderful, the power of that fetish. Ireland felt it, and then produced it afterward!"

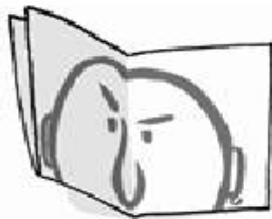
He sees the same processes at work with Wechsler and Koppelman. "Again, they're trying to get close to this most wonderful and mysterious of authors, this most mysterious genius—what has he *touché*? The truth is that it doesn't change one thing about what we think about Shakespeare or why we love him or why we value him. But if this were Shakespeare's hand! It's very moving to me, I have to say. None of us would do what we do if we didn't share in it. It's easy to be glib and dismissive of Bardolotry, but that's how we *all* got here, in some way." As for the Baret annotator's two annotators—he has reviewed their book, though not yet their prize object—he manages a skeptical benevolence. "I don't think they're dishonest in any way at all, and I think it's a lovely book and I wish it were here, and I'd like to add it to these, and it's probably worth ten thousand bucks or something," he says. "Do I think it's Shakespeare? It would be lovely if it were. At the very least, what you have is an active reader of a dictionary at the time."

One afternoon not long ago, I went with Koppelman and Wechsler to visit their prize, which is being kept for now in a security vault in a storage facility in Red Hook, in Brooklyn. We took a car from Eighty-sixth Street, Koppelman tentatively navigating the driver through expressway entrances and exits and Brooklyn streets. I thought I detected in the two men just a slight note of stagefright, or nerves, balancing their usual excitement. They had just got back final galleys of the book about their discovery.

After much to-ing and fro-ing with sign-in books and identity cards and special uniformed ushers sent to open the vault, we found that the Alvearie was kept, forlornly alone, inside an envelope inside a strongbox, inside a room that looked like a solitary cell in a Supermax

prison, with a glaring fluorescent light overhead.

We took the Alvearie out to a cold examination room, and cautiously began to turn its pages. Koppelman and Wechsler showed me some of the prize annotations: "Dowkers" and "Dobchickes" and "Bucke-bacquet." Wechsler said, a little subdued, "I was reading 'The Tempest' just now, and it connects." He described



one more possible connection he thought he had spotted, with the annotator singling out words—"fetch," "trencher," and "wash," for instance—that appear in Caliban's triumphant song: "No more dams I'll make for fish, / Nor fetch in firing at requiring, / Nor scrape trenching, nor wash dish."

He paused. "The Shakespeare text we have today plus the annotations, plus what we've already discovered—it was like an absolutely beautiful, perfect moment. But with the book in front of me? I've looked at books so many times. It's just a book! And, right now, what's overwhelming me is the difference between the argument and the object. An object that is so ordinary, but, at the same time, if it weren't ordinary, if we had anything about Iago here, you know, anyone could have identified it long ago."

It was true that the object, the old beat-up dictionary, seen by itself in its lonely maximum-security prison, looked less prepossessing than the constructions that biographical imagination built upon it, an old thatched hut supporting an enormous scaffolding of conjecture. I warily turned the densely annotated pages and thought that, at a minimum—and the minimum may well be the maximum that time and the scholarly community allow them—Koppelman and Wechsler's annotated Baret is a fascinating glimpse into the lexical web of meaning in the Elizabethan mind. The annotator, it's plain, found in the Alvearie not a set of fixed

definitions but a pulsing network of meaning-by-association. He races back and forth among words, dowsing for connections. The dictionary is a compendium of possible allusions, from language to language and word to word. What is lost in lucidity is gained in the strange poetic power of association that is Shakespeare's most striking poetic feature. His mind leaps sideways—and, by implication, in cross-referenced, associative, language-leaping allusiveness—as often as it bulls forward toward a goal. It is the very opposite of what Orwell and the like supposed to be the special virtue of English: plain-pudding simplicity and clarity. Our top Bard looked at language as, precisely, a beehive, where words went out and then came back to make honey from the nectar of their exotic engagements.

That arch-rationalist Bertrand Russell once said that the mystery of Shakespeare lies in understanding why lines that are all allusion and enchantment—like "Come unto these yellow sands" or "A great while ago the world began" or "Still through the hawthorn blows the cold wind"—have what he called "mental content"; that is, they assert actual propositions, states of affairs that we can entertain and appraise. They sound like music and read like law. Magic that makes sense to mind: that seems to be as good a definition, or encirclement, of Shakespeare's art as we are likely to get. No dictionary could explain it, but it might help mark the ground where it happens. The Baret may not be the ultimate beehive; but it is a nice assembly of bees.

Meanwhile, our fascination with lives and faces alongside verses and pages can't be cured. The effort may even be inhumane. Our minds as readers are also made like beehives—sending scholar-messengers out into the world for nectar, finding it where they will, and making their own peculiar honey. We cannot police their routes out and back, no matter how we try. Pedantry tries to shut the exits to the hives and make the bees do all their work in the dark. Scholarship tries to map some of the bees' travels. And if, over the centuries, the bees buzzing around the biographers' heads sometimes seem like bats winging madly in the belfry, well, that is an association honored by Shakespeare's sweetest spirit: Where the bees suck, Ariel sings, is where the bats fly, too. ♦