SHAKE-SPEARE the Mystery

A distinguished O.U. alumnus has written a book revealing a scientist's efforts to discover true authorship of plays attributed to Shakespeare. Following account, Chapter 7 of book, reveals his answer. The spelling "Shake-speare" has been adopted by author from original spelling in First Sonnet Folio and other works.

By GEORGE ELLIOTT SWEET, '27 chem, '29 ms

Did actor William Shakespeare merely act greatest role for his Queen?

Author suggests Queen Elizabeth may be author of Shakespearean plays.

SHAKE-SPEARE did not strive for originality in his sonnets any more than he did in his plays. In the dramas his style and the foreground of his thought derived from his fellow University Wits; his classic background was the broadest possible including derivations from Sophocles, Euripides, Aeschylus, Aristophanes, Darius Phrygius, Ovid, Horace, Virgil, Lucretius, Statius, Catullus, Seneca, Terence, and Plautus. The inspiration for his sonnets came principally from Ovid's Metamorphosis, various poetry of Horace, and from Chaucer's Roman de la Rose. As Francis Meres has indicated, Shake-speare as a poet was closer to Ovid than to any other writer. A comparison of Shake-speare's time sonnets with the Epilogue to the Odes of Horace, quoted above, will show the similarity of thought and expression between the two poets. Apparently, contemporary poets had relatively little influence on Shake-speare's sonnets, which argues that he was one of the first Elizabetians in the sonnet field. Since the sonnet fashion reached its peak in the 1590's, it is natural to assume that Shake-speare wrote his sonnets before the 1590's. Therefore, we have an independent indication that Mr. Hotson's date of composition is correct.

Many interpretations can be put upon the sonnets. Some critics view them as allegorical, some think that they are more dramatic than personal, others that they might have been written merely as exercises in the art of composition in the sonnet form. All of these various elements...
probably play a part. We will never know just how personal or just how artificial the sonnets are. Since the poet is of necessity a central figure in a sonnet as he is not in a play, the literary detective, while he knows he is on shaky ground because of the latitude allowed by poetic license, nevertheless is so starved for clues he is bound to speculate on the possible revelations as to the poet's character, physical attributes, and identity contained in the sonnets. The literary detective hopes that the sonnets are as personal as E. K. Chambers thinks they are by his, "Here are souls that pulse and words that burn."

The first 126 sonnets are written in admiration of the physical, mental and spiritual beauty of a "lovely boy." The next twenty-six are principally devoted to condemning the infamous "dark lady" as a wanton with a soul as dark as her complexion. The narrative of the "lovely boy" and the narrative of the "dark lady" taken together strike a most discordant note. The sixteenth century was still the age of chivalry. The story of King Arthur and his Knights of the Round Table continued to be the most popular story in England. No small percentage of the populace took the story to be history and actually awaited King Arthur to return as he had promised. The Tudors claimed to be descended from Arthur through Owen Tudor, grandfather of Henry VII. Serious writers suggested that Queen Elizabeth was the embodiment of King Arthur and that the Elizabethan Age was the Golden Age of the return of Arthur. A poet was expected to sing the praises of some beautiful lady and by the same token, I suppose, a poetess would be expected to dwell on the admirable qualities of some beautiful boy or beautiful man. But here we have a poet singing a boy's praises and throwing mud on his lady. This is certainly a maladjustment. T. G. Tucker decries the lack of "decent taste and ordinary chivalry" in most of the "dark lady" sonnets.

In 1640 John Benson edited and published a medley of Shake-speare's sonnets in which in some cases he altered the sex of the addressee by switching the pronouns. Through the influence of Benson and others, the view was generally adopted that the main body of the sonnets was addressed to a man. Samuel Coleridge took the position that the main body of the sonnets, "could only have come from a man deeply in love, and in love with a woman." For a century and a half, the presumption prevailed that the addressee was a woman; then came a reversal. Edmund Malone took up the study of changing the male pronouns to female pronouns and after extensive research arrived at the conclusion that the main body of the sonnets was addressed to a man. Edmund Malone established this hypothesis as the correct theory and his views have prevailed down to the present. Malone was a thorough and competent research worker on Shake-speare. He it was who discovered the poaching story of William Shakspere's youth to have been false because Sir Thomas Lucy did not have a deer park until much later. Malone also exposed a number of Shakespearean forgeries.

SOMEBODY OR SOMEHOW THERE APPEARS TO BE A MISPLACED GENDER AMONG THE SONNETS. BARRETT WENDELL RECOILED AT THE IDEA OF MYRIAD-MINDED SHAKESPEARE SINCEROUSLY PROTRUSTING HIMSELF BEFORE A BOY PATRON; THEN REMINDED HIMSELF OF ELIZABETH BARTR BROWNING'S "SONNETS FROM THE PORTUGUESE; SHE WAS SIX YEARS OLDER THAN HER "LOVELY BOY," ROBERT BROWNING.

The picture of the "lovely boy" as generated by expressions in the sonnets is very flattering. He is "the world's fine ornament," a "beauteous and lovely youth." He is in his late teens or early twenties, "And thou present'st a pure, unstained prime." He has red or auburn hair, "And buds of marjoram had stol'n thy hair." The boy is as fair in disposition and mental ability as he is fair of face, "Fair, kind and true, is all my argument"; also "Thou art as fair in knowledge as in hue." The beautiful youth has a beautiful mother and we have a hint that Shake-speare has known her in her lovely girlhood:

"Thou art thy mother's glass, and she in thee Calls back the lovely April of her prime!"

What is meant by the seventh line of Sonnet 20: "A man in hue all hues in his controlling"? Gerald Massey suggests that it might refer to Robert Devereux, Earl of Essex, who had for one of his titles, Enev, Herman Conrad for a number of reasons selected the Earl of Essex as the "lovely boy." In the Encyclopedia Britannica, E. K. Chambers mentions this choice of Essex, disagrees with the idea, but praises Conrad's work in general. Essex had auburn hair. He was born on November 19, 1566, and would have been twenty in April, 1587, which would fit the time requirements perfectly.

We see personal allusions to Shake-speare in some ten sonnets.

Sonnet 22
"My glass shall not persuade me I am old, So long as youth and thou are of one date; But when in thee time's furrows I behold, Then look I death my days should expire."

Sonnet 37
"So I, made lame by fortune's dearest spite Take all my comfort of thy worth and truth;"

Sonnet 48
"But thou, to whom my jewels trifles are," and "Within the gentle closure of my breast,"

Sonnet 62
"But when my glass shows me myself indeed, Bated and chopp'd with tann'd antiquity" and "Painting my age with beauty of thy days"

Sonnet 63
"Against my love shall be, as I am now With Time's injurious hand crush'd and o'erworn;"

Sonnet 72
"My name be buried where my body is"

Sonnet 73
"That time of year thou may'st in me behold When yellow leaves, or none, or few, do hand Upon those boughs which shake against the cold, Bare ruin'd choirs, where late the sweet birds sang."

In me thou seest the twilight of such day As after sunset fadeth in the west;"

Sonnet 76
"Why write I still all one, ever the same, And keep invention in a noted weed, That every word doth almost tell my name, Showing their birth and where they did proceed?"

Sonnet 89
"Speak of my launteness, and I straight will halt,"

Sonnet 94
"They that have power to hurt and will do none, That do not do the thing they most do show."

The ideas expressed by Sonnets 72, 76, and 94 might be guideposts and then again, they might not be. Perhaps Sonnets 72 and 76 are hints as to Shake-speare's identity. Perhaps Sonnet 94 is autobiographical. From Sonnets 37 and 89 we gain the impression that Shake-speare is lame or has been lame some time in the past. There should be no doubt that the four age sonnets, 22, 62, 63, and 73 mean what they say in the absence of any contradictory evidence in the rest of the sonnets. Another age sonnet, number 138, has not been quoted because it is a member of the "dark lady" sonnets in which we believe Shake-speare is speaking with another's voice and gazing with another's eyes. The age sonnets plainly relate that in 1587 Shake-speare was middle-aged, perhaps forty or fifty. In this year, William Shakspere was in his early twenties.

Gerald Massey was of the opinion that Sonnet 48 was spoken by a man to a woman, but J. M. Robertson comments of Massey, "he instantly evokes the rejoinder that it is more fitly to be conceived as addressed by a woman to a man." The only solution
that will completely lay to rest the problem of the misplaced gender of the main body of the sonnets is to assume that Shakespeare was a woman. A fantastic idea? Hardly, when for years Mary, Countess of Pembroke, has been seriously considered as a candidate for Shakespeare's position. T.W. Baldwin is of the opinion that both the "dark lady" sonnets of the 127-152 series and the allusion to a lady in Sonnets 40, 41, and 42 are purely literary fictional fabrications. If such be the proper interpretation, then for the sonnets to have been written by a woman makes even greater sense. It would be quite natural for a woman to feel called upon to show her esteem and admiration for a lovely boy.

In the two books of Frank Harris, The Man Shakespeare and The Women of Shakespeare, the author many times points out the womanly qualities of Shakespeare. In the introduction to The Women of Shakespeare he makes this explanation about choosing a title for the book: "Here again Shakespeare will reveal himself as the gentle, irresolute, meditative poet-thinker-lover we learned to know in the Orsino-Hamlet-Antony, an aristocrat of the thinker-lover's sense . It would be quite natural for a woman to feel called upon to show her esteem and admiration for a lovely boy.

A descendant of Sir Francis Drake would naturally be curious about the world his ancestor lived in. George Elliott Sweet, '27 chem, '29 ms, certainly is, and for years he's been reading all he can find concerning the Elizabethan age. When Sweet isn't traveling around the country in fulfillment of his duties as president of the Sweet Geophysical Company, he may be found at the nearest library. Always the scientist, he likes to dig out facts and sift them for truth; such a sifting process formed the backbone of his new book Shakespeare the Mystery, published at Stanford University Press.

Sweet turned down an unsolicited appointment to Annapolis in order to come to O.U. for two degrees in science. He was a college athlete, a hurdler and quarter-miler, but a heart murmur almost put a stop to that. However, a wise doctor told him to keep running and the murmur would go away. It did.

Sweet's controversial book is dedicated to his son Jerry, just turned 13 and of whom his father writes this: "In the last year in Little League Jerry won ten games and lost two; for all I know he may be pitching for the Sooners some day." He is married to the former Mildren Robison, '36ba, '38 Law. The family lives in Malibu, California.

Comments made thus far by first readers of Shakespeare the Mystery have ranged from orchids to onions: some are convinced by Sweet's argument, others outraged. Most, though, are fascinated by the book, which Barbara Bundschu of United Press said "reads like a detective story"—a description with which the editors are inclined to agree.

George Elliott Sweet, scientist turned literary detective, is seen with his son, Jerry.

Shakespearian Scientist

We have another woman candidate; she fits the age sonnets perfectly, and in April 1587 she fell in love with Robert Devereux, Earl of Essex. On May 3, 1587, one Anthony Bagot wrote a letter in which he said, "When she is abroad, nobody with her but my lord of Essex, and at night my lord is at cards, or one game or another with her, that he cometh not to his own lodging till birds sing in the morning." The lady was none other than England's queen, Elizabeth Tudor. She was fifty-three, her lovely boy but twenty: a much greater discrepancy than between Elizabeth Barrett Browning and Robert Browning. Elizabeth Tudor was charming at any age and she was a great and noble queen.

The critics specify that Sonnet 104 was written for a birthday or some other kind
The illness of the Queen is caused by an open ulcer above the ankle, which prevents her from walking.” Sonnet 37, however, may refer to a more lamentable lameness. Ben Jonson’s story to a tavern friend that the Queen “… had a membrana on her leg, which made her incapable of man, …” finds a striking parallel in Sonnet 37, which strongly suggests sexual lameness.

“...English prose is elaboraterather than simple. It was not always so. Nothing could be more raucy, straightforward and alive than the prose of Shakespeare; but it must be remembered that this was dialogue written to be spoken. We do not know how he would have written if like Corneille he had composed prefaces to his plays. It may be that they would have been as euphuistic as the letters of Queen Elizabeth.”

We see in Shake-speare Elizabeth’s twin. Their myriad intellects neither crashed nor diverged; they always saw eye to eye. The political propaganda in the plays never came in for any act of censorship because it was written “exactly as Elizabeth would write it.” Their philosophy was the same, their religion was the same, their intense patriotic devotion to England was the same, their desire to instruct while amusing was the same. Tucker Brooke writes of Elizabeth: “With whom are we to match her? With whom but with the man of Stratford, the greatest of all her subjects, her mightiest colleague in building the age we know alternately by both their names? … And at the end there are no better words to apply to Elizabeth than those Arnold addressed to her poet:

“‘Others abide our question. Thou art free. We ask and ask: thou smilest and art still, Out-topping knowledge.’”

J. E. Neale writes, “Elizabeth had no intention of surrendering her powers, or acquiescing in men’s views of women. She had a great longing, she said, ‘to do some act that would make her fame spread abroad in her lifetime, and, after, occasion memorial for ever.’” We are on firmer ground when we assume that Elizabeth, in
choosing a pen name, would use her fine intelligence to formulate a nom de plume that would be appropriate and fitting, yet would be ingenious enough to preserve her secret until well after her death. It is very much like that thoughtful queen to do as thorough a job as possible inventing a fool-proof disguise for her authorship.

Elizabeth Tudor would no doubt have been pleased to have been able to follow the advice of Theodore Roosevelt to “talk softly and carry a big stick,” if she had been possessed of a big stick. The English of her day as well as the English of today were opposed to a large standing army. Her navy against the Spanish Armada was only a handful of small vessels. She was banking on the skill of her naval architects and the superior abilities of her great sea captains to carry off the victory. Elizabeth ruled half a small island with a total English population of about four million. Little wonder she found the only practical policy was to “talk a good fight and run scared.” When Spain got tough she became chummy with France, and when France became quarrelsome she made overtures to Philip. All English sovereigns were perpetually in need of money. Elizabeth was no exception. She encouraged Sir Francis Drake to seize Spain’s homeward-bound gold ships and then informed Philip that she simply could not control her pirate merchantmen. The great Queen understood well the futility of battle (exactly the same lesson explained by Shakespeare in Troilus and Cressida) and she would not go to war if there was any way to avoid the conflict. Elizabethan England would not have been a world power had it not been for the adroitness with which Elizabeth maintained the balance of power in Europe, and she did it by shaking-a-speare—that is to say, she knew how to make a show of strength where a show of strength was needed and to keep one and all, even her Privy Council, in doubt as to her next political move. The pen name Shakespeare had to be appropriate; it was. Shakespeare had to be subtle; it was, as the passage of time well testified. Shakespeare had to appear in the image of a flesh-and-blood man of a similar name; this was arranged. Shakespeare had to appear in the image of a man, not a woman, because sixteenth-century England would never forgive a woman, let alone a queen, for writing down-to-earth realism, and that was the way Elizabeth wanted to write. In order to test the good and bad qualities of a play, the author must obtain a completely frank expression of public opinion, which would only be frank if the literary effort were written anonymously or under a pen name, if said author is some great personage. Even in the nineteenth century, male prejudice being what it is, Mary Ann Evans Cross thought it best to write as George Eliot; and Charlotte, Emily, and Ann Bronte as Currer Bell, Ellis Bell, and Acton Bell.

Brakspeare and Hurlspeare are warlike names without a doubt. Shakespeare has been called a warlike name, but when we stop to analyze the verb-noun combination, Shake-speare is more appropriately the name of a statesman, a politician, a sovereign, and a writer. Elizabeth was, in the highest sense, all four. To shake-a-speare, or to shake-the-speare, is in some instances a show of strength, sometimes it is a threat; in a broader sense it is a means of keeping the other fellow guessing as to just what your intentions are. It is a means of keeping your opponent or opponents wondering just how much strength you possess and just how you will employ said strength. To shake a weapon is to write—or should we say that to write is to shake a weapon and that a powerful writer wields a powerful weapon. The original sceptre may have been a speare; at least a sceptre and a speare are similar shafts. In a speech before the House of Commons in 1586, Elizabeth had this to say: “... Then to the end I might make the better progress in the art of swaying the sceptre I entered into long and serious cogitation what things were worthy and fitting for kings to do; and I found it was most necessary that they should be abundantly furnished with those special virtues, justice, temperance, prudence, and magnanimity, ...”