

Sleuthing an enigmatic Latin annotation

By Paul H. Altrocchi, M.D.

*What is the end of study, let me know?
Why, that to know which else we should
not know.
Things hid and barred, you mean, from
common sense?
Ay, that is study's godlike recompense.
(Love's Labour's Lost, I.i.55)*

Unsolved enigmas stimulate the human mind; unraveling them accepts the de Verean challenge seeking "to know which else we should not know."

The enigma in this case is a six-word handwritten Latin annotation stumbled across in the University of Hawaii's micro-filmed copy of the 1590 edition of William Camden's *Britannia*. A photocopy of the difficult-to-read penned comment was read by a consulting Professor of Latin as "Is Gulielmo Shakespear Rescio plani nostro" and translated as "Thus I find out that William Shakespeare is an impostor."¹

Could the annotator be the first anti-Stratfordian, even an Oxfordian, possibly as early as the 17th Century? When was the mysterious comment written and who was the writer? The hunt was on. As Professor Rudolph Altrocchi has written:

How mistaken those people are who think the scholar's life is nothing more than a monotonous grind! There are adventures for the literary sleuth as for the much more frequently exalted private detective, adventures in books as thrilling as adventures in life. Indeed, what are books if not records of adventures in life? And some old volumes have stories, quite apart from those told in the printed page, stories full of mystery, romance, even crime. These adventures reveal themselves only to the book explorer, the research scholar.²

The facts

The University of Michigan micro-filmed the six Latin editions (1586, 1587, 1590, 1594, 1600, and 1607) and two English editions (1610 and 1637) of William Camden's *Britannia*, using books of its

own as well as ones borrowed from other libraries, making copies available to all libraries in the world. For microfilming the 1590 Third Latin Edition it used a copy owned by The Huntington Library in San

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Marino, California.³ The Huntington had purchased the volume from Clarence Saunders Brigham in January, 1922.⁴ Brigham was President of the American Antiquarian Society and often volunteered to fill gaps in the Huntington's book collections on overseas buying trips, a story detailed in Don Dickinson's *Henry E. Huntington's Library of Libraries*.

Thus Brigham merely acted as a purchasing intermediary for the copy now at the Huntington. The bookseller was never revealed and the provenance of the book between 1590 and 1922 is impossible to trace.⁵ Camden's brief description of Stratford-on-Avon appears on pages 452 and 453 of the 1590 edition and reads as follows:⁶

Plenior hinc Avona defertur primùm per Charlcott nobilis & equestris familiae Luciorum habitationem, quae à Charlcottis iam olim ad illos haereditario quasi transmigravit: & per Stratford emporiolù non elegans [sic. This word was misprinted; it should have been "inelegans"]. quod duobus fuis alumnis omnem dignitatem debet loanni de Stratford Archiepiscopo

Cantuariensi qui templu posuit, & Hugoni Clopton Pretori Londinési, qui A vonae pontem faxeum quatuordecem fornicibus subnixum non fine maximis impensis induxit.

The key lines with relevance to this paper are underlined. The English translation of the paragraph (with the same key lines underlined) is:

From here the River Avon flows down more strongly first through famous Charlcott and the house of the knightly family of Lucies which long ago passed to them from the Charlcotts as it were by heredity, and through the not (un)distinguished little market town of Stratford, which owes all of its reputation to its two foster sons, John of Stratford, the Archbishop of Canterbury who built the church, and Hugh Clopton, the magistrate of London who began the stone bridge over the Avon supported by fourteen arches, not without very great expense.

The last printed line on page 452 reads:

quod duobus fuis alumnis omnem dignitatem debet loanni
(trans. = ...which owes all of its reputation to its two foster sons...)

There is a penned underline (see figure 1) beneath the word "alumnis" which means "alumni" or "foster sons" or, as Philemon Holland translated it in the English editions of 1610 and 1637, "there bred and brought up."

At the bottom of page 452, below that underline, is the intriguing handwritten comment in ink which, when photographed directly from the book, is seen to state in Latin: "et Gulielmo Shakefpear Rofcio planè nostro."

Three key words—*et, Roscio, and planè*—are now seen differently from the original imperfect photocopy of the microfilm and yield an entirely different meaning.

Translation of the annotation's first Word: "Et"

The first "word" of the annotation is a Tirolian note for "et", the Latin word for "and." It is fancily penned but its main and darkest component is similar to the number "7" and means the same as our modern printed symbol "&."⁷ The handwritten shape of such symbols changed over time until printing presses tended to standardize their design.

Various abbreviations and symbols like the asterisk (*), which connoted poetic verses regarded as authentic, can be traced as far back as Alexandrian Greece in the fourth century B.C.⁸ Most of us do not know shorthand but we all use such shortcut abbreviations and symbols as "part of English," e.g.:

1. Abbreviations: "i.e." = "that is", derived from the Latin *id est*; "e.g." = "for example", derived from the Latin *exempli gratia*.

2. Symbols: # % & @

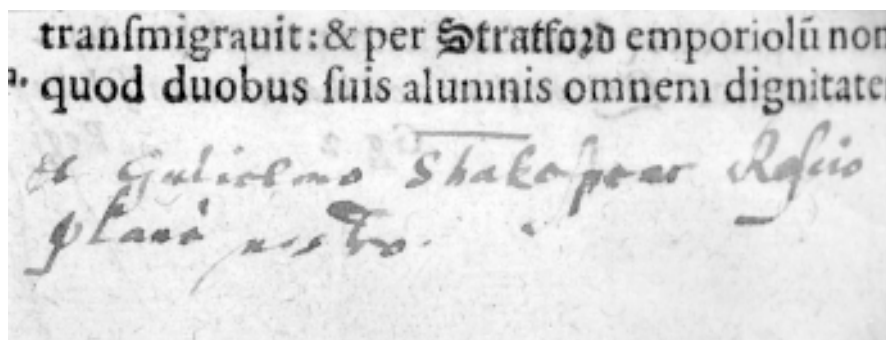
The invention of a comprehensive system of shorthand is credited to Marcus Tullius Tiro, a former Roman slave who became a freedman and the secretary of Cicero (106-43 B.C.). Recognizing Tiro's high intellect, Cicero encouraged him to develop a standard tachygraphic (speed writing) system which could be used to record Cicero's dictation and speeches and also be taught to professional scribes.⁹

The system rapidly spread. Many Romans trained special slaves as shorthand writers. Students learned shorthand to take down lectures. Even prominent Romans learned the system, e.g., Cicero himself and Seneca (4 B.C.- 65 A.D.) the philosopher, statesman and writer of nine tragedies who amplified and codified the system further.¹⁰

So successful was Tiro's concept and system that for centuries shorthand was known as "notae Tironianae" or "Tironian notes." Tiro retired to a farm and, before dying at the age of 100, played an important role in preserving the literary works and extensive personal correspondence of his close friend Marcus Tullius Cicero.¹¹

Translation of the second and third words: Gulielmo Shakefpear

Gulielmo = William. Shakefpear (= Shakespeare) has a second "s" in the "secretary" style of writing (*vide infra*) and lacks a final "e".



Courtesy of the Henry E. Huntington Library

Figure 1. The intriguing handwritten annotation—apparently never before noted by any Shakespeare researcher—that the author found in the UMI microfilm copy of Camden's *Britannia* (1590 edition) while researching entries under "Stratford" in all the available editions of *Britannia* (ranging from 1586 to 1637).

Translation of the annotation's fourth word: Roscio

The second letter is definitely different from every "e" in the annotation and, despite its solid black ink center, is an "o", not an "e". The "f" is an "s" in the secretary hand. The word, therefore, is not Rescio but Roscio. What is the meaning of Roscio, a word not in any Latin dictionary?

"Roscio" is rarely encountered nowadays, and the author is indebted to an insightful comment by Roger Stritmatter from the audience when this material was first presented at the Seventh Annual Edward de Vere Studies Conference in Portland, Oregon, this past April¹² (see article on page 1).

Quintus Roscius Gallus (c. 126 - 62 B.C.) was born a slave at Solonium, south of Rome. Handsome with an elegant carriage, he moved to Rome to study acting, frequenting the Roman forum to study the eloquence and delivery of famous orators including Quintus Hortensius and Cicero. He became a master of the acting art, the finest comic actor of his time, so remarkably outstanding that Cicero took lessons from him and the Emperor Sulla presented him with a gold ring, symbol of equestrian rank, a unique distinction for an actor. He even wrote a treatise comparing acting and oratory. He amassed a fortune from his acting.¹³

In a time of grandeur for Rome and some of its famous leaders, Roscius was deemed so supremely peerless that his name came to symbolize greatness in theatrical artistry and, in later centuries, supremacy in any field of artistic endeavor, i.e., a consummate artist.¹⁴

In 18th century England the term Roscius or Roscian was still applied to

uniquely great actors, e.g.:

1. James Boswell (1740 - 1795), noted biographer of Samuel Johnson, wrote, "I was sitting with the great Roscius of the age, David Garrick."

2. In *Theatre in the Age of Garrick*, C. Price said: "To the eighteenth century, Garrick was the outstanding actor of modern times, and to call him 'Roscius' as was so often done was merely to indicate that in one respect at least, England could rival ancient Rome."¹⁵

In his later years, Garrick had the dubious distinctions of financing the fabrication of a new statue of "Shakespeare" in 1768 for the north side niche in Stratford's Trinity Parish Church (now claimed as "the original" by Stratfordians), and in 1769 initiating the Shakespearean Festival in Stratford-on-Avon which continues to the present day.

Now back to our Latin annotation. The annotator uses the dative case of "Roscius," i.e., "Roscio," in accord with Camden's use of the dative case: "... Stratford, which owes all of its reputation to its two foster sons—John of Stratford, the Archbishop of Canterbury who built the church, and Hugh Clopton . . ."

The unknown annotator is adding "and to our Roscius . . ." which, in Latin, requires the dative case.

Was Edward de Vere aware of the quintessential actor, Roscius? Yes, indeed! Our new friend Roscius is encountered twice in de Vere's plays:

(1) *3 Henry VI* (V.vi.10). Henry VI is about to be murdered by Gloucester and asks him:

(Continued on page 18)

Latin annotation (cont'd from page 17)

So flies the reckless shepherd from the
wolf;
So first the harmless sheep doth yield
his fleece,
And next his throat unto the butcher's
knife.
What scene of death hath Roscius now
to act?

(2) *Hamlet* (II.ii.392). As a group of theatrical players arrives at Elinsore Castle, Hamlet, feigning madness, mocks Polonius:

Hamlet (aside): I will prophesy he comes
to tell me of the players. Mark it. You
say right, sir, for o' Monday morn
ing, 'twas so indeed.
Polonius: My lord, I have news to tell
you.
Hamlet: My lord, I have news to tell you.
When Roscius was an actor in Rome
Polonius: The actors are come hither,
my lord.
Hamlet: Buzz, buzz.

Translation of the annotation's fifth word: *planè*

Planè is an adverb meaning "certainly," as used by the great Roman writer of comedies, Plautus, who died in 184 B.C. and was paid homage to by Edward de Vere, who used plots from *Amphitrua*, *Aulularia*, and *Manacchi* in his own plays. *Planè* was used by Cicero to mean "distinctly," "clearly" or "intelligibly"—as in "planissime explicare," to explain distinctly or clearly.¹⁶

The fifth letter in "*planè*" is a secretarial "e" (*vide infra*), not an "i." The word is *not* "*plani*," the Latin subjective genitive case of "*planus*" describing the source of an activity, "Shakespeare's impostoring" as it was first translated erroneously.¹⁷

The Latin language used a line over a vowel such as "i" or "e" to express longness in pronunciation. By the middle ages it had disappeared, being replaced by accent marks to indicate either long vowels or stressed syllables,¹⁸ as used by our unknown annotator.

Translation of the sixth word: *nostro*

Nostro means "our" in Latin.

We can now see that the complete, correct translation of the annotation is:

And certainly to our Roscius, William Shakespeare.

So what Camden is saying in the 1590 entry under the town of Stratford-on-Avon is that the otherwise rather undistinguished market town owes its reputation to two eminent local sons, John, who became Archbishop of Canterbury, and Hugh Clopton, who built Stratford's lovely bridge. The annotator is adding his opinion that Stratford also certainly owes its reputation to "our" Roscius, William Shakespeare.

Relevant history of English handwriting

The secretarial hand was an indigenous English creation—developing from the small handwriting characteristic of the reign of Henry VII (1485-1509). Fancy and difficult to write but popular because of its graceful appearance, the secretarial hand was well established in England by 1525 and became the working hand both of scribes and businessmen in the 1500s, lingering into the first half of the 1600s.¹⁹ As Martin Billingsley said in his 1618 analysis of handwriting, *The Pens Excellence*:²⁰

The secretary . . . is so termed (as I conceive) because it is the Secretaries common hand; and partly because it is the only usual hand of England, for dispatching of all manner of businesses.

The italic hand appeared in Italy in 1423 and was officially adopted by the Vatican's papal chancery in 1431. It appeared in England in the early 1500s and rapidly spread. Why? Because of its greater ease and clarity and because emigrating Italian writing teachers dominated European and English handwriting and printing styles in the 16th century.²¹

The italic hand soon became favored by scholars at Cambridge, including Roger Ascham, who tutored the future Queen Elizabeth I in calligraphy as well as Greek and Latin from 1548 to 1550, when Elizabeth was 15 to 17 years old. Having learned the secretarial hand first, she was adept at both scripts, as were Francis Bacon and a number of Elizabethan nobles.²² Edward de Vere and his nemesis, William Cecil, used the italic hand.

There was a continuing battle between the two hands in England in the late 1500s and 1600s, written documents and letters often showing an intermixture but with the italic hand increasingly predominating.²³

Ardent Stratfordian Giles Dawson of the Folger Shakespeare Library summarized the demise of the secretarial hand: "By 1650 it was well on its way towards extinction, and by 1700 it had vanished not without a trace, but vanished as a distinct hand."²⁴

Analysis of the annotation's handwriting: can it be dated?

Our annotation is a mixture of secretarial and italic hands. The two secretarial letters are the "e" and the "f = s".

The clearly secretarial "e" appears four times in *Gulielmo*, *Shakespear* (twice), and *planè*. Each of these "e's" has a horizontal slash near the top which is formed by a broad separate stroke of the pen, quite distinctive from an italic "e," which is the same as our printed "e" today. The italic "e" is well exemplified in personal letters written by Edward de Vere.²⁵ The secretarial "e" persisted longer than all other secretarial letters as the italic script took over.²⁶

The "f" (see figure 1) as the sixth letter in "Shakespear" and the third letter in "Roscio" is a definite secretarial "s" in form, quite different from the italic "s," which looks exactly like our modern printed "s." The "f" persisted so long in mixed scripts that it is given less diagnostic value in dating than the secretarial "e."²⁷

The "t" in *nostro* is flourished but not clearly secretarial.²⁸

In the 1500s the "i" is usually accented rather than dotted, so the dotted "i" in *Gulielmo* and in *Roscio* favors a date in the 1600s or later.

Handwriting analysts try to decide the earliest and latest dates for a piece of writing. Given the important caveats that handwriting analysis is an inexact science and that a sample of six words is extremely small, the author's experts state that the overall predominance of the italic hand (30 out of 35 letters = 86%), mixed with secretarial "e's" and "f's," suggest that our annotation was most likely written between 1620 and 1650.²⁹

Summary and Conclusions

1. The ink annotation found on page 452 of the Huntington Library's copy of William Camden's 1590 Third Edition of *Britannia* correctly reads: "et Gulielmo

Shakespear Roscio planè nostro.”

2. In English this reads: “and certainly to our Roscius, William Shakespeare.”

3. Handwriting analysis suggests the annotation was written between 1620 and 1650.

4. By his annotation, the book’s owner is declaring himself a Stratfordian since he is attributing Stratford-on-Avon’s reputation to Shakespeare as well as to its two foster sons, John, Archbishop of Canterbury and Hugh Clopton, the only two Stratford “alumni” thought worthy of note by Camden.

5. Owners of any book except the Bible in those days were certainly members of the educated class, especially the owner of a book in Latin who wrote a Latin annotation. This does not mean he was a member of the nobility, since most members of Edward de Vere’s University Wits were fluent in Latin and none were nobles, and since other bright commoners like Ben Jonson knew Latin. The identity of the annotator will never be known.

6. Since there is no evidence that Shaksper of Stratford was a famous actor and little or no valid evidence that he was an actor at all, this reference to “Roscius” raises an interesting question. Just what did the annotator know about Shaksper of Stratford? He believes Shaksper is famous enough to be mentioned as an important foster son of Stratford, but in what capacity?

If the annotator knew the works of Shakespeare, why not call him “Our honey-tongued Ovid” or “Our mellifluous Virgilian wordsmith?” In the vast majority of cases, “Roscius” has been used to refer to great actors, including Shakespeare’s two usages in *3 Henry VI* and *Hamlet*. Calling Shaksper “Roscius” would seem to indicate that, despite the lack of evidence, there were some who thought he was an actor and that acting was how he “made it” in London.

7. The annotation, likely written so soon after Shaksper of Stratford’s death in 1616, does confirm the remarkable early success of what Oxfordians view as William Cecil’s clever but monstrous connivance: forcing the genius Edward de Vere into pseudonymity and promoting the illiterate grain merchant and real estate speculator, William Shaksper of Stratford, into hoaxian prominence as the great poet and playwright, William Shakespeare.

Final comments

In addition to the obvious reminder that one must always make certain that research material is copied with uncompromised technical accuracy, sleuthing a cryptic six-word Latin annotation in a 1590 book led to edification in the following scholarly arenas:

1. Paleography, the study of ancient writing.
2. The wonderful intricacies of Lingua Latina, the Latin language.
3. The historical origins and development of shorthand.
4. The life of Tiro and his historically important association with Cicero.
5. The life of Quintus Roscius and use of the terms “Roscius” or “Roscian” for supremely gifted artists in any field, especially actors.
6. Study of Elizabethan handwriting, the evolution of the secretary hand and its demise, and the supremacy of the italic hand up to the present.
7. The techniques of handwriting analysis in chronological dating.

All of these derivatives represent a rather bountiful harvest from six words hastily scribbled more than 300 years ago. Edward de Vere’s viewpoint on literary study and research is once again confirmed:

*Study is like the heaven’s glorious sun.
Love’s Labour’s Lost (I.i.84)*

The author is indebted to Stephen Tabor, Curator of Early Printed Books, Huntington Library, for sage and helpful advice.

References

1. The Latin professor will remain anonymous because he was so wrong!
2. Rudolph Altrocchi. *Sleuthing in the Stacks*. Harvard Univ. Press, page 3, Cambridge, Mass., 1944.
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4. Personal communication from Stephen Tabor, Curator of Early Printed Books, Huntington Library, San Marino, California, 2002.
5. Ibid.
6. Paul Altrocchi. “What did William Camden

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7. Tabor, op. cit.
8. Sir Edward Maunde Thompson. *An Introduction to Greek and Latin Palaeography*. Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1912.
9. *Harper’s Dictionary of Classical Literature and Antiquities*. Editor, Harry Thurston Peck, American Book Co., Harper & Bros., NY, 1896.
10. Ibid.
11. Thompson, op. cit.
12. Comment made by Roger Stritmatter after presentation of “What Did William Camden Say? Why and When Did He Say It?”, 7th Annual Edward de Vere Studies Conference, Portland, Oregon, April 13, 2003.
13. *Encyclopedia Britannica*, 11th Edition, volume XXIII. Cambridge Univ. Press, England, 1911, p. 275.
14. *The Columbia Encyclopedia*, 6th Edition, NY, 2001. (also: Tabor, op. cit.).
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23. Ibid.
24. Dawson and Skipton, op. cit.
25. William Plumer Fowler. *Shakespeare Revealed in Oxford’s Letters*, preface, Peter E. Randall, Portsmouth, New Hampshire, 1986.
26. Tabor, op. cit.
27. Ibid.
28. Ibid.
29. Mary Robertson, handwriting expert and Chief Curator of Manuscripts, The Huntington Library, San Marino, Calif., 2003, communicated to the author via Stephen Tabor (Tabor, op. cit.).