

Deciphering the Wilton House Shakespeare Statue Scroll

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Abstract

The Wilton House Shakespeare statue scroll shows Macbeth's famous soliloquy upon the death of Lady Macbeth. There appears to be stenographic cipher in the unusual capital letters of scroll with an anagram solution "The woman who sustained Dyer's AA Fellowship" referring to Countess Mary (Sidney) Herbert whom the statue commemorates. This solution does not identify the Countess as an author. There is also an unsatisfactory solution that identifies to Christopher Marlowe as the sole author.

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1. Deciphering the Wilton House Shakespeare Statue Scroll for indications of alternative authorship has been the subject of investigation (Nettleton, 2014). On the anniversary of publication of the First Folio in 1623, this research note updates the Wilton House scroll investigation. As with all potential ciphers, there are an infinite number of possible ciphers including multiphase "enigma wrapped in a conundrum" ciphers, ingenious ciphers such as "every third letter following punctuation", whitespace ciphers, or different ciphers applied to different part of an encrypted message. Indeed there may not be any cipher at all.
2. Prima facie there appears to be stenographic cipher in the capital letters of the Wilton House scroll with anagram solution "The woman who sustained Dyer's AA Fellowship". This encipherment is an impressive achievement in the short space of the scroll text and so is probably the only cipher in the message.
3. The top two lines of the scroll text provide a very nice stenographic cipher anagram of "Dyer AA Fellowship". Vertical alignment is often used in stenographic ciphers and the unusual right-justification is used here to vertically align the "AA", which is a well-known enigmatic symbol or key of early Freemasonic-Rosicrucian groups. This secret AA Fellowship was probably a similar group to Sir Walter Raleigh's School of Night (or what the Jesuit's called the School of Atheism), of which many of playwrights are thought to be members including Christopher Marlowe, George Chapman, Thomas Hariot, and Sir Henry Percy.
4. "The woman who sustained Dyer's AA Fellowship" is a solution including the letters that are not in the top two lines, "t, s, t, a, g, e, a, s, m", which in English are somewhat elusive to anagram solutions. However a solution readily achieved with one of the "s" is appended to "Dyer" and the remaining letters "t, t, a, g, e, a, s, m" forming an anagram of the Latin "gestatam", which is the feminine accusative of "borne, carried, sustained etc", which is the usage in the Bible. The brilliant choice of "gestatam" conveys a huge amount of meaning in just one word, and cipher designer had only a few words to communicate the Mary Sidney's commemoration. With a quite high degree of certainty Countess Mary Sidney Herbert is "the woman who supported" the playwright group. This is because Mary Sidney maintained the Wilton Circle of playwrights at Wilton House, where she lived from her marriage in 1577 to her death in 1621. The Wilton Circle was run by run by Sir Walter Raleigh's half-brother Humphrey Gilbert. Its members included Edmund Spenser, Michael Drayton, Sir John Davies, Abraham Fraunce, Samuel Daniel, and perhaps Dr John Dee, who developed alchemical and plant-based medicines with Mary Sidney at Wilton House, and John Florio who bequeathed his library to Wilton House. Through its membership, the Wilton Circle would have been closely affiliated with Dyer's AA Fellowship. While "the woman who sustained Dyer's AA Fellowship" doesn't completely exclude an interpretation of Mary Sidney as its major playwright this is considered unlikely. Females were not accepted as

members of Rosicrucian societies so she would not have been a member of the supported AA Fellowship. Furthermore, various materials in Shakespeare's plays could be interpreted as seditious in which case Mary's estates would be at risk of expropriation. In fact Mary's sons William and Philip waited until immediately after her death to draw together the First Folio as their commemoration of Mary's achievement in sustaining the corpus.

5. "The woman who sustained" part of the solution relies on a full set of capital letters including the "s, m" from the attribution. This attribution appears to be an important part of the cipher because it extraordinarily belabours the obvious. Macbeth's soliloquy on the Wilton House statue is attributed, in contrast to equally famous but unattributed Tempest lines on the contemporaneous Westminster Abbey statue. Since any attribution to Macbeth's soliloquy is unnecessary because it is self-evident, it is redundant to attribute Macbeth's soliloquy to the play Macbeth. Furthermore, it is even more superfluous to attribute the Macbeth play to Shakespeare. It might be added that these two attributions are completely unnecessary for those who would recognise the initial "AA" key. Although there is plenty of space on both the Westminster Abbey and Wilton House scrolls for attributions, the Wilton House statue attribution appears to be unnecessarily abbreviated. This implies that the designer of the cipher was somewhat embarrassed by including the attribution.
6. This research applied many well-known deciphering techniques to the Wilton House scroll. These include simple anagrams, "one time pad" substitution ciphers, which are unbreakable except by fortuitous trial-and-error cribbing, a 2-pad crib of the Wilton House scroll paired with the Westminster Abbey scroll, Vigenère and Beaufort ciphers and variants. However, as it turns out, the result "the woman who sustained Dyer's AA Fellowship" doesn't touch on the authorship controversy. Another anagram solution was found that identifies Christopher Marlowe as a single author, in contrast to the AA Fellowship. This solution, which appears unsatisfactory, is "Morley's agape as flawd atheist" where "flawd" is a term for "drunk". In other words "Marlowe's love to other humans as a drunk atheist". While this resonates with unsubstantiated allegations by Marlowe's or Robert Cecil's adversaries denouncing Marlowe as a drunk and an atheist (when he was probably a dystheist). In reaching a conclusion that this solution is unsatisfactory it only needs be considered how this solution would rather cynically perpetuate Marlowe's denouncement rather than honouring the author; how this solution reflects adversely on the context of the statue and Macbeth's soliloquy, which exhibits beautiful blank verse in iambic pentameter and expresses profound philosophical insights; how the solution would disparage Shakespeare's revered name and reputation; and how this solution would blight the very spirit of honour in which Shakespeare's statue is meant to commemorate Mary Sidney. Furthermore, the solution requires rather brutish wrangling in contrast to the elegance of Occam's Razor parsimony in accepting the simplest solution and the stenographic clues provided.

References:

Nettleton, S. J. "Bayesian Interrogation of the Elizabethan Social Network for First Folio Authorship." *Brief Chronicles V* (2014) 113, (<https://shakespeareoxfordfellowship.org/wp-content/uploads/Nettleton.Bayesian.pdf>)