

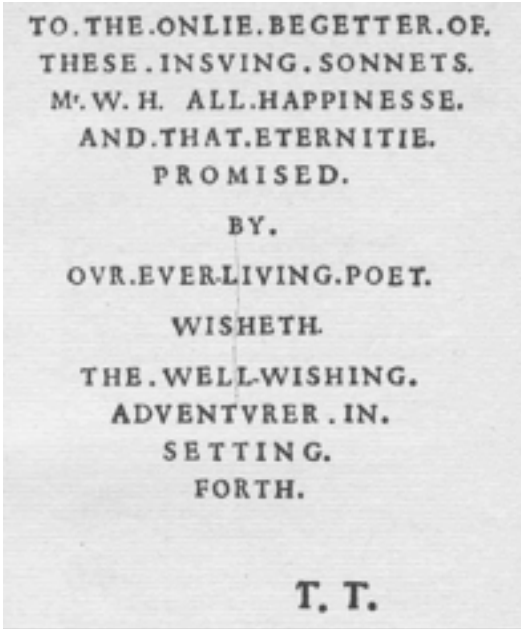
Henry Neville: The Name Encoded In The Sonnets

David Ewald and John Casson

Language is code which can contain more than one meaning when metaphor, allusion and symbol are used. Poets play with language, using rhyme, rhythm, puns and many other techniques. Under autocratic regimes writers use story, image and word play to encode forbidden meanings. Ben Jonson and other Elizabethan/Jacobean poets were known to use cryptic writing to hide their real meaning. Jonson had reason to be cautious, having spent time in prison for offending the government when *The Isle of Dogs*, a play co-written with Thomas Nashe, was banned and Nashe's works burned. Shakespeare also hid his real meaning in cryptic passages, sometimes so successfully that they remain opaque: *The Phoenix and the Turtle* being a good example.

When previous investigators of the authorship question posited that there might be coded passages in Shakespeare's works, they looked for a particular, pre-conceived, person's name and constructed it out of fragments of text. These attempts have been unconvincing to the unbiased outsider and have brought the whole enterprise of seeking coded messages into disrepute. Contempt has been poured on "amateur code breakers" by orthodox scholars. However it is possible to take another view of their unsuccessful efforts. These researchers intuited that there were hidden messages in these cryptic writings so they tried to unlock the code. Just as science proceeds through hypothesis and evidence gathering and may pursue many false leads until a better solution is discovered, so previous generations of code breakers have tried and failed to find the truth.

When she explored the dedication to the 1609 *Shake-speares Sonnets* Brenda James did not set out with a preconceived name she was trying to make the text fit. She was genuinely surprised to find the name Henry Neville because she had never heard of him. Fearing she would be ridiculed, she did not at first publish her decoding method. Whilst researching the sonnets and their obviously cryptic dedication, John Rollett, Brenda James, Rosemary Warner, Bruce Leyland, James Goding and David Ewald have all independently found various logical constructions in which one clue has led to another in a step by step process. We now set out the basic information with some examples. Interested readers can follow this up through the internet and other books¹. The enquiry process started with the mysterious dedication to the 1609 edition of *Shakes-speares Sonnets*. The odd layout and strange syntax, which does not make simple sense, might reasonably lead one to suspect it might conceal a hidden meaning.



TO . THE . ONLIE . BEGETTER . OF .
THESE . INSVING . SONNETS .
M^r . W . H . ALL . HAPPINESSE .
AND . THAT . ETERNITIE .
PROMISED .
BY .
OVR . EVERLIVING . POET .
WISHETH
THE . WELLWISHING .
ADVENTVRER . IN .
SETTING .
FORTH .

T . T .

James was not the first to find names embedded in this dedication. In 1997 John Rollett² published his discovery that the names Henry and Wriothesley³ were encoded in the dedication. He had placed it into grids of 15 and 18 letters across and found these names.

HENRY

T	O	T	H	E	O	N	L	I	E	B	E	G	E	T
T	E	R	O	F	T	<u>H</u>	E	S	E	I	N	S	V	I
N	G	S	O	N	N	<u>E</u>	T	S	M	r	W	H	A	L
L	H	A	P	P	I	<u>N</u>	E	S	S	E	A	N	D	T
H	A	T	E	T	E	<u>R</u>	N	I	T	I	E	P	R	O
M	I	S	E	D	B	<u>Y</u>	O	V	R	E	V	E	R	L
I	V	I	N	G	P	O	E	T	W	I	S	H	E	T
H	T	H	E	W	E	L	L	W	I	S	H	I	N	G
A	D	V	E	N	T	V	R	E	R	I	N	S	E	T
T	I	N	G	F	O	R	T	H						

WR-IOTH-ESLEY

T	O	T	H	E	O	N	L	I	<u>E</u>	B	E	G	E	T	T	E	R
O	F	T	H	E	S	E	I	N	<u>S</u>	V	I	N	G	S	O	N	N
E	T	S	M	r	W	H	A	L	<u>L</u>	<u>H</u>	A	P	P	I	N	E	S
S	E	A	N	D	T	H	A	T	<u>E</u>	<u>T</u>	E	R	N	I	T	I	E
P	R	O	M	I	S	E	D	B	<u>Y</u>	<u>Q</u>	V	R	E	V	E	R	L
I	V	I	N	G	P	O	E	T	W	<u>I</u>	S	H	E	T	H	T	H
E	<u>W</u>	E	L	L	W	I	S	H	I	N	G	A	D	V	E	N	T
V	<u>R</u>	E	R	I	N	S	E	T	T	I	N	G	F	O	R	T	H

By a different process Brenda James made her discovery, in the grid of 15 across, that Henry Neville was the hidden poet who used Shake-speare as his pen name. She guessed that the surname of “Henry Poet” must be in the letters beneath. From these letters she attempted to create surnames and came up with Nevvell as the most compelling answer.

HENRY NEWELL POET

T	O	T	H	E	O	N	L	I	E	B	E	G	E	T
T	E	R	O	F	T	<u>H</u>	E	S	E	I	N	S	V	I
N	G	S	O	N	N	<u>E</u>	T	S	M	r	W	H	A	L
L	H	A	P	P	I	<u>N</u>	E	S	S	E	A	N	D	T
H	A	T	E	T	E	<u>R</u>	N	I	T	I	E	P	R	O
M	I	S	E	D	B	<u>Y</u>	O	V	R	E	V	E	R	L
I	V	I	<u>N</u>	G	<u>P</u>	<u>Q</u>	<u>E</u>	<u>T</u>	W	I	S	H	E	T
H	T	H	<u>E</u>	<u>W</u>	<u>E</u>	<u>L</u>	<u>L</u>	W	I	S	H	I	N	G
A	D	V	<u>E</u>	<u>N</u>	T	V	R	E	R	I	N	S	E	T
T	I	<u>N</u>	G	F	O	R	T	H						

The name **Newell** can be constructed in four different ways, from above or below, vertically and diagonally. On Neville’s baptismal record he was named as, “Henry Newell sonne to Syr Henry Newell knyght”. If the ‘W’ of the dedication is recognised as a double ‘V’ (as it was printed) Newell can be read as **Nevvell**. James went on to find the name ‘Henry Nevill’ encoded in other ways in different grids, reinforcing her initial discovery. There was no standard spelling in the 16th Century. In writing his name Neville used the spelling Nevill. His father used Nevell⁴. The surname Neville occurs a number of times in the Shakespeare history plays which have been proven to exhibit a pro-Neville bias (see Bradbeer & Casson, 2015). In the original quarto texts of *Henry VI* parts 2 and 3 the name was

spelt Neucl, Neuil, Neuill ('u' being interchangeable at that time with 'v').

In 2003, before Brenda James announced her discovery, Rosemary Warner found the name Neville (in a reversed diagonal⁵) in sonnet 134, "So now I have confest...", when she had placed the poem in a grid of 30x16. After James made the announcement of Neville's authorship in 2005, Bruce Leyland and James Goding in Australia began their own independent research into the dedication. Starting only with the knowledge of the name, but not how James had made her discovery, they explored how it might be encrypted. Developing their own method they confirmed that Henry Neville's name occurs in multiple ways within the dedication. They have published their findings that the dedication is a complex, systematic structure which conceals and reveals the authorship of *Shake-speares Sonnets*.

The name Henry Neville in two sonnets

Analysing the language of sonnet 121, Helen Vendler found it "more than usually complex" and that the word play on 'vile' suggested that the word 'live' "hovers unseen under 'vile'". She also noted that "the concealed KEY WORD 'IL[L]' plays hide and seek throughout the poem" (Vendler, 1999, 513). From this it seems that elements of the name 'Neville' are hidden in this sonnet. But is there the necessary initial 'N' available to complete the name?

David Ewald in the USA had been conducting independent research. His findings supported James' suggestion that Henry Neville had named himself three times in sonnet 121 using the words 'level', 'bevel' and 'evil'⁶. The sonnet starts with the statement, "'Tis better to be vile than vile esteemed." The name 'Nevile' can be seen in "then_vile". 'Than' in

this sentence is spelt 'then' in the 1609 imprint, so offering an 'e' just displaced by one space. The sonnet may have been written during the period 1601-3 when Neville was condemned for his part in the Essex rebellion, judged a traitor, imprisoned and heavily fined. The anger and bitterness at being judged that is the essential mood of the sonnet would fit Neville's life experience. Ewald noted that in *Shakespeare's Sonnets, With A New Commentary*, David West (2007, 371) pointed out that the words 'level' and 'bevel' gave their lines an extra eleventh syllable. (If 'general' were to be counted as three syllables, then line 13, which includes the word 'evil', also has eleven syllables.) This gives those lines a special emphasis. Spelt out, the number eleven seems to reflect Henry Neville's surname because Neville reversed spells elliveN. The square root of this sonnet's number, 121, is 11. These three words, 'level', 'bevel' and 'evil' seem to offer a portion of the name Neville, or echo the word 'eleven', but again we ask, is there the necessary N? These three words are preceded by lines in which three words contain the letter 'k', indeed they are the only words in the sonnet that contain this letter. These are the word 'think' in line 8, 'reckon' in line 10 and 'rank' in line 12. The 'k' words are connected by being forms of thought (think, reckon and rank thoughts): the poet is inviting us to think with him. The two questions posed in the sonnet lead to a statement about identity: "I am that I am". Each of the 'k' words also contains a letter 'n', indeed it is the only other letter common to all three words. These letter 'n's perform the duty of completing the name Neville in the following line, as James had suggested. In the 1609 imprint the word 'evil' is spelt 'euill'⁷ resulting in the final naming being 'Nevill': this was the spelling Neville used in signing letters in 1601, 1602 and 1613.

'Tis better to be vile than vile esteemed,
When not to be receives reproach of being
And the just pleasure lost, which is so deemed
Not by our feeling but by others' seeing.
For why should others' false adulterate eyes
Give salutation to my sportive blood?
Or on my frailties why are frailer spies,
Which in their wills count bad what I think good?
No, I am that I am, and they that level
At my abuses reckon up their own.
I may be straight though they themselves be bevel.
By their rank thoughts my deeds must not be shown,
Unless this general evil they maintain,
All men are bad and in their badness reign.

Another possibly significant pattern is the three pairs of “their/they” in lines 8-13.

Which in their wills count bad what I think good?
No, I am that I am, and they that level
At my abuses reckon up their own.
I may be straight though they themselves be bevel.
By their rank thoughts my deeds must not be shown,
Unless this general evil they maintain,
All men are bad and in their badness reign.

These pairs of words offer the possibility that the name **Henry** can be spelt out using these letters:

Which in their wills count bad what I think good?
No, I am that I am, and they that level
At my abuses reckon up their own.
I may be straight though they themselves be bevel.
By their rank thoughts my deeds must not be shown,
Unless this general evil they maintain,
All men are bad and in their badness reign.

The two words 'their' and 'they' provide the letters 'he_ry' and, from the 'k' words, the final missing letter 'n' can be applied to complete the name 'Henry' and link it to "Nevel/Nevill".

In this sonnet there are three sets of three: the three words containing the letter 'k', 'think', 'reckon' and 'rank'; the words 'level', 'bevel' and 'evil' and the three instances of their/they. Roe (2011, 28, 67, 110) found examples of when Shakespeare sought to emphasise a relevant detail by repeating it three times. Leyland & Goding (2015, 116-118) found that in sonnets 67 and 76 the question 'Why' was asked three times. These two sonnets' numbers map onto the only letter 'Y' in the dedication which is in the grid box that has the co-ordinates 6/7 and 7/6. It is the Y of HENRY in the grid of 10x15. It seems that when the Bard did things three times he was underlining something significant. This suggests that in sonnet 121 the Bard may have been signalling that there is something to be found here. The number of the sonnet, 121, appears to be the number 11 nesting the number 2, much like Henry Neville was two separate personas in one man, Neville and Shakespeare.

Neville may again be named in sonnet 144. We recall that there are 144 letters in the dedication at the start of the sonnets so it can be laid out in a grid of 12x12. This grid contained the name Henry and, half hidden, the name Neville. We might then reasonably suspect that sonnet 144 could include something significant. Again the key is mathematical: the square root of 144 is 12 and the name 'Henry Neville' contains 12 letters. Neville spelt out his name in the final lines: Henry descending diagonally from the 'h' of 'both' in line 11 (again that number) and Neville ascending vertically in the ends of the last three lines forming a triangle (in this case we use the original 1609 spelling⁸).

TWo loues I haue of comfort and difpaire,
 Which like two fpirits do fugieft me ffill,
 The better angett is a man right faire:
 The worfer fpirit a woman collour'd il.
 To win me foone to hell my femall euill,
 Tempteth my better angel from my fight,
 And would corrupt my faint to be a diuel:
 Wooing his purity with her fowle pride.
 And whether that my angel be turn'd finde,
 Suspect I may, yet not directly tell,
 But being both from me both **h** to each friend,
 I geffe one angel in an others **hel**.
 Yet this fhall I nere **know** but **liue** in doubt,
 Till my bad angel **fire** my good **one** out.

All this might be dismissed as coincidence or “seeing what you want to see” but for the fact that these numbers and names are logical constructions which complement James’ (2008) original discoveries and the findings made by Leyland & Goding (2015) who have discovered similar matching between the numbers of the sonnets and letters in the dedication.

Neville was a mathematician who had experience of using codes of numbers and letters in his diplomatic correspondence. In two letters to Robert Cecil in January 1600 he used a cipher of numbers and letters to encode names.

“I beseeche you to insert these Characters following into your **Cifre**, r. 163 to serve for the *Fryar* whom I employ: 1.163 for the Party from whom I had this inclosed Letter, and m.177 for Roome, for of these I shall have often occasion to wryte hereafter....”⁹

Sawyer, the editor of the letters, put the solutions to the cipher in italics (our emphasis is in bold). Ten days later Neville wrote:

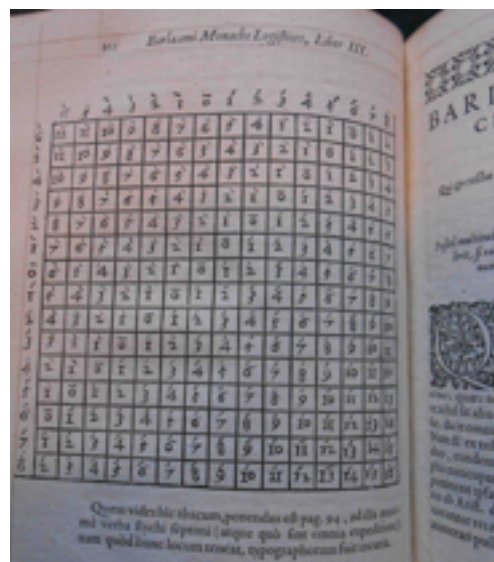
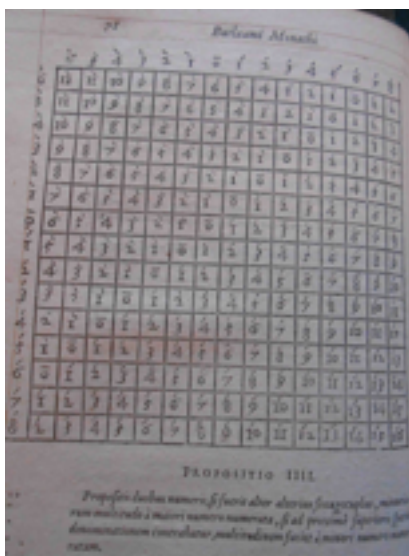
“Since my last, which I sent by my Brother Trelawny, I have dispatched r. 163 *The Fryer mentioned in my last letter* q.ic.m.177 to Rome. Before his Departure I caused him to make straight Acquaintance with som *dociiud Scottes* here, whom I suspected to be Practizers in the Business I have so often written of; which was easie for him to doe, because they perceiving the Creditt he had with *z.eotduy.hcmscrt the Patriarch*, were very glad to become inward with him hoping to make good use of him towards the other I last mentioned.

In the Confidence (he having governed himself discretely, and seeming very zealous and passionat in the common Cause) they have opened themselves in generall terms very farre unto him, *and confirmed all that I have hithertofore advertised* and have given him letters of special Recommendation to *Rome*. The Letters he brought to me, which I perusing, I tooke a Copie of one of them which I send here inclosed, fynding yt to impart more than the rest. And perceiving that the Wryter had willed his Freend to communicatt their **Cifre** unto him when he came there, I caused him, under Pretence of his Desyre to wryte from *Lions*, where *x.dowgmq.igtlgow the Patriarch* was to make som Stay, **to demaund a Cifre** of him; where upon he Gave me the very same that he had used in his Letter, by meanes whereof I cam to read yt:...”¹⁰

Shakespeare used the word ‘cipher’ six times from *Love’s Labour’s Lost* to *The Winter’s Tale*. He used the plural ‘ciphers’ just once in *Henry V* which was written in 1599. The only time Shakespeare used the word ‘decipher’¹¹ was in *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, the earliest version of which has now been dated to 1599. We suggest that both these 1599 plays were written in France when Neville was ambassador, which explains their strong French elements. Neville used the word ‘decipher’ in a letter

dated 27/6/1599 (Sawyer, 1725, Vol 1, 51). In *Twelfth Night*, written in 1600, Malvolio, trying to puzzle out a cipher, ‘M.O.A.I.’, sees what he wants to see: a cautionary tale for anyone seeking to find the meaning of coded material! We note that Shakespeare used fullstops after each letter of ‘M.O.A.I.’; that there are fullstops after each word in the dedication; and Neville used fullstops in his cyphers such as “r.163 *The Fryer*” and “q.ic.m.177 to Rome”.

In 1600 John Chamber dedicated a poem to Neville at the start of his translation of the mathematics of Barlaam. In that book Chamber laid out grids of numbers.



Barlaami Monachi Logisticae pages 78 and 102, Private Collection

Perhaps it was from this book that Neville took the idea of using grids. The Cardano Grille, a method of encoding messages in a square grid, had been invented in the 16th Century by the mathematician Girolamo Cardano, (1501-1576). He had taught at Padua and Neville is known to have visited Padua in 1581¹². A much older grid method was the Polybius Square dating back to the second century B.C.. *The Histories*, which

contained Polybius' encoding method, was published by Isaac Casaubon in 1609 but he had been working on the translation for at least 15 years. In 1596 Casaubon¹³ asked about Polybius' method when he contacted Henry Savile, Neville's tutor and friend¹⁴. Leyland & Goding (2015, 43) showed how the Polybius Square is essentially what the dedication to *Shake-speares Sonnets* uses to encode its message.

There is evidence that Neville knew of coding and grids, had studied maths and had practice in sending secret messages. The contorted language of the dedication to the sonnets, and of many of the sonnets themselves, becomes understandable when one realises that the poet was using words and individual letters to encode meaningful names. Neville's extant 1600 letters on a cipher that used letters and numbers corroborates that he was able to think in this way almost a decade before the sonnets were published. Finally all this coding would be implausible if there were not a vast amount of multi-factorial evidence that Neville was the real poet using the name William Shakespeare as a pen name (see Casson & Rubinstein, 2016).

Further research could test these findings to ensure that they are not just the result of coincidence. Consideration of the statistics of coincidence for a set of 144 characters indicates that a large number of associations are possible and it is not surprising that names and random words might appear in the grids (see, for example, Hand, 2014). A rigorous analysis could compare the probabilities of names of several individual authorship candidates appearing in the grids: Francis Bacon, for example, is impossible because there is no letter 'c' in the dedication. Perhaps the strongest case from the grid-analysis approach to the sonnets' dedication comes from the fact that neither Brenda James nor Rosemary Warner were looking for the name Neville but stumbled upon this unknown figure whilst exploring the grids: the history of science attests to the

power of serendipitous discoveries. Whilst the name Neville occurs in the history plays most members of the family who appear on stage have their Neville identity obscured by being referred to by their titles: the Earl of Westmoreland, Warwick, Salisbury, Abergavenny; Cecily Neville as the Duchess of York and Anne Neville as Lady Anne (both the latter in *Richard III*: see Bradbeer & Casson, 2015). The sonnets and their dedication carefully hid the name by various methods ensuring the authorship was not only concealed but, had it been discovered in the author's own time, it could have been plausibly denied as coincidence or the readers' fantasy. With the compelling evidence for Neville's authorship of the Shakespeare canon published in a number of books, we can now appreciate that the sonnets were the most personal statements he created, both concealing and revealing his identity.

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Notes

¹ James, 2008 and Leyland and Goding, 2015.

² and again in 1999, see references.

³ That the name WR-IOTH-ESLEY is spelt out in relation to the top line of letters that reads “To The Onlie Begetter” suggests previous scholars’ conjecture that Wriothesley was the person meant by “Mr. W.H.” is correct. The ‘WR’ is vertically below the first word: ‘TO’. The final part of the name ‘ESLEY’ descends from the ‘ONLIE’ and ‘IOTH’ is under the first letter of ‘Begetter’ reinforcing Henry Wriothesley as the “Onlie Begetter”. We also note that although the ‘WR’ is widely separated from the rest of the name, if we consider the W is made of two capital ‘V’s and V is 5 in Roman numerals then counting ten squares from the ‘W’ of WR we come to the next section of the name: ‘IOTH’. Again these alignments and the mathematical element based on a Roman numeral suggest intention rather than coincidence. Leyland and Goding found the letter L had significance as the Roman numeral for 50 in their decryption. (See also footnote 9.)

⁴ In a letter from the 1570s stored at the Berkshire Records Office, Reading: D/EZ/138/1.

⁵ Warner’s discovery is detailed in Leyland & Goding’s book. When they changed this setting to 29 columns the name ‘Neville’ was in a vertical column with the word ‘Rimer’ (meaning poet) below.

⁶ James, 2008, 113.

⁷ The letter ‘u’ often was used for ‘v’ and vice versa: in the same poem ‘up’ is spelt ‘vp’, ‘Unless’ is ‘Vnless’.

⁸ This arrangement works less well in the unauthorised publication of *The Passionate Pilgrim* in 1599 when this sonnet first appeared: the result is 'Neville' with three 'l's. This suggests the spelling of 'hel' in the 1609 edition is a deliberate authorial choice.

Two Loves I haue, of Comfort, and Despaire,
That like two Spirits, do suggest me still:
My better Angell is a Man (right faire)
My worser spirite a Woman (colour'd ill.)
To winne me soone to hell, my Female euill
Tempteth my better Angell from my side,
And would corrupt my Saint to be a Divell,
Wooing his purity with her faire pride.
And whether that my Angel be turnde feend,
Suspect I may (yet not directly tell:
For being both to me: both, to each friend,
I ghesse one Angel in anothers hell:
The truth I shall not know, but liue in doubt,
Till my bad Angell fire my good one out.

This is evidence that Shakespeare took care to revise his work and that the layout of the 1609 sonnets was authorised and carefully prepared.

⁹ Sawyer, 1725, Vol 1, 145: 14th January 1599 (1600) from Paris.

¹⁰ Ibid, Vol 1, 146: 25th January 1599 (1600).

¹¹ 'Decipher' is in the First Folio version of the play: 5.2.9. It is not in the first quarto of 1602. The word 'deciphers' occurs in *The Comedy of Errors* (5.1.335); 'deciphered' is to be found in *Henry VI* part 1 (4.1.184) and *Titus Andronicus* (4.2.8).

¹² James, 2008, 100-3.

¹³ Leyland and Goding, 2015.

¹⁴ Neville stayed in touch with Savile all his life, making him an executor of his will.