

# Labeo is Shakespeare is Bacon

---



*Francis Bacon revealed by the Elizabethan poets Hall and Marston as the true author of the Shakespeare poems 'Venus and Adonis' and 'Lucrece'.*

Author: Peter Dawkins

In an exchange of satirical writings published during 1597-8, the scholarly poets Joseph Hall and John Marston unequivocally reveal that the Shakespeare poems *Venus and Adonis* and *The Rape of Lucrece*, which had been first published in 1593-4 and then republished several times in the years following, were in fact written by Francis Bacon using the pseudonym of "William Shakespeare".

In his general attack on writers whose verses were devoted to licentious subjects, Hall particularly singled out the author of the two Shakespeare poems. Marston, on the other hand, defended such poetry and their poets. In doing so, the two satirists identify the author of the Shakespeare poems as "Labeo" and "*mediocria firma*", amongst other identifying pointers.

The Latin phrase, "*Mediocria firma*", was the heraldic motto of Sir Nicholas Bacon and his sons. Sir Nicholas died in 1579, and the only sons of his who were deeply and actively involved with literature and poetry were Anthony and Francis Bacon, whose mother was the strict puritanical Lady Ann, scholarly daughter of Sir Anthony Cooke. Both Anthony Bacon (1558-1601) and Francis Bacon (1561-1626) were known to their friends as secret poets, but of the two only Francis was a qualified lawyer who fell out of favour with the Queen in a particularly unique way. This is important, because it provides the *raison d'être* for the naming of the author of the Shakespeare poems as "Labeo".

The most famous Roman who bore the name Labeo was the jurist, Marcus Antistius Labeo (d. 10 or 11 AD). He was a member of the plebeian nobility who rose quickly to the praetorship; but he held an undisguised antipathy for the new regime of Caesar Augustus and occasionally expressed Republican sympathies in the Senate. Tacitus referred to this as Labeo's *in corrupta libertas* ('uncorrupted freedom'), and it proved an obstacle to Labeo's advancement. Although in line to become a consul, instead his rival, Ateius Capito, was promoted to the consulate by the Emperor. Hurt by this wrong done to him, Labeo declined the office when it was offered to him in a subsequent year. Thereafter he appears to have devoted his time to jurisprudence, but expanded this to include, amongst other things, dialectics, philology and antiquities as being valuable aids in the exposition, development and application of legal doctrine, in which he became a recognised expert.

Francis Bacon was also a jurist and acted as the Queen's Counsel extraordinary. Although acting for the Queen he was also an MP and believed in a proper judicial and political balance between the Sovereign and Parliament, and between the House of Lords and House of Commons, favouring democracy above autocracy. In the Parliament of January-March 1593, he opposed not only an attempt by the Queen and House of Lords to diminish the House of Commons' vitally important prerogative of raising taxes and discussing such matters in private, but also the triple taxation that the Queen and her government were demanding that the Commons should raise, which he considered to be too great for ordinary people to bear. The Queen was furious at his behaviour and immediately made him

feel her displeasure. He was denied access to her presence and told “that he must nevermore look to her for favour or promotion”. Although this situation moderated itself over the following months, it affected his promotion to the office of Solicitor-General, for which he was rightfully the first in line. When in 1594 the office of Attorney-General fell vacant, it was intimated to Francis that the Queen might appoint him to the office of Solicitor-General in place of the existing holder who would be promoted to Attorney-General, and that it was only Francis’ conduct in Parliament that stood in the way. However, Francis would not recant, and both Essex’s and Fulke Greville’s attempts to help came to nothing. In fact, Francis wrote in a letter to Essex that he neither had much hope nor much desire for the position of Solicitor-General—the lack of desire or appetite being because he was so preoccupied with “the waters of Parnassus” which almost entirely quenched his thirst for other things, and the lack of hope because his only real reason for having the office, other than serving the Queen, was so as to be able to pay off his old debts and take on new ones. In the end, in November 1595 the Queen formally appointed Edward Coke as Attorney-General and Serjeant Fleming as Solicitor-General.

As an added bonus to this analogy, the name ‘Francis’ means ‘free’, and Labeo’s *incorrupta libertas* (‘uncorrupted freedom’) was similar to what Francis Bacon believed in and tried to both live and teach. The word ‘free’ is derived from Sanskrit *pri*, meaning ‘love’.

Following on from these events of 1593-4, during which *Venus and Adonis* and *Lucrece* were published, Joseph Hall wrote his first volume of satires, entitled *Virgidemiarum*, which was published in 1597. This was made up of six ‘books’ and was followed in 1598 with a second volume of three further ‘books’. Notably, just over a century later Alexander Pope, the recognised expert on both Shakespeare and Bacon who designed the enigmatic Shakespeare Memorial in Westminster Abbey, described this work of Hall’s as the “truest satire in the English language”.<sup>1</sup>

In Book II, Satire I, of *Virgidemiarum*, Hall reproves Labeo for the licentious tone of his writing and implies that Labeo was writing with someone else: -

For shame write better *Labeo*, or write none,  
Or better write, or *Labeo* write alone.

In fact, Francis Bacon was indeed writing with someone else; firstly and primarily with his brother Anthony, and secondly with various lawyer-poets of Gray’s Inn and other university educated poets, all of whom assisted him. He also belonged to the Essex-Pembroke-Southampton circle of aristocrats, which included Bacon’s friend Fulke Greville, and who, with the poets they patronised, constituted what could be called “the Shakespeare circle”.

Hall’s satire continues by associating Labeo with “the Cynic” and referring to the action of the “swain”: -

Nay, call the *Cynic* but a witty fool,  
Thence to abjure his handsome drinking bowl:  
Because the thirsty swain with hollow hand  
Conveyed the stream to wet his dry weasand.

The appellation of ‘cynic’ was originally given to a member of a school of ancient Greek philosophers founded by Antisthenes, who believed virtue to be the only good, and self-

control to be the only means of achieving virtue. “The Cynic” refers to Diogenes of Sinope, one of the founders of cynic philosophy, who was also known as Diogenes the Cynic. The abjuring of the handsome drinking bowl is a reference to Diogenes who, when he saw a young shepherd drink water from his cupped hand, threw away his own small drinking vessel, believing it to be an unnecessary utensil. In associating Labeo with Diogenes, Hall is saying that Labeo is a witty fool to stoop so low as to write a licentious story (*Venus and Adonis*) rather than something nobler; for the waters of the Muses (the Hippocrene spring of poetic inspiration) deserve something more handsome than a hollow hand to hold it.<sup>2</sup>

The satire can also be interpreted further, by seeing that the “handsome drinking bowl” also refers to the name of the true author, a gentleman-poet, who has been foolish enough to abjure his reputable name and instead use that of a common swain (country youth).

Hall continues with a reference to the many love poems written by those who both can and cannot write good poetry. He particularly singles out those who are like Lollards (followers of John Wycliffe), who believed in living a life of evangelical poverty and were, in this sense, similar to followers of the Cynic. Hall thinks that such poems, written on paper and circulated around society, are but paper-faggots fit only for burning, all of which is “labour lost”. In this satirical remark there is a subtle reference to the Shakespeare play, *Love’s Labour’s Lost*, which various evidence indicates was written originally for performance on one of the cancelled last Grand Nights of the famous Gray’s Inn 1594/1595 revels, *The Prince of Purpoole and the Honourable Order of the Knights of the Helmet*. Francis Bacon was in charge of producing these revels, which he largely wrote. The Shakespeare play, *The Comedy of Errors*, was an integral part of the revels, as also *Loves Labours Lost* was intended to be.

*Write they that can, tho they that cannot do;*  
 But who knows that, but they that do not know?  
 Then many a *Loller* would in forfeitment  
 Bear *Paper-fagots* o’re the Pavement,  
 But now men wager who shall blot the most,  
 And each man writes: *Ther’s so much labour lost.*  
 Both good things ill, and ill things well: all one?  
 For shame write cleanly *Labeo*, or write none.

Hall concludes the above lines by urging Labeo to write cleanly or not at all, because Labeo is not making a clear distinction in his poetry as to what is good and what is ill, and in this way debases the good and elevates the ill, making them seem all one, with no moral distinction between them to indicate what is good and what is evil.

In Book IV, Satire 1, of *Virgidemiarum*, Hall again writes about Labeo, associating him with the Cynic and mentioning in particular the “Cynic’s Helmet”.

Should I endure these curses and despight,  
 While no man’s ear should glow at what I write?  
 Labeo is whipt, and laughs me in the face:  
 Why? for I smite and hide the galled-place,  
 Gird but the Cynic’s Helmet on his head,  
 Cares he for Talus, or his flail of lead?

Long as the crafty Cuttle lieth sure  
 In the black cloud of his thick vomiture,  
 Who list complain of wronged faith or fame,  
 When he may shift it on to another's name?

Not only does the Cynic's Helmet point to the name William, which is derived from (a) Old German, *wil* ('will, desire') + *helm* ('strength, protection') and (b) Old Norse, *gylden* ('golden') + *hjalmr* ('Helmet'), but also it particularly refers to Francis Bacon's Knights of the Helmet. This attribution is derived from the entertainment called *The Honourable Order of the Knights of the Helmet*, written by Francis Bacon, that was presented before an invited audience of nobility and high-ranking officers of the Queen's government on the second Grand Night<sup>3</sup> of the 1594/5 Gray's Inn Christmas revels. This was well liked and became famous, and established Gray's Inn as the leader of the Inns of Court in both revels and education. In this entertainment or masque Francis Bacon presented his philosophical ideals and an 'Order of knighthood' dedicated to carrying them out. The purpose of the Order was to correct the errors of the past and bring order out of chaos, virtue out of vice, knowledge out of ignorance, light out of darkness.

The name of this philosophical Order refers to the divine Spear-shaker, Pallas Athena, the Tenth Muse and Patroness of the Arts and Sciences, whose golden helmet guards the sacred diadem of the Prince of Purpoole. In addition, the goddess presents similar golden helmets to her knight-heroes, hence the Order of the Knights of the Helmet. These helmets were said to bestow invisibility on the wearer. Each knight is, metaphorically, a golden-helmeted spear-shaker or shake-speare (i.e. Will-helm Shake-speare), who shakes his lance at the "eyes of ignorance", as Ben Jonson later said about the author Shakespeare in his poem "To the Memory of my Beloved, the Author" prefacing the Shakespeare Folio. The spears symbolise rays of light or wisdom that can open people's eyes and illuminate their minds. The helmets that bestow invisibility signify the disguise or 'hood' that the wearer adopts in order to conceal his face or real self from public view and thereby protect himself from those who would attack him. Such a helmet is the Cynic's Helmet, for Hall likens Labeo (Francis Bacon) and his philosophy to Diogenes and his philosophy. This helmet is a mask and is a direct reference to the swain, William Shakspere of Stratford-upon-Avon, whose name, suitably re-spelt, is being used to mask the real author of the Shakespeare poems (and plays).

Because of Labeo's helmet or literary mask, all of Hall's satirical whipping, smiting, hitting ('hide' is the old past participle of the verb 'to hit') and flailing of Labeo have no real effect on the disguised poet, who just laughs and cares not about the criticisms as they don't touch him directly. The reference to Talus and his flail of lead is an allusion to the Iron Man in Spencer's *The Faerie Queene*. The "Cuttle" refers to a cuttlefish which, like the squid, is able to squirt an inky liquid in order to hide himself from an attacker.

Further on, Hall acknowledges that Labeo does indeed write true heroic poesy, his sensible self being reft by the "fury" (furor) of enthusiasm and excitement so that he could be filled with divine Apollonian intelligence—Apollo (Phoebus) being the Daystar and leader of the Muses, who bestows inspirational light or wisdom. Moreover, Labeo can call upon the various heathen deities for guidance (which would include Pallas Athena and the Muses), or filch whole pages from Petrarch and clad them in English weed: -

Though *Labeo* reaches right (who can deny?)  
 The true strains of *Heroic* poesy:  
 For he can tell how fury reft his sense,  
 And *Phoebus* filled him with intelligence:  
 He can implore the heathen deities  
 To guide his bold and busy enterprise;  
 Or filch whole pages at a clap for need,  
 From honest *Petrarch*, clad in English weed;  
 While big *But Oh's* each stanza can begin,  
 Whose trunk and tail sluttish and heartless been:  
 He knows the grace of that new elegance  
 Which sweet *Philisides* fetch'd late from France,  
 That well beseem'd his high-stil'd *Arcady*,  
 Though others marre it with much liberty,  
 In epithets to join two words in one,  
 Forsooth, for adjectives can't stand alone:  
 As a great poet could of *Bacchus* say,  
 That he was *Semele-femori-gena*.  
 Lastly he names the spirit of *Astrophel*.  
 Now hath not *Labeo* done wondrous well?

The description of filching whole pages from Petrarch and cladding them in “English weed” refers to the Shakespeare sonnets, some or all of which were in circulation amongst the literary circles of the 1590s. These borrow from the Petrarch sonnets but change the Petrarchan rhyme scheme to that of the English sonnet, and subvert the Petrarchan conventions such as by splitting the object of desire into two separate and sometimes conflicting characters. Of further interest is Hall’s specific use of “English weed” to describe Shakespeare’s poetry. Since it is the poet Shakespeare who is being satirised, it obviously relates to Shakespeare’s sonnet 76, wherein the bard writes: -

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?

By qualifying ‘weed’ as “English weed”, it has a reference to tobacco, already so popular in England in the 1590s that it was the “noted weed” (i.e. noticed, recommended), but came to be listed (i.e. noted) as the “contemptible weed” in the State Calendar and as the “despised weed” because it was so despised by King James VI of Scotland, later to become King James I of England. When Sir Walter Raleigh arrived back in England in 1586, he brought tobacco from Virginia with him and introduced it to Court, which started a craze for smoking it in Court circles and beyond, hence the description “English weed”. At the time it was seen as being good for health reasons as well as for relaxation and enjoyment. In 1595 Anthony Shute published *Tobaco*, which promoted the English weed further. Hall’s cryptic hint in this is the hyphenated name of the English weed, dividing it so as to make it a two-word epithet, ‘to-bacco’. Bacco is the Italian spelling of Bacon, and at the time of writing the satires there were two Bacons, two poet brothers, Anthony and Francis, working together like the Gemini on Francis’ great scheme.<sup>4</sup> But only one of these two was the immortal poet,

the supreme Shakespeare whom Hall calls Labeo: hence the sonnet says “that every word [*to-bacco*] doth *almost* tell my name”. The Gemini hint is there, which is a key to both the Shakespeare authorship and the Shakespeare works. It is also embodied in the title and subject of *Venus and Adonis* (i.e. the immortal and mortal), and in the Gemini headpieces printed on both Shakespeare poems, *Venus and Adonis* and *Lucrece*.<sup>5</sup>

The “*But Oh’s*” that begin each stanza, which Hall mentions, refers to both of the Shakespeare poems, *Venus and Adonis* and *Lucrece*, wherein it is noticeable how many stanzas commence with “But” or “O”, or “But O”.

Likewise in these two poems it is noticeable how many hyphenated words are employed as epithets. The most famous one, of course, is Shake-speare, which is how the sonnets were entitled (*Shake-speares Sonnets*) when they were published in 1609, and how the name is spelt on many quarto editions of the Shakespeare plays, beginning with the second quarto of *Richard III* that was published in 1598—the year in which the Shakespeare name first appeared in print attached to a play as author.

The reference to *Phylisides* and his *Arcady* is to Sir Philip Sidney and his great heroic poem, *Arcadia*, inspired to some extent by the French poets, Pierre de Ronsard, Joachim du Bellay, Étienne Jodelle and Philippe Desportes—the first three being members of ‘La Pléiade’ that was led by Ronsard. Shakespeare (Francis Bacon) was likewise influenced by these French poets, some of whom he probably met as well as read when he was in France in his youth. Francis Bacon also knew Philip Sidney from his early youth, and later (in the 1590s) became involved with Philip’s sister, Mary, Countess of Pembroke, and her circle.

The two lines that follow the comment about the epithets refer to Labeo as being born of Semele, like Bacchus. The three-word epithet *Semele-femori-gena* created by Hall translates as ‘Semele-thigh-brood’, referring to Bacchus who was “twice-born”, the first time from the womb of Semele and the second time from the thigh of Zeus. Bacchus, also known as Dionysus, was the son of Zeus and the mortal Semele, thus he was a god-man or immortal-mortal. The immortal-mortal theme, as well as knowledge of the Dionysian Mysteries, underlies the Shakespeare works. Most pertinently for this description of Labeo, the Italian rendering of the Latin name *Bacchus* is *Bacco*, the same as the Italian (and German) version of Bacon’s name, as can be found on translations of Bacon’s works. That is to say, *Bacco* is the Italian spelling of Bacon. The descriptive title of Bacchus is *Liber*, meaning ‘Free’ (i.e. *Liber Bacchus*, ‘Bacchus the free’), which is the meaning of the name Francis. Quite literally, the full name Francis Bacon can be translated as *Liber Bacchus* or Bacchus the free.

Bacchus is renowned as the god of drama and the theatre, and it was on the stage of the Dionysian Mystery schools, in which the mysteries were enacted, that the male *bacchant* or female *bacchante* wore masks. For comedies these initiate-actors were clothed in fawn skins and wore soft sandals made of fawn skin (the original of the socks of comedy), whilst for tragedies they wore goatskin tunics and high-soled hunting boots made of goatskin, known as buskins. The mask was used to represent the way the incarnate god functioned. Just as the mask veiled the bacchant whilst he played his role on the stage, so the bacchant was considered to be the mask or earthly representative of the god Bacchus on the stage of the world: hence the swain Shakspeare, with his name re-spelt as Shakespeare or Shake-speare, is the mortal actor or bacchant masking the immortal poet Francis Bacon. (N.B. a poet is said to be immortalised by his poetry.)



Lastly, in this particular sequence, Hall congratulates Labeo for having done wondrous well, for he has not only performed all that is referred to in this list but also managed to name the spirit of Astrophel. “Astrophel” is a reference to Philip Sidney’s sonnet sequence, *Astrophil and Stella*, in which Philip Sidney portrays himself as Astrophil who is hopelessly in love with Stella. The name Astrophil derives from the two Greek words, *aster* (star) and *phil* (lover): thus Astrophil is the star lover. Stella is a Latin word meaning ‘star’: hence Stella is the star whom Astrophil loves. She is his spirit—the spirit of Astrophel. But who is she? Hall says that Labeo (Francis Bacon) knows who she is, for he names her. Hall is undoubtedly referring to the Shakespeare poem *Venus and Adonis*, the Shakespeare sonnets and *Love’s Labour’s lost*, wherein Shakespeare names the spirit that, like Astrophil, he loves beyond all else, which is the truth that all seek after—the truth that is wrapped in beauty, wherein truth and beauty are one. Two centuries later the poet Keats summed this up in the last two lines of his *Ode on a Grecian Urn*: -

‘Beauty is truth, truth beauty’—that is all  
Ye know on earth, and all you need to know.

In Francis Bacon’s *Advancement of Learning*, Bacon uses the word ‘wisdom’ for ‘truth’, because wisdom and truth are synonymous. He states that this wisdom (truth) is wrapped in the form of beauty. The wisdom is the Word of God, and this wisdom disposes the beauty of the form, which form then holds and expresses the wisdom. The two, wisdom and beauty, are inseparable.

In the work of Creation we see a double emanation of Virtue from God: the one referring more properly to Power, the other to Wisdom; the one expressed in making the subsistence of the matter, and the other in disposing the beauty of the form.<sup>6</sup>

Bacon’s Knights of the Helmet were Rosicrucians, whose principal emblems were the golden cross and rose. The golden cross is the symbol of light or wisdom; the rose is the symbol of beauty. The combination of the rose on the cross, or the rose blooming from the heart of the cross, is emblematic of the unity of truth and beauty. The six-pointed star, known as the Star of David or Christ Star, is its stellar symbol. It is this star (Stella) that is the spirit of Astrophel (Astrophil).

Shakespeare’s sonnet 54 speaks of this intimate, even passionate link between truth and beauty, and how beauty is represented by the rose and its perfume: -

O how much more doth beauty beauteous seem,  
By that sweet ornament which truth doth give!  
The rose looks fair, but fairer we it deem  
For that sweet odour which doth in it live.  
The canker-blooms have full as deep a dye  
As the perfumed tincture of the roses,  
Hang on such thorns and play as wantonly  
When summer’s breath their masked buds discloses:  
But, for their virtue only is their show,  
They live unwoo’d and unrespected fade,  
Die to themselves. Sweet roses do not so;  
Of their sweet deaths are sweetest odours made:

And so of you, beauteous and lovely youth,  
When that shall fade, my verse distills your truth.

Two of the most famous Shakespearean lines use the symbol of the rose to point out that that which we love, be it a person or a poem, would smell just as sweet whatever name he, she or it was given, which is the case with the name Shakespeare. The lines are spoken by Juliet to Romeo: -

What's in a name? That which we call a rose  
By any other name would smell as sweet.<sup>7</sup>

Hall continues his satire by describing how Labeo's Muse had to go through two degrees of development before she could sufficiently learn to wield her weapon and express herself (via the poet) in true heroic vein.

But ere his Muse her weapon learn to wield,  
Or dance a sober *Pirrhicke* in the field,  
Or marching wade in blood up to the knees,  
Her *Arma Virum* goes by two degrees,  
The sheep-coat first hath been her nursery,  
Where she hath worn her idle infancy,  
And in high startups walk'd the pastur'd plains,  
To tend her tasked herd that there remains;  
And winded still a pipe of oat or breare,  
Striving for wages who the praise shall bear;  
As did whilere the homely *Carmelite*  
Following *Virgil*, and the *Theocrite*;  
Or else hath been in *Venus'* chamber train'd  
To play with *Cupid*, till she had attain'd  
To comment well upon a beauteous face,  
Then was she fit for a heroic place;

The weapon is Pallas Athena's spear: she is the divine Spear-shaker or Shake-speare, wearing a golden helmet and shaking (brandishing) a golden lance at dragons of ignorance (or ignorant minds, referred to as "eyes of ignorance" by Ben Jonson). John Barclay, in his *Argenis* (1634), describes the goddess thus: -

The image of the goddess that was worshipped before the altar was fierce and suited to the arms she wore; her bended brow, what with the sharp cast of her eyes and her helm covering half her forehead, did show her to be most beautifully terrible, her face, though fierce, yet resembling a virgin. She held a golden spear, which the people oft thought the goddess had shaken, being deceived by the diversity of rays reflecting the gold's brightness.

In describing the two degrees of Athena's (or the poet's) development, Hall refers to the pastoral idyll of Spencer's *The Shepheardes Calender* as representing the first degree. This pastoral vein follows Virgil and Theocritus (third century BC), the latter being the creator of ancient Greek bucolic (pastoral) poetry. The second degree is illustrated by the love poem, *Venus and Adonis*. Thus the ascent or evolution is from pastoral to amorous to martial



(heroic), the latter being portrayed in the tragic but heroic story of *The Rape of Lucrece*. The suggestion that Hall seems to make here is that Labeo (Bacon) was the author of *The Shepheardes Calender* as well as of *Venus and Adonis* and *Lucrece*, which other evidence also suggests. *The Shepheardes Calender* was entered on the books of the Stationers' Company on 5 December 1579, and was probably published before the end of the following March, when the old year officially expired. The author of the eclogues signed himself 'Immerito', a Latin word meaning '[by] Guiltless/Innocent', and was styled "the new poet" by the author ("E.K.") of the accompanying commentary. The name of Edmund Spenser was first attached to the work as author when it was published together with *The Faerie Queene* in 1590, but there are some indications that Spenser could not have written these poems but allowed his name to be used as a mask, as did William Shakspere for the Shakespeare works.

Hall indicates that Pallas Athena, the Tenth Muse, is Labeo's Muse, which means she is Shakespeare's Muse, concerning whom many of the Shakespeare sonnets are devoted. This is suitably confirmed by Ben Jonson in his eulogy to the author Shakespeare prefacing the Shakespeare First Folio, when he says about Shakespeare: -

Looke how the fathers face  
Lives in his issue, even so, the race  
Of Shakespeares minde, and manners brightly shines  
In his well toned, and true-filed lines:  
In each of which, he seemes to shake a Lance,  
As brandish't at the eyes of Ignorance.

Jonson indicates that Shakespeare is not only inspired by this Tenth Muse, but embodies her and acts as her, as the mortal yet immortal Shake-speare. This was also said of Francis Bacon, whose Muse was recognised as being Pallas Athena and to whom he was likened (and also to Apollo).<sup>8</sup> That this is so is because Labeo, Shakespeare and Bacon are all one.

Soon after Hall's second volume of satires appeared in 1598, John Marston joined the game with his first book of poetry, *The Metamorphosis of Pygmalion's Image and Certaine Satyres*, confirming that Labeo was the author Shakespeare. Although directly derived from Ovid's narrative poem, *Metamorphosis*, in which Pygmalion was a sculptor who fell in love with the statue he had carved, Marston's poem can be seen to be a part-parody of Shakespeare's *Venus and Adonis*, which is also derived from Ovid's story, howbeit somewhat altered. The intended comparison with *Venus and Adonis* is made clear in the postscript to Marston's poem, 'The Author in praise of his precedent Poem'.

In this postscript, having commented on his poem in the first 26 lines—which end with "And in the end (the end of love, I wot), / Pygmalion hath a jolly boy begot"—Marston continues by comparing his *Metamorphosis of Pygmalion* poem with that of Shakespeare's *Venus and Adonis*, calling the author "Labeo", as Hall does: -

So Labeo did complaine his love was stone,  
Obdurate, flinty, so relentlesse none;  
Yet *Lynceus* knowes, that in the end of this,  
He wrought as strange a metamorphosis.  
Ends not my poem thus surpassing ill?

Come, come, *Augustus*, crown my laureat quill.<sup>9</sup>

The first two lines of this passage allude to lines 200 and 201 of *Venus and Adonis* (“Art thou obdurate, flinty, hard as steel? / Nay more than flint, for stone at rain relenteth”), which enables Marston (using the name *Lynceus*), in the following two lines, to point out that the metamorphosis of Adonis in Labeo’s Shakespeare poem is just as strange as the metamorphosis of Pygmalion’s statue in Marston’s poem. Then in the next line Marston poses a question to Labeo, in the form of a double-entendre, that his poem has ended excellently well, both poetically and because it has a better ending than *Venus and Adonis*, for whereas in the latter Adonis dies and is morphed into a flower, which is where the poem ends, with *Pygmalion* the poem concludes with a consummated love that produces a child of love. In the concluding line of this set of six lines, Marston calls on Labeo to crown him poet laureate for this achievement. In doing this he refers to Labeo as “Augustus”, thereby acknowledging Labeo (Shakespeare/Bacon) as the emperor of poets and thus able to crown another poet as his laureate.

Finally, In Satire IV, wherein he is criticising the “censurer” Hall, Marston finally identifies Labeo conclusively in the following lines: -

Fond censurer! why should those mirrors seem  
So vile to thee, which better judgments deem  
Exquisite then, and in our polish’d times  
May run for senseful tolerable lines?  
What, not *mediocria firma* from thy spite?

“Mirrors” are emblematic of poems that hold a mirror up to the actions or writings of famous people and reflecting their deeds so that the authors may learn from their errors. In the previous lines Marston has been giving reasons why poets should write “mirrors” and criticising the “censurer” for condemning them. In the lines quoted above Marston sums up his argument and brings it to a head with the crowning question, “What, not *mediocria firma* from thy spite?” Translated, this means “What, has not even *mediocria firma* escaped thy spite?” The implication is that whoever it is that *mediocria firma* identifies, that poet was considered to be the greatest of all—the “Augustus” of poetry—the Labeo who wrote *Venus and Adonis*, with which Hall makes a comparison with his own poem of *Pygmalion*. As mentioned at the beginning of this essay, ‘*mediocria firma*’ was the motto of the Bacon family, sons of Sir Nicholas Bacon, of whom only Anthony and Francis Bacon were deeply and actively involved with literature and poetry, and of these two Francis Bacon is the only one whom the appellation of ‘Labeo’ fits like a glove.

Marston continues by mentioning “Magistrates Mirror”, an allusion to *The Mirror for Magistrates* that Hall ridicules in his satires. This is a collection of English poems from the Tudor period by various authors which recount the lives and tragic ends of various historical figures, which perhaps started off the vogue for mirror writing. This is followed by mention of Rosamond and Gaveston, an allusion to Samuel Daniel’s *Complaint of Rosamond* (1592) and Michael Drayton’s *The Legend of Piers Gaveston* (1593). Daniel was at one time tutor to the Countess of Pembroke’s son, William Herbert, and was an English poet and historian, who was appointed Poet Laureate in 1599. Drayton likewise was an English poet who dedicated his first book of poems, *The Harmony of the Church*, to Lady Devereux, followed by a collection of pastorals, *Idea: The Shepherd’s Garland*, 64 Sonnets under the title of

*Ideas Mirror*, and then in 1593 the first of his historical poems, *The Legend of Piers Gaveston*.

But must thy envious hungry fangs needs light  
 On Magistrates' Mirror? Must thou needs detract  
 And strive to work his ancient honour's wrack?  
 What, shall not Rosamond or Gaveston  
 Ope their sweet lips without detraction?  
 But must our modern critic's envious eye  
 Seem thus to quote some gross deformity,  
 Where art, not error, shineth in their style,  
 But error, and no art, doth thee beguile?  
 For tell me, critic, is not fiction  
 The soul of poesy's invention?  
 Is't not the form, the spirit, and the essence,  
 The life, and the essential difference,  
 Which *omni, semper, soli*, doth agree  
 To heavenly descended poesy?

Marston doesn't mention anyone else, so it is interesting why he should choose to select Samuel Daniel and Michael Drayton and place them directly after the *mediocria firma* allusion to Francis Bacon, and all within the section dealing with "heavenly descended poesy". We know that Francis Bacon did not compose his poetry alone, so maybe these other two poets were important helpers, besides the others whom we already know.

## Postscript

**John Marston** (1576-1634), who was a member of Middle Temple, was in a particularly good position to know the truth, since he was a close friend of Thomas Greene of Warwickshire, also a member of Middle Temple, who claimed to be the cousin of William Shakspeare of Stratford-upon-Avon (and possibly was by marriage). Greene's father had business with the Stratford Corporation, and with the Marstons in Coventry. Thomas Greene had stood surety for John Marston's entry to the Middle Temple Inn of Court in 1594, and Marston had stood surety for Greene's entry in 1595. Greene named his children, Anne (b.1603/4) and William (b.1607/8), after the actor William Shakspeare and his wife Anne, and in 1609 rented rooms from them in New Place, Stratford-upon-Avon. His brother, John Greene, who had been a student at Clement's Inn, also settled in Stratford.

Whilst at the Middle Temple, Marston wrote poetry, satires and plays, his career as a writer lasting a decade. Marston himself was no stranger to the use of pseudonyms and masks. He had hidden himself under the pseudonym of W. Kinsayder for both his poems, *The Metamorphosis of Pygmalion's Image* and *The Scourge of Villainy*.

**Joseph Hall** (1574-1656) was a devotional poet and writer—a satirist and moralist—who became an English bishop. According to Thomas Fuller, Hall was known as "our English Seneca". He was the first writer in English to emulate Theophrastus, an ancient Greek philosopher, in writing a book of characters.<sup>10</sup> He went to Emmanuel College, Cambridge, where in 1595 he became a fellow. It was during his residence at Cambridge that he wrote his collection of satires known as *Virgidemiarum*, first published in 1597 and republished in

amended form in 1598. *Virgidemiarum: The three last bookes of byting Satires* was also published in 1598 and reprinted in 1599. In 1601 Hall took up holy orders and became the Anglican vicar of Hawstead, Suffolk. He clearly knew the Bacon family, and in 1605 he travelled abroad with Sir Edmund Bacon on an embassy to Spa, and then to Brussels. In 1608 he became a chaplain to Henry, Prince of Wales. Eventually, after several different appointments, in 1627 he became Bishop of Exeter, after which, in 1641, he became Bishop of Norwich.

Copyright © Peter Dawkins, 2016

Rev. May 2020

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Comment to be found on a copy of *Virgidemiarum Sixe Bookes. First Thirteew Bookes, of Tooth-lesse Satyrs. 1. Poeticall. 2. Academicall. 3. Moral.* London: John Harrison for Robert Dexter, 1599. On the blank leaf following the 1602 title is a note by J. West. "This book was given me by Alexander Pope Esq. who at the same time told me he thought It contyained the best poetry & truest Satyr of any of our English poets & that he inte[n]ded to modernise them as he had Dr. Donnes. The Book is very scarce. I never saw but this & one other Copy."

Also mentioned in Allibone, *Critical Dictionary of English Literature* (1882), Vol. 1, p.763. Alexander Pope: "The best Poetry and the truest Satire in the English language. I wish I had seen them sooner."

<sup>2</sup> Hall's pun on 'hand' is worth noticing.

<sup>3</sup> 3 January 1595, the Feast of the Most Holy Name of Jesus.

<sup>4</sup> The number 2, written as 'Two' or 'To', and the letter B, the second letter of the alphabet, are special keys to understanding both the Shakespeare authorship and the Shakespeare works. Hall seems to know so much that it is quite possible he knew this as well.

<sup>5</sup> See A. Peter Dawkins, *The Secret Signature* (FBRT Essay).

<sup>6</sup> Francis Bacon, *Advancement of Learning*, Bk II.

<sup>7</sup> Shakespeare, *Romeo and Juliet*, II, ii, 1-2.

<sup>8</sup> See A. Peter Dawkins, *Tributes to Sir Francis Bacon* (FBRT essay).

<sup>9</sup> John Marston, *The Metamorphosis of Pygmalion's Image, and Certaine Satyres* (London, 1598), p. 25.

<sup>10</sup> *Encyclopaedia Britannica*.