

# ON WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE AND HIS HERBAL DEPICTION

**By Morten St. George**

The year 1598 saw the publication of an encyclopedia of plants called *The Herball or Generall Historie of Plantes*. At more than 1,400 pages, it was, and remains, the largest botany book ever published in English. On the title page four persons are depicted. On the upper left we find the botanist John Gerard, the principal author. On the upper right, we see the Flemish botanist Matthias de l'Obel, almost certainly a contributing author. On the bottom left, we encounter William Cecil, the great Lord Burghley, surely a patron of this botany project granted that there is a dedicatory to him. The person on the bottom right is unidentified though there seems to be some agreement among the experts that a poet is depicted. Whether this poet was a wealthy patron or a contributing author, or perhaps both, is unknown. It was not unusual for great geniuses of the Renaissance to dabble in diverse fields ranging from arts to science. This is him:



In 2015, the historian and botanist Mark Griffiths published an article claiming that this poet was William Shakespeare. Among his arguments are that he is depicted carrying a rare flower called the snake-head fritillary, which grew from the spilled blood of Adonis in the poem *Venus and Adonis*.

Here is a Wikipedia photograph of the respective flower.



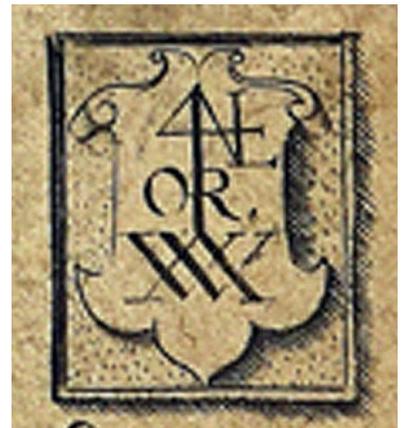
Notice its purple color underlying white checkers, and here is how Shakespeare describes it in *Venus and Adonis*:

By this the boy that by her side laie kild,  
Was melted like a vapour from her sight,  
And in his blood that on the ground laie spild,  
**A purple floure sproong vp, checkred with white,**  
Resembling well his pale cheekes, and the blood,  
Which in round drops, vpō their whitenesse stood.

Note that in Greek mythology, the flower was a windflower, not a fritillary, so it seems the portrait and the poem were manipulated to coincide with each other.

In the portrait, the poet is standing upon a pedestal, and on that pedestal there's an emblem containing unknown iconography.

Griffiths has interpreted these icons as referring to William Shakespeare, but his analysis is unconvincing, mainly because the 4L looks more like 4L than 4E to mean "shake", and XXX is more likely to be XXX than a W for William.





In *On William Shakespeare and his Last Will and Testament*, I show many correlations between the Last Will and Testament of William Shakespeare and that of Michel Nostradamus, and also that there were correlations between the gravestone epitaphs of each. Most of all, I found numerous

textual correlations between the works of Shakespeare and the prophecies of Nostradamus. For details, see my essay *On William Shakespeare and the Nostradamus Prophecies*. Also see my article *On William Shakespeare and the Throne of England* for yet another illustration of how a drawing on the title page of a book links to Nostradamus and affirms a Shakespearean connection with that book. Here too it has to be the same. If that poet is really Shakespeare, this iconography must point to the prophecies of Nostradamus.

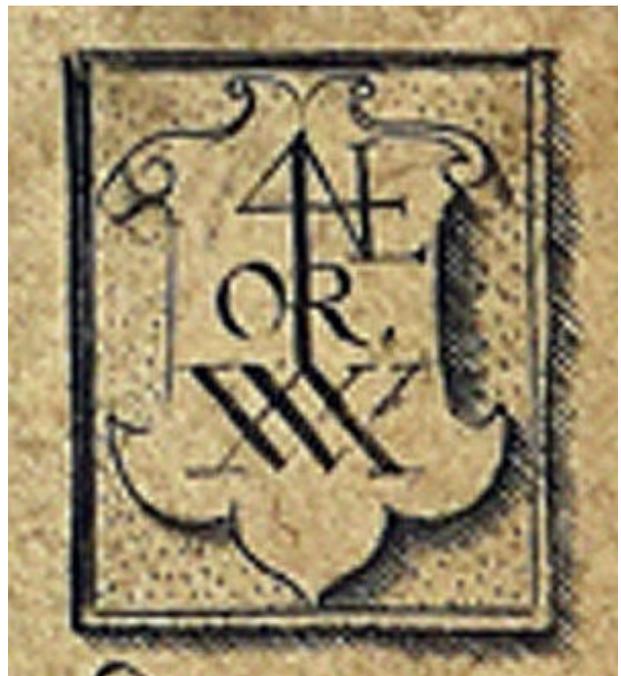


As we know, the prophecies of Nostradamus were written in the French language and here, in the middle of the iconography, we see a French

word: OR, which means GOLD. The French usually write it as l'or, the gold, and note that preceding the OR we see the L above. Consequently, we must assume that the strange comma (,) after OR is in fact a misplaced French apostrophe ('). Hence, we're looking for L'OR, all in caps.

The Nostradamus prophecies comprise ten "Centuries" of prophecies, numbered I through X (but Century VII was incomplete), where each Century contained one hundred prophecies, numbered I through C, Where are we to find the L'OR?

On top of the iconography, we see the number 4 and Latin L, which is the Roman numeral for 50. The 4 is connected with the L with an X, where one line proceeds from the down shaft of 4 and extends horizontally into the L, and the other line proceeds from the top of 4 to the base of the L. In Roman numerals, XL represented 40 but the point is that numbers to the left are subtractions and numbers to the right are additions. Here, therefore, 4L is nothing more than the number 46.



Of which Century? The best guess is the connecting X, the tenth Century.

This is prophecy XLVI of Century X from the famed Benoist Rigaud Edition dated 1568:

XLVI.

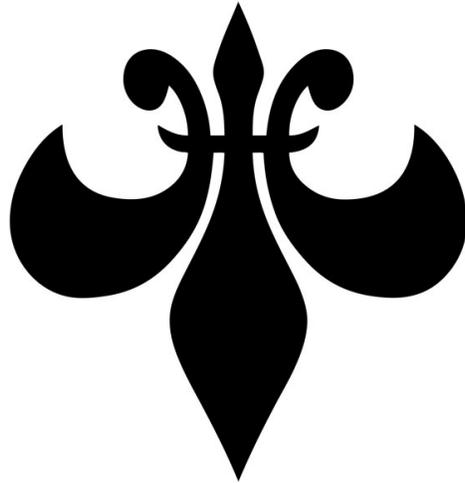
Vie fort mort de L'OR vilaine indigne,  
Sera de Saxe non nouveau electeur:  
De Brunsvic mandia d'amour signe,  
Faux le rendant au peuple seducteur.

There you see it. In the middle of the first line: L'OR, and its only appearance (in caps) in the Nostradamus prophecies.

Let's now take one more look at our iconography.

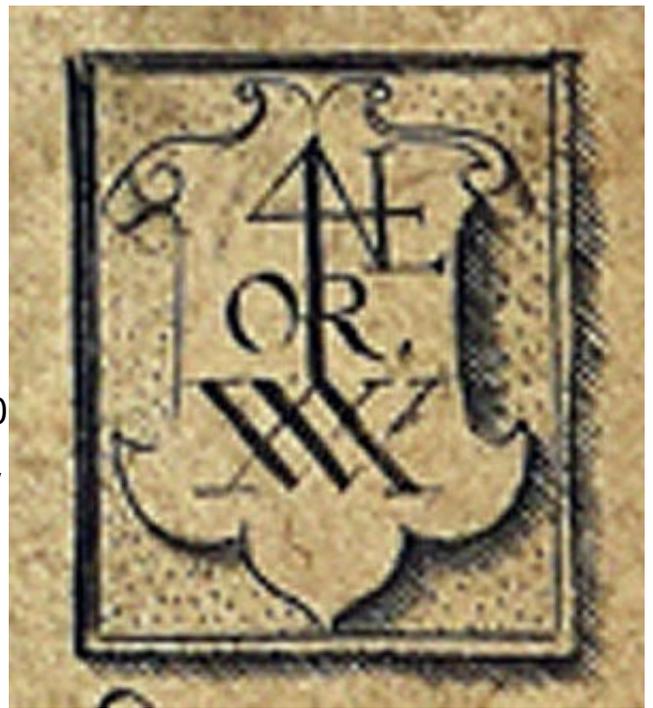


One interesting observation is that the iconography is positioned on an emblem in the shape of a fleur de lys turned upside down. For comparison, here is free art of a fleur de lys turned upside down:



But in which prophecy are we to find the fleur de lys?

Note the XXX on the bottom, which is the Roman number for 30. Next, note that the XXX is connected to the 4 by virtue of the I (dark vertical line down the middle) which is final numeral of the number XLVI. Logically, therefore, the 30 and 4 replace the I of XLVI, giving us XLV plus 30 plus 4, or 79. Without other indications, we remain in the tenth Century.



Here is prophecy LXXIX (79) of the tenth Century:

L X X I X.

Les vieux chemins seront tous embellys,  
L'on passera à Memphis soimentree:  
Le grand Mercure d'hercules fleur de lys,  
Faisant trembler terre, mer & contree.

And there you see it, at the end of the third line: the fleur de lys.

### ***MORE NOSTRADAMUS***

In the first preface to his *The Herball or Generall Historie of Plantes*, a dedicatory to his friend Matthias de l'Obel, Gerard ends with highly cryptic allusions to Nostradamus:

***"... Nostradami Salo-mensis Gallo-prouincie,  
Nostra-damus, cùm verba damus, quia fallere nostrum;  
Et cùm verba damus, nil nisi Nostra-damus  
Vale. Londini ipsis Calendis Decembris 1597."***

Nostradamus lived in **Salon**, a town in the Gallic province of Provence.

These closing remarks by Gerard provide yet another layer of justification for turning to Nostradamus to decipher the iconography.

In brief, the iconography meets the Nostradamus test and we must conclude that the depicted poet may very well be the real William Shakespeare. But who would that be?



One notable feature that might be helpful is a mustache that twists outward and up.

Here's a portrait of William Stanley, the Earl of Derby, who is currently ranked fourth among candidates for Shakespearean authorship.



And here's a close-up view of his mustache:



As you can see, parts of the mustache stretch outward and up on both sides of the mustache.

Beyond the mustache, there are a couple of other reasons for believing that the poet laureate depicted on the cover of *The Herball or Generall Historie of Plantes* was William Stanley:

1. The poet is depicted opposite a portrait of William Cecil, the grandfather of William Stanley's wife.

2. In 1597 William Stanley was already the Earl of Derby and doubtless wealthy enough to help finance publication of the massive 1400-page encyclopedia of plants.

It is unknown if Stanley was also ghostwriter for any of the prose or poetry found in the introductory pages.

What accounts for such interest in botany? For now, let's just assume it was an effort to identify or explain plants that they had never seen before.

Stanley (1561-1642) is also one of the main candidates for authorship of the Shakespearean plays, and in that regard he has a lot of arguments in his favor:

1. He was very wealthy, wealthy enough to have financed the First Folio of 1623 as well as the Second Folio of 1632.

2. He had a long life, long enough to have personally made the 1700 textual revisions found in the Second Folio.
3. He was highly educated: private tutors, Oxford, then a few years at Gray's Inn studying law.
4. He traveled abroad and was fluent in French (used in *Henry V*)
5. He had ties to music and theatrical performances from childhood, and as an adult he maintained a company of actors known as Derby's Men.
6. He signed his name as "Will" and the Shakespearean Sonnet 136 says "my name is Will."
7. He was accused by a Jesuit spy of being too busy writing plays to dedicate any time to the Catholic cause.
8. He attended royal court assuring us that he knew all the pastimes and customs of royalty that we see expressed in the plays.
9. He was a member of King James' Privy Council giving him the power to enforce authorship secrecy.
10. He had contact with William Cecil and John Dee, owners of two of the largest libraries in England, giving him access to the literary sources known to have been used by the author of the Shakespearean plays.

In some early publications, the name Shakespeare was often written with a hyphen: Shake-speare, leading some to believe that it was a pen name based on the Greek goddess Pallas Athena (Pallas refers to shaking a

spear), a warrior goddess. Interestingly, she had ties to Hercules and to Bellerophon, two names found in the prophecies. In Rome, Pallas Athena was given the name Minerva, and by Renaissance times she had become a patron of the arts, of poetry, of wisdom and knowledge. A painting dated 1591 was entitled *Minerva Victorious Over Ignorance*.

We'll now get to the point: in the portrait of Stanley that we just showed you, he is wearing a cameo medallion:



Could that be the goddess Minerva on horseback, wearing a plumed helmet, right hand raised, holding a long spear pointing forward and downward?

For more information, visit <http://mortenstgeorge.net/>