

# John Shakespeare's "Spiritual Testament" Is Not John Shakespeare's

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ONE OF THE THORNIEST PROBLEMS IN SHAKESPEARE BIOGRAPHY is the "Spiritual Testament," the document attributed to John Shakespeare, father of the playwright, in which he appears to declare a radical and personally dangerous devotion to the Catholic religion.<sup>1</sup> Central to all discussions of the religious environment in which Shakespeare grew up, this document's acceptance or rejection has been something of a shibboleth for Shakespeare biographers. This essay studies a group of hitherto unnoticed early print editions of the text that underlies the "Spiritual Testament." In it, I advance a double thesis: first, that the "Spiritual Testament" cannot belong to John Shakespeare for reasons of date; and second, that its most likely creator is arguably Joan Shakespeare Hart (1569–1646), Shakespeare's sister.

## I. THE DOCUMENT

The existence of the "Spiritual Testament" was first recorded on June 14, 1784, when John Jordan (1746–1809) of Stratford-upon-Avon wrote a letter to the editor of the *Gentleman's Magazine*.<sup>2</sup> Jordan, an impoverished wheelwright

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<sup>1</sup> A note on terms: this article uses "Spiritual Testament" to indicate the composite document printed by Malone in 1790, and *Testament* to refer to the devotional text recorded in eight different languages from 1613 onward. As will be seen, much, but not all, of the "Spiritual Testament" is a version of the *Testament*, while conversely the *Testament* also contains some material not in the "Spiritual Testament."

<sup>2</sup> The most detailed factual account is Robert Bearman, "John Shakespeare's 'Spiritual Testament': A Reappraisal," *Shakespeare Survey* 56 (2003): 184–202; Bearman's conclusions were disputed by Dennis Taylor, "Bearish on the Will: John Shakespeare in the Rafters," *Shakespeare Newsletter* 54.1 (2004): 11, 16, 24, 28; for an account within a wider history, see Takashi Kozuka, "Shakespeare in Purgatory: A Study of the Catholicising Movement in Shakespeare Biography" (PhD diss., University of Warwick, 2003); see also Robert Bearman, "Jordan, John (1746–1809), local historian and poet," *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*

whose formal schooling had not gone beyond the age of ten, seems an unlikely correspondent for that magazine, but he harbored literary ambitions: he wrote poetry and local history, though he is chiefly remembered for the unverified tales about Shakespeare he related to visiting tourists, and for occasional amateurish acts of Shakespeare falsification. Jordan's claims, in this letter and in subsequent statements, were that on April 29, 1757, a man named Joseph Moseley had been retiling the roof of the former Shakespeare property on Henley Street in Stratford-upon-Avon—then in the ownership of the Hart family, descendants of Shakespeare's sister Joan Hart—and that he had found, between the rafters and the tiling, an incomplete manuscript document.<sup>3</sup> Moseley had kept it, showing it to some of his neighbors as a curiosity, and had recently given it to Jordan, in whose possession it now remained, available for inspection by any gentleman who wished to visit. Jordan hoped to publish a transcription of the document in the *Gentleman's Magazine*. The editors declined to publish the transcription, thinking (according to Jordan) that the document was spurious.

The next sight we catch of the manuscript is in 1789, by which time Jordan had given it back to Moseley, who had in turn given it to John Payton, a Stratford-upon-Avon publican and Shakespeare enthusiast. Payton showed it to the vicar, James Davenport, who was at the time helping the Shakespearean scholar Edmond Malone gather materials for his new and rigorous study of Shakespeare's life. Davenport wrote to Malone to let him know of the document's existence, commenting that "it appears to be the confession of our poet's father's faith drawn up by himself," and later arranged for Malone to borrow the manuscript from Payton.<sup>4</sup>

Malone inspected the document. "The five leaves which were sent to me," he wrote, "were very small, tacked together by a thread, the size the eighth part of a sheet, and the upper part of the last page but one, almost illegible."<sup>5</sup> At least one page was missing at the start. The transcription was a struggle, even for the experienced Malone. The content started in the middle of a sentence, and appeared to be a series of articles in the form of a will, in which John Shakespeare, named no fewer than twelve times in the text, and declaring his patron saint to be Saint Winifred, announced his intention to die a good Catholic death.

(*ODNB*), and S. Schoenbaum, *Shakespeare's Lives*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991), esp. 131–33.

<sup>3</sup> Quoted in J. O. Halliwell-Phillipps, *Outlines of the Life of Shakespeare*, 7th ed., 2 vols. (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1887), 2:399, the authoritative source from which other accounts of this now-lost letter derive. The building's history is detailed in Richard Schoch, *Shakespeare's House: A Window onto his Life and Legacy* (London: Bloomsbury, 2024).

<sup>4</sup> Bearman, "John Shakespeare's 'Spiritual Testament,'" 185.

<sup>5</sup> Halliwell-Phillipps, *Outlines*, 2:402.

Malone's first impressions were that the document was genuinely old, and yet not old enough to have belonged to the poet's father. "It appears to me," he observed in another letter, "that the handwriting is at least thirty years more modern than the year 1601, when John Shakspeare, the father of our poet, died." He also felt the spellings and punctuation looked more regular than one would expect for a document of that date. Davenport, who had read it in Stratford, concurred on both counts: he wrote to Malone that "the handwriting and spelling of this paper, I confess, struck me as more modern than the era when our Poet's father died."<sup>6</sup>

But Malone hesitated, weighing up his preconceptions. He thought that Catholicism was in retreat through this period and that it would be odd to find anyone "deeply tinged with Popery" as late as the 1630s or later. But it also occurred to him that the document might validate his long-held suspicions that John Shakespeare would surely have named one of his sons after himself. Thinking aloud, Malone even speculated that if such an untraced son had lived until around 1630, "this would solve some of the difficulties which I have stated," but no such son could be documented.<sup>7</sup>

Nevertheless, with further study Malone convinced himself that it was not impossible that the handwriting could come from late in John Shakespeare's lifetime. He concluded that the document was genuine, but continued to reserve his position on whether it was written by Shakespeare's father or by some now-unknown brother, and resolved to print the text in his "Historical Account of the English Stage" within the edition of Shakespeare's *Works* which was to appear in 1790. He continued to investigate the "Spiritual Testament," in particular making enquiries about the trustworthiness of those involved, and about whether the rest of the document had been found. Around this time James Davenport provided Malone with a notebook about Stratford history that had been put together by John Jordan. In this notebook Malone found, to his surprise, a document represented as a transcription of the missing opening leaf of the "Spiritual Testament." Perhaps the most remarkable thing about this document was its almost-quoting of the ghost of Hamlet's father; John Shakespeare worried about being carried off "in the blossome of my sins."<sup>8</sup> When questioned, Jordan gave a very evasive and contradictory account both of how he had come

<sup>6</sup> Halliwell-Phillipps, *Outlines*, 2:399; letter from Davenport quoted in Bearman, "John Shakespeare's 'Spiritual Testament,'" 186.

<sup>7</sup> Halliwell-Phillipps, *Outlines*, 2:399, 400; nor, as far as is known, is there any other individual named "John Shakespeare" recorded in Stratford-upon-Avon after 1601.

<sup>8</sup> Edmond Malone, ed., *The Plays and Poems of William Shakespeare*, 10 vols. in 11 (London: H. Baldwin, 1790), 1.2:162–66, 330–31, quotation from 1.2:330; a detail discussed by David Scott Kastan, *A Will to Believe: Shakespeare and Religion* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2014), 24.

by the first leaf, and of where that leaf was now. Malone printed that text, too, in an appendix at the end of the same volume that contained the main text.<sup>9</sup>

Thereafter, Malone remained cautious not just about the “first leaf” but about the whole “Spiritual Testament.” In 1796 he commented that he had “since obtained documents that clearly prove it could not have been the composition of any one of our poet’s family,” and promised to explain more fully in his *Life of Shakespeare*.<sup>10</sup> Neither the *Life*, nor whatever evidence he was referring to, was ever published. What is more, at some point after Malone inspected and returned it, the five-leaf document itself disappeared and has never been seen again.

## II. AFTER MALONE

The “Spiritual Testament” transcribed by Malone remained a bitterly contested text throughout the nineteenth century, with Shakespeareans divided about whether it was authentic—and therefore strong evidence that the Shakespeare family were secret Catholics—or a complete forgery by Jordan.<sup>11</sup> A major breakthrough occurred in 1923, when the religious scholar Herbert Thurston came across a Spanish pamphlet printed in Mexico in 1661, and recognized that its text had much in common with the “Spiritual Testament.”<sup>12</sup> This pamphlet was:

*Testamento o ultima voluntad del alma hecho en salud para asegurarse el christiano de las tentaciones del Demonio, en la hora de muerte; Ordenado por San Carlos Borromeo, cardenal del titulo de Santa Praxedis, y Arcobispo de Milan* (Mexico: Por la Viuda de Bernardo Calderon, 1661).

[The Testament or Last Will of the Soul, made in health for the Christian to secure himself from the temptations of the devil at the hour of death, drawn up by St. Charles Borromeo, Titular Cardinal of St. Praxedis and Archbishop of Milan. With licence. At Mexico by the widow of Bernard Calderon, St. Augustin’s Street, 1661.]<sup>13</sup>

<sup>9</sup> The composite text can be read in S. Schoenbaum, *William Shakespeare: A Documentary Life* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1975), 41–43.

<sup>10</sup> Quoted in Kozuka, “Shakespeare in Purgatory,” 230; perhaps Malone had found one of the dozens of continental printings of the *Testament* described later in this essay.

<sup>11</sup> For a history of the debate, see John Henry de Groot, *The Shakespeares and “The Old Faith”* (New York: King’s Crown, 1946), esp. 1–4; Kozuka, “Shakespeare in Purgatory.”

<sup>12</sup> Herbert Thurston, “A Controverted Shakespeare Document,” *The Dublin Review* 173 (1923): 161–76.

<sup>13</sup> Thurston, “A Controverted Shakespeare Document,” 165 and 165n†.

The pamphlet attributes its authorship to the celebrated Saint Charles Borromeo (1538–1584), Cardinal Archbishop of Milan and a leading figure in the Counter-Reformation. Thurston then located the same text in a Spanish manuscript from around 1690 in the British Museum collection (now the British Library); in a nineteenth-century Italian print version which attributed it not to Borromeo but to his mentor Alessandro Sauli (1534–1592); and in a Romansch version, printed in 1741.<sup>14</sup> The text, in its common features across all these versions, might usefully be referred to as the *Testament*. An ingeniously constructed document, the *Testament* takes the form of a will in which the signatory declares that it is their final intention to die a faithful member of the Catholic church, even if, as it may be, in the future they die suddenly, or in circumstances that prevent them from receiving extreme unction or other Catholic rites. It also aims to disavow anything irreligious that the speaker might say or do in the future when *in extremis*. In effect, it offers a form of words that formally records one's good spiritual intentions before the approach of death impairs one's mental capacity.<sup>15</sup>

Instantly, Thurston's discovery of the *Testament* transformed narratives around the "Spiritual Testament." It showed that the main body of the "Spiritual Testament," which closely followed the text of the *Testament*, was indeed an authentic Catholic text of the right general period. Conversely, it also revealed that the "first leaf," the passage that was only found in Jordan's notebook, bore no resemblance to the corresponding passages in the *Testament*, and had clearly been reverse-engineered to fit onto the front of the incomplete document that Malone had actually seen.<sup>16</sup> Finally—and particularly germane to the argument here—even someone who still wished to deny that the main body of the "Spiritual Testament" belonged to John Shakespeare now had to start by conceding that John Jordan had, at some point, had an old and rare document in his hands, even if only to copy it out and falsify it.

Thurston's discovery was built on by Clara Longworth, Comtesse de Chambrun, who located a French version of the *Testament*; by John Henry de Groot, who added three later print versions from Spanish South America; and by James G. McManaway.<sup>17</sup> Writing in 1967, McManaway described yet three

<sup>14</sup> Thurston, "A Controverted Shakespeare Document," 166–67.

<sup>15</sup> See Kozuka, "Shakespeare in Purgatory," for work locating this particular text in a wider tradition of testaments of the soul.

<sup>16</sup> Most observers assume, therefore, the "first leaf" was made up by Jordan, though occasionally it is still quoted from as if it were authentic.

<sup>17</sup> Clara Longworth de Chambrun, *Shakespeare Rediscovered: By Means of Public Records, Secret Reports & Private Correspondence Newly Set Forth as Evidence on His Life & Work* (New York and London: C. Scribner's Sons, 1938), 75 (although it is not clear which of the French printings she located, as she does not give further details); James G. McManaway, "John

more print versions from eighteenth-century Mexico, and one in English from 1638, newly discovered and acquired by McManaway's institution, the Folger Shakespeare Library. This last, *The Testament of the Soule*, was an almost word-for-word match for the "Spiritual Testament." Since McManaway, another printing of the English version, dated 1635 and, like the 1638 version, probably printed on the continent, has also come to light.<sup>18</sup>

The apparent vindication of the main part of the "Spiritual Testament" gave rise to a plausible, indeed, seemingly irresistible narrative tracing its origin to the Jesuit Mission to England of 1580. Borromeo had been an enthusiastic supporter of that mission, and de Groot had adduced documents relating to Borromeo that, he thought, referred specifically to the *Testament* in connection with the 1580 project. Furthermore, de Groot heard what seemed to be echoes of the *Testament* in other Counter-Reformation prayers, which suggested it had enjoyed immediate success. These elements all combined into a powerful story for proponents of a Catholic Shakespeare. Richard Wilson, for example, wrote that Shakespeare's schoolmaster John Cottom

is likely to have provided [the Jesuits'] safe-house in Stratford, since the 1580 mission under the Jesuits Edmund Campion and Robert Parsons included his brother Thomas, who was returning from Poland when he was arrested at Dover. Whether or not the teacher hid Parsons on his journey through the Midlands, it was during this mission that a profession of faith was signed by Shakespeare's father from "the bottom of his heart": the Spiritual Testament the Jesuits had brought from Milan, where it had been presented to them by no less an authority than Saint Carlo Borromeo. . . . According to Parsons, the meetings at which this Testament was distributed were convened in houses "we entered as kinsfolk of some person within, where putting ourselves in priest's apparel we had secret view and conference with the Catholics that might come, whom we ever caused to be ready that night late for Confession, and next morning very early we had Mass and after an exhortation." Such was the fervour in which John Shakespeare appears to have put his name to Borromeo's text, confessing himself an "abominable and grievous sinner," vowing to suffer "violence of pain and agony . . . like a sharp cutting razor" rather than renounce his faith, beseeching his "friends and kinsfolk" to celebrate mass, and appointing the Virgin as "chief Executress" of his will.<sup>19</sup>

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Shakespeare's "Spiritual Testament," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 18.3 (1967): 197–205; *The Contract and Testament of the Soule* ([Saint-Omer]: [Widow of C. Boscard], 1638).

<sup>18</sup> *The Sovles Testament*, in Geronymo Gracian, *The Bvrning Lampe* (1635), 126–56; facsimile in *English Recusant Literature 1558–1640*, 140 (Menston: Scolar Press, 1973).

<sup>19</sup> Richard Wilson, "Ghostly Fathers: Shakespeare's Equivocation," in François Laroque, ed., *Histoire et Secret à la Renaissance* (Paris: Presses Sorbonne Nouvelle, 1997), 213–27, quotation

According to this narrative, later fearing for his life if he were found to possess this dangerous document, John Shakespeare concealed it in the roof of his house where it lay unnoticed for more than 150 years.

This reading of the "Spiritual Testament" served—still serves—as a keystone for the wider case for Shakespeare's Catholic upbringing. It gives a particular color to the records that show John Shakespeare avoiding church attendance, and it provides one seemingly solid point of reference in the "Shakeshafte theory," according to which William Shakespeare can be found in Lancashire in 1581, in the will of the strongly Catholic nobleman Alexander Hoghton. There are plenty of other indications of Catholic connections for Stratford-upon-Avon and for the Shakespeares, but John's "Spiritual Testament" is a jewel in the crown, and it features prominently in many recent Shakespeare biographies. Indeed, the best-known of all of them, Stephen Greenblatt's *Will in the World*, gives considerable space to the "Spiritual Testament," reading it alongside Hamlet's father's ghost.<sup>20</sup>

But the details of the 1580 mission were always problematic, and in 2003 Robert Bearman mounted a sustained attack on the authenticity of the "Spiritual Testament." He demonstrated significant problems with all the evidence used to argue that the *Testament* had a role in the 1580 mission; he cast doubt on de Groot's proposed echoes of the *Testament* in sixteenth-century texts; and he argued that there was very little to suggest that the *Testament* was at all known at that date—indeed, the *Testament* does not even appear in an English list of Borromeo's works from 1611.

Bearman certainly damaged the received narrative of the "Spiritual Testament" in 1580, and since 2003 his attack on its credibility has influenced and been reinforced by further work questioning other aspects of the Catholic Shakespeare hypothesis.<sup>21</sup> On the other hand, he could not do much to disrupt

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from 219–20. Wilson reiterates the idea in *Secret Shakespeare: Studies in Theatre, Religion, and Resistance* (Manchester: Manchester UP, 2004).

<sup>20</sup> Stephen Greenblatt, *Will in the World: How Shakespeare Became Shakespeare* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2004), 317–19; also Anthony Holden, *William Shakespeare: An Illustrated Biography* (London: Little, Brown, 2002); Michael Wood, *In Search of Shakespeare* (London: BBC Worldwide, 2003); Peter Ackroyd, *Shakespeare: The Biography* (London: Chatto & Windus, 2005).

<sup>21</sup> See, e.g., Robert Bearman, "Was William Shakespeare William Shakeshafte? Revisited," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 53.1 (2002): 83–94; Bearman, "John Shakespeare: A Papist or Just Penniless?" *Shakespeare Quarterly* 56.4 (2005): 411–33; Peter Davidson and Thomas McCoog, "Unreconciled: What Evidence Links Shakespeare and the Jesuits," *Times Literary Supplement* 5424 (March 16, 2007); Michael Winstanley, "Shakespeare, Catholicism, and Lancashire: A Reappraisal of John Cottom, Stratford Schoolmaster," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 68.2 (2017): 172–91; Glyn Parry and Cathryn Enis, *Shakespeare Before Shakespeare: Stratford-upon-Avon, Warwickshire and the Elizabethan State* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2020); Matthew Steggle, "William Shakeshafte, Player," *Shakespeare* (June 2023), <https://doi.org/10.1080/17450918.2023.2214536>.

the eighteenth-century end of the story. Having examined closely the two surviving transcriptions, by Jordan and by Malone, he concluded that the underlying manuscript document does appear to have been through-written, rather than having had blanks into which the name could have been inserted by a forger. Given that fact, it seemed incredible that Jordan would have had the skill to be able to erase an existing name and replace it with “John Shakespeare” twelve times over without the deceit being obvious. As for the possibility of complete forgery, Bearman came up against the point made by Herbert Thurston nearly eighty years before:

On the forgery theory we have to suppose that [Jordan] had found an English translation of this distinctively Catholic testament, that he copied it out again in archaic writing, inserting in twelve places the name of John Shakespeare, and that he did his work so skilfully that Malone, the prime detector of forgeries, though he had the five little leaves in his hands for months and wrote many times to make inquiries about them at Stratford, was completely imposed upon. . . . We have, in fact, not a scrap of evidence to show that Jordan possessed any exceptional skill in penmanship.<sup>22</sup>

Here even Bearman struggles. His best surmise is that Jordan did possess an incomplete English printed or manuscript *Testament*, perhaps one that he could have found exposed when graves were dug over in the town graveyard. Jordan, he argued, had recopied the text, changing the wording to be about John Shakespeare and somehow making an entirely fresh and convincing forgery. But as well as the technical achievement of the new document, falsifying ink, paper, and handwriting, Bearman also had to posit that Jordan managed to deceive or suborn numerous fellow townsfolk into going along with the fiction that it had been discovered in the roof. Bearman was unable to account for Jordan’s forgery without granting him some of the powers of a supervillain.

Moreover—and here I move beyond my summary of Bearman—if in 1784 Jordan did make a completely fresh recopied document, with all the associated expense and effort, and deception or corruption of his fellow townsfolk, he made some very odd decisions in the process. For a start, why make a testament about John, and not the far more marketable William? And was the base text a good choice, since it made John very Catholic, when something Protestant would have been far more welcome to Jordan’s potential audience? Why make an incomplete document, given that, as subsequent events demonstrated, he was perfectly capable of making up text that would furnish a plausible first page? And if he had indeed invested many hours in making it, why did he give it away to the bricklayer

<sup>22</sup> Thurston, “A Controverted Shakespeare Document,” 173–74.



at some point after 1784? If it were a completely fresh recopied document, then some of Jordan's choices seem baffling except by invoking, once again, the idea that they were part of an extremely devious plan to avoid suspicion.<sup>23</sup>

John Shakespeare's "Spiritual Testament," then, seems to present an almost paradigmatically insoluble problem. As David Scott Kastan puts it:

Is it more probable that an amateur Stratford antiquarian (who, it should be noted, was not a Catholic) found an English translation of the Borromeo testament, of which no other English version was known until 1966, and that he decided to forge evidence of John Shakespeare's enduring Catholicism? Or that a manuscript version of the Borromeo testament, of which no other example is known, reached John Shakespeare, and that he, or someone acting for him, filled in his name in the blanks of the formulary to confirm his Catholicism? I don't know. Each seems to me almost equally *improbable*, but one of these must be true. . . . There is no way to establish if the Spiritual Testament is authentic and, even if we could, there is no way to determine what the document represented for John Shakespeare.<sup>24</sup>

Precisely because the "Spiritual Testament" has remained controversial, rejected completely by some scholars and strongly defended by others, it still sets an agenda for biographers, and even those who choose not to incorporate it into their story must spend time and space apologizing for it in their opening chapters.<sup>25</sup>

### III. EARLY EDITIONS OF THE *TESTAMENT*

All of the above provides the context for the new research offered here, which sets out to trace other copies of the *Testament*. Up till now only two pre-1660 printed versions of the *Testament* have been cited in discussion, and both of them are in English. But there are more than twenty other pre-1660 editions of the *Testament*, six of which are earlier than the earliest edition yet known. The examples are spread across Italian, French, and Spanish, and they seem to tell a consistent story about a publishing phenomenon.<sup>26</sup> Arguably the most important of these early editions comes from 1622:

<sup>23</sup> Several of these points are well made by Dennis Taylor in "Bearish on the Will."

<sup>24</sup> Kastan, *A Will to Believe*, 23, 25.

<sup>25</sup> Defenders include Joseph Pearce, *The Quest for Shakespeare: The Bard of Avon and the Church of Rome* (San Francisco, CA: Ignatius Press, 2008); Lee Oser, "Shakespeare and the Catholic Spectrum," *Religion and the Arts* 16.4 (2012): 381–90, reviewing recent work; Dennis Taylor, *Shakespeare and the Elizabethan Reformation: Literary Negotiation of Religious Difference* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2022), 402n; Lee Oser, *Christian Humanism in Shakespeare: A Study in Religion and Literature* (Washington, DC: Catholic UP, 2022).

<sup>26</sup> A note on method: these new examples have been found through a range of electronic search methods. Google Books, making quickly available full-text content curated by many different research libraries, has been a particularly valuable portal. On some pitfalls, hopefully

*Testamento et vltima volontà dell'anima. Composta dal Reuer.<sup>mo</sup> Padre Santio Cicatelli Generale della Religione de' Padri Ministri de gl'infermi* (Rome: Guglielmo Facciotti, 1622).

[The Testament and Last Wishes of the Soul. Composed by the most Reverend Father Santio Cicatelli, Superior General of the Cleric Ministers to the Sick].



Figure 1. Title-page of Santio Cicatelli, *Testamento et vltima volontà dell'anima* (Rome: Guglielmo Facciotti, 1622). Published by the National Central Library of Rome at [https://archive.org/details/bub\\_gb\\_pvry8\\_uK1Vkc](https://archive.org/details/bub_gb_pvry8_uK1Vkc) under a Creative Commons Public Domain License, <https://creativecommons.org/publicdomain/mark/1.0/>.

avoided here, in using Google Books as a research tool, see John Lavagnino's 2012 King's College London lecture, "Scholarship in the EEBO-TCP Age," online version at <http://ora.ox.ac.uk/objects/uuid:4dd24b3f-1914-42d7-83ba-85506b043066>.

The title-page (figure 1) ascribes the pamphlet to Sanzio Cicatelli (1570–1627), the head of the religious order known as Clerics Regular, Ministers to the Sick, or, because it had been founded by the future Saint Camillus (1550–1614), the Camillians. As their formal name suggests, the Camillians specialized in providing spiritual care to the ill and dying, notably during plague outbreaks. A Neapolitan by birth, Cicatelli had himself worked with Camillus to establish the organization in its early days, and became head of the order in 1619. His major known literary work is his *Life of Camillus*, first published in 1615, and his third, revised and expanded, edition of the *Life* was published in Rome in 1624 by Guglielmo Facciotti, the same publisher who in 1622 had issued this pamphlet.<sup>27</sup>

The content of the pamphlet is an Italian version of the text already known from the later Spanish and English versions. To demonstrate the closeness, here is article 13 as it stands in this *Testament*, and article 13 in the "Spiritual Testament":

*Item, voglio, e lascio, che l'anima mia subito sciolta da questo carcere terreno, sia sepolta nell'amorosa cauerna del costato di Giesù Christo, nella quale viuifica sepoltura giaci, e viua perpetuamente confinata in quell'eterna requie, e riposa, col benedire mille volte quel crudelissimo ferro di lancia, che à guisa di scarpello pungente fece vn monumento cosi dolce nell'amato petto del mio Signore.*

[Item, I do will and bequeath that my soul, as soon as freed from this earthly prison, should be buried in the amorous cavern in the side of Jesus Christ, in which life-giving grave it may lie and live forever perpetually confined in such an eternal peace and rest, to bless a thousand times that very cruel iron of the lance, which in the manner of a cutting razor made a monument so sweet in the loved breast of my Lord.]

XIII. *Item*, I John Shakspear doe by this my last will and testament bequeath my soul, as soon as it shall be delivered and loosened from the prison of this my body, to be entombed in the sweet and amorous coffin of the side of Jesus Christ; and that in this life-giveing sepulcher it may rest and live, perpetually inclosed in that eternall habitation of repose, there to blesse for ever and ever that direfull iron of the launce, which, like a sharp cutting razor, formes so sweet and pleasant a monument within the sacred breast of my lord and saviour.<sup>28</sup>

<sup>27</sup> See for instance, his biography in "I Superiori Generali dei Camilliani," <https://www.camilliani.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/biografie-padri-general-di-camilliani.pdf>.

<sup>28</sup> Santio Cicatelli, *Testamento et vltima volontà dell'anima* (Rome: Guglielmo Facciotti, 1622), 10–11; "Spiritual Testament" cited from Malone, *Plays and Poems* (1790), 1.2:165, except with "charge in a censore" emended to Jordan's correct reading, "sharp cutting razor." See discussion of the crux in Bearman, "John Shakespeare's 'Spiritual Testament.'"

It also carries an Italian version of the introductory material that appears before many other versions, including the specific instruction that this text can be used even by those unable to read it, who can merely hear their copy read aloud and affix a mark to it to indicate their assent.<sup>29</sup> Overall, this seems like a very Camillian document. Cicatelli's own *Life of Camillus* shows that the Order was much exercised by the problem of people dying suddenly without adequate religious rites being available, and the historian of the Camillians (who does not hesitate to ascribe the text to Cicatelli) says that his tract is a worthy application of Camillus's simple, practical methods in this respect.<sup>30</sup> Another religious historian who accepts the attribution without demur is Eugenio Saponi, whose extensive study of the pastoral care of the sick in seventeenth-century Italy situates the 1622 publication as one of a wave of writings by Camillians that seek to address this topic.<sup>31</sup> The Camillians themselves also certainly went on to use the *Testament* as part of their end-of-life care of the mortally ill, as is shown by a later printed example from 1694.<sup>32</sup>

Clearly, the way that the 1622 pamphlet identifies Cicatelli by name, using his official title, in his lifetime, in the city where he was based and by a publisher with whom he is associated, offers a forceful ascription of authorship, and one that also seems plausible in the context of the purpose of the document. Also relevant here is that the ascription to Cicatelli persisted. It was repeated in some later editions, such as that from the city of Bracciano in the year 1655, and a Portuguese translation printed in 1711, 1716, and 1733.<sup>33</sup>

<sup>29</sup> Cicatelli, *Testamento et ultima volontà dell'anima*, 2; cf. *Testament of the Soule*, 42–44.

<sup>30</sup> "I Superiori Generali del Camilliani"; for the concern with unprepared deaths, see esp. Sanzio Cicatelli and Pantaleone Dolera, *The Life of S. Camillus of Lellis, Founder of the Clerks Regular Servants of the Sick* (London: T. Richardson and Son, 1850–51), 267–74.

<sup>31</sup> Eugenio Saponi, *La cura pastorale del malato nel rituale di Paolo V (1614) e in alcuni ordini religiosi del XVII secolo: Studio storico-liturgico* (Rome: Centro Liturgico Vincenziano, 2002), 243–364, esp. 247–50.

<sup>32</sup> See *Invito alla Congregazione eretta, e fondata per aiuto de' Moribondi* (Milan, 1694), 63ff. This collection represents forms and prayers used in an institution set up by the Chierici Regolari Ministri de gl'Infermi in 1634.

<sup>33</sup> See Nicolò Toppi, *Biblioteca Napoletana* (Naples: Antonio Bulifon, 1678), 328, which describes a book by Cicatelli entitled *Testamento, & ultima volontà dell'anima* (Bracciano: Jacomo Fei, 1655); I have been unable to trace any surviving copies of the 1655 edition. Agostinho de Santa Maria, trans., *Breve disposição espiritual que deve fazer todo o christão, para estar sempre aparelhado para a morte. Composto em italiano pelo M. R. P. Sancthichicatelto* (Lisboa, 1711), described in Joaquim Pereira da Costa, *Catalogo dos livros antigos, raros e clássicos* (Lisboa: Imprensa Nacional, 1873), 5; a 1716 edition under a very similar title, described in Diôgo Barbosa Machado, *Bibliotheca Lusitana* (Lisboa Occidental: Antonio Isidoro da Fonseca, 1741), 1.71; and a third edition within *Manual de orações, e devoções* (Lisboa Occidental: Manoel Fernandes da Costa, 1733), sig. E5r and following.

But the ascription offered by this family of texts starting in 1622, and reinforced by the *Testament's* apparent link to the Camillians, must be read against rival ascriptions in other early versions. The text first appears, for instance, within a volume printed in Venice nine years earlier:

*Thesoro della dottrina di Christo, ouero, Epistola di Christo all'huomo: che contiene diuersi motiui per la pretensione della vita eterna e le virtù con le quali s'acquista. Composta dal R.P.Fr. Giouanni di Giesù Maria Carmelitano scalzo et di nuouo aggioutoui in questa nostra impressione l'ultima volontà dell'anima fatta in forma di testamento da D. Silvestro Ferrari.* (Venezia: Pietro Bertano, 1613).

[The treasure of the doctrine of Christ, or, a letter from Christ to man, which contains diverse reasons for the claim of eternal life and the virtues by which it can be acquired. Composed by the reverend father friar Giovanni di Gesù Maria, discalced Carmelite, and newly added in this our printing, the last will of the soul made in the form of a testament, by Silvestro Ferrari].

Giovanni di Gesù Maria (1564–1615) is well attested: he was a mystical writer, and his *Epistola di Christo all'huomo* takes up most of this particular volume.<sup>34</sup> The "Ultima volontà" is added after the *Epistola di Christo all'huomo*, and it is given an ascription at its start that says that the text was brought from Rome by Girolamo Verduro, Canon in Brescia, and "posta in luce da Silvestro Ferrari suo Confessore"—put into the light by his confessor Silvestro Ferrari, a statement that would seem to be a claim of editorship rather than of the authorship implied by the title-page.<sup>35</sup>

The only thing that can be said for certain about the *Testament's* Silvestro Ferrari is that he was at some point confessor to Girolamo Verduro, Canon of the Cathedral of Brescia in Northern Italy. From that it follows that he is very likely the Sylvestris Ferrareus, priest, who edited two collections of educational material published at Brescia in 1600 and 1607.<sup>36</sup> Verduro himself is also rather obscure, but he was a cleric who attended the courts of Pope Innocent IX (1591) and his successor Pope Clement VIII (1592–1605), and who returned

<sup>34</sup> For his official Vatican biography, see "Giovanni di Gesù Maria (al secolo: Giovanni de San Pedro y Ustarroz) (1564–1615)," *Dicastero delle Cause dei Santi*, <http://www.causesanti.va/it/venerabili/giovanni-di-gesu-maria-al-secolo-giovanni-de-san-pedro-y-ustarro.html>.

<sup>35</sup> *Thesoro della dottrina di Christo*, 179–90, 179.

<sup>36</sup> These are *Tyrocinium ex lucubrationibus Io. Petri Landolii i.v.d. Villae archip. Nuper per r. presbyt. Syluestrum Ferrarium Tiranensem, summa diligentia exemtum, recognitum, et in hanc formam redactum* (Brescia: apud Petrum Mariam Marchettum, 1600); and *Dictionarivm Ciceronianvm Francisci Priscianensis . . . Nuperrime per . . . Siluestrum Ferrarium Tiranensem multis mendis purgatum* (Brescia: apud Petrum Mariam Marchettum, 1607). That he is called "Tiranensis" suggests that he is originally from Albania.

to his home town of Travagliato, just outside Brescia, where he built a palazzo for himself that still stands today. He was still alive in 1611, since in that year he also built a portico onto the church in his home town.<sup>37</sup>

Three years after its first printing in 1613, the text made a second appearance in print in Venice, toward the end of a miscellaneous volume of devotional material put together by Eugenio Petrelli. This printing offers no ascription of authorship for it.<sup>38</sup> And three years after that, it appeared in France, in French translation:

*Les Larmes de la sacrée Vierge Marie tenant son Fils descendu de la Croix. Avec la dernière volonté de l'Âme faite en forme de Testament traduit d'Italien en François par un Religieux de l'Ordre des Peres Capucins* (Tournon, 1619).

[The tears of the sacred Virgin Mary holding her Son brought down from the Cross. Together with the last wishes of the soul, made in the form of a will, translated from Italian into French by a cleric from the Order of the Capuchin Fathers].

The text in question forms the second part of the volume, separately paginated; it is a close translation of the text into French; and the translator's name is given in the text as "Jérôme Verdure." Again, the volume carries no attribution of authorship for the original document.<sup>39</sup> A fifth early edition of the *Testament*, published in Turin in 1627, repeated the claims of the 1613 version, saying that the text was brought from Rome by Verdure and put into the light by Ferrari.<sup>40</sup>

There are, then, three identifiable people involved across these five early editions between 1613 and 1627: Cicatelli (1570–1627), identified as the author in the 1622 edition; Verdure (*fl.* 1591–1611), who is in some sense a provider of a text from Rome for the 1613 and 1627 editions, and is named as a translator of the 1619 one; and Verdure's confessor Ferrari (*fl.* 1600–1607), who is identified as an editor in 1613 and 1627.

<sup>37</sup> Antonio Fappano, "Verdure Girolamo," *Brescian Encyclopedia*, online at [https://www.encyclopediabresciana.it/enciclopedia/index.php?title=VERDURO\\_Girolamo](https://www.encyclopediabresciana.it/enciclopedia/index.php?title=VERDURO_Girolamo); Enrico Cordoni, "L'Antico Palazzo Verdure dal primo costruttore Verdure, ad oggi," *Travagliato Passato e Presente* 5 (1996): 24–28.

<sup>38</sup> Eugenio Petrelli, *Nouo sentiero del paradiso* (Venice: Antonio Turrini, [1616]), 333–45. The date is established from the *imprimatur*.

<sup>39</sup> The *Testament* appears as a separately paginated second part of the volume: see page 1 of the second part.

<sup>40</sup> Silvestro Ferrari, *Ultima volontà dall'anima fatta in forma di testamento portata da Roma dall'Ill. mons. Girolamo Verdure canonico in Brescia posta in luce per opera del R. P. Silvestro Ferrari* (Turin, [1627]), known from a single copy now in Grenoble. The date is reported in Pierre-Antoine-Amédée Ducoin, *Catalogue des livres que renferme la Bibliothèque publique de la ville de Grenoble*, 3 vols. (Grenoble: Baratier, 1831–39), 3:214.

It would be a long task to develop a full and detailed map of the textual relationships between the dozens of versions of the *Testament* now known, especially since eight different languages are involved. But fortunately they are, mostly, strikingly stable as regards their overall shape and details. Given the text's brevity, and the fact that all five of these early editions, and most of the immediately subsequent ones, seem to survive only in a single copy, it seems safe to assume that the editions that are extant are only a subset of those that were printed. There is, for instance, the already-cited record of the 1655 edition in the tiny format of 24mo, which appears now to be lost, and there are doubtless many others that have disappeared completely.

So, the attribution of the *Testament* to St. Charles Borromeo, which has been more or less uncontested by Shakespeare scholars since 1923, and which has underpinned all discussions of the "Spiritual Testament," is called into question by the competing early attribution to Cicatelli, and equally by the lack of early attributions to Borromeo.<sup>41</sup> For as long as the attribution was uncontested, it seemed to pin the text's composition to before 1584, when Borromeo died: but if it is not necessarily by Borromeo, then the date must be evaluated afresh. Since Bearman's work has cast doubt on all the proposed references to the *Testament* from around 1580, the first certain evidence of it now comes in 1613.

After these five early editions, the *Testament* became a text frequently reprinted either on its own or within larger anthologies of devotional material. Further editions in Italian were followed, in 1635, by the first recorded English translation, which was also the first version to offer an attribution to Borromeo. So the Borromeo attribution does not originate, as it were, in the text's heartland of Italy, but on the periphery of its range.<sup>42</sup> Over the next five years,

<sup>41</sup> See also the detailed early *Life* of Borromeo, which does not mention it: Giovanni Pietro Giussano, *The Life of St. Charles Borromeo, Cardinal Archbishop of Milan*, 2 vols. (New York: Burns and Oates, 1884). A manuscript entitled "*Ultima volontà dell'anima fatta in forma di testamento*," with blanks which have been filled in, in a different hand, with the name "Carolus," and annotated in a different hand "20 dec 1560," is found bound in with a Book of Hours which belonged to Charles Borromeo during his time as Archbishop of Milan (1564–84). I would argue that the date, and the implication that it is Borromeo's personal copy, are both spurious. See Maria Luisa Grossi Turchetti, "San Carlo e la Braidense: Di alcuni manoscritti appartenuti a san Carlo Borromeo," *Libri & Documenti* 38 (2012): 67–80, esp. 80.

<sup>42</sup> See C. Göttler, "Saints and Patronage: Peter Paul Rubens and Maximilian Villain de Gand in the Cathedral of Tournai" in Hans Vlieghe and Katlijne Van der Stighelen, eds., *Sponsors of the Past: Flemish Art and Patronage, 1550–1700* (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols, 2005), 135–56, esp. 150; *Parte prima dell'istruzioni della Congreg. de i Cherici dell'Assunzione* (Naples, 1629), 706–10; *Ultima volontà dell'Anima In forma di Testamento: con altre devotioni par la buona morte* (Fermo, Italy: heredi di Moneti, 1635). The only copy of this traced is at the Bibliotheca Vallenciana in Rome, and the details are taken from their card catalogue, digitized at <https://cataloghistorici.bdi.sbn.it/>.

another seven editions are recorded in Italian (4), French (2), and English (1), with various competing attributions to Verduro/Ferrari, one to Antonio Bonifacio, and increasingly to the appealingly famous Borromeo.<sup>43</sup> This spread of influence is also shown by the fact that in 1639 the Bishop of Tournai made a will in which he asked to be buried with his personal manuscript copy of the *Testament*: thus, the document was indeed in use as the instructions intended.<sup>44</sup> In 1647, the *Testament* made the jump into Spanish, carrying the Borromeo attribution with it, and by 1660, it had appeared in more than twenty-five different editions in four languages.<sup>45</sup> Thereafter, it spread into Portuguese, Catalan, Romansch, and Armenian, while continuing also to appear in its core languages of French, Italian, and Spanish, and being printed not just in Europe but in Spanish America.<sup>46</sup> By now the Borromeo attribution had become dominant, although some Portuguese editions still attributed it to Cicatelli, and some Italian editions fathered it on other figures such as Giovanni Bona or

<sup>43</sup> See *Catalogue générale des manuscrits des bibliothèques publiques de France: Paris, Bibliothèque Sainte-Geneviève*, 2 vols. (Paris: Plon, 1896), 2:534; *Manuale ad uso delli r.<sup>di</sup> fratelli sacerdoti, & benefattori della Congregazione del glorioso S. Carlo* (Naples: Secondino Roncagliolo, 1637), 104–108; Antonio Bonifacio, *Tesoro di varie orationi devotissime alla beatissima Vergine madre di Dio* (Rome: Il Grignani, 1639), 133–62; *Congregazione del felicissimo Transito della Beatiss.<sup>ma</sup> Vergine Maria madre di Dio* (Milan: Ghisolsi, 1639), 15–23; *Prima Regola delle Monache di S. Chiara* (Perugia, 1639); *Meditations, soliloques, et manvel de S. Avgustin, S. Anselme, et S. Bernard* (Douai: Baltazar Bellere, 1639).

<sup>44</sup> His will is reproduced in H. Lentz, *Fondations de bourses d'étude établies en Belgique*, 9 vols. (Brussels: P. Weissenbruch, 1885–97), 5:425–32, esp. 426; see also Göttler, “Saints and Patronage,” 150–51.

<sup>45</sup> Paul de Barry, *L'Année Sainte, ou l'instruction de philagie pour vivre à la mode des saints . . . Quatrième Partie* (Lyon: Veuve de Claude Rigaud, 1641), 420–25; Toppi, *Biblioteca Napoletana*, 320; Calisto di Missanello, *Regola e Costituzioni, Essercitij Spirituali, e Cerimonie da osservarsi nelle Congregazioni, e nelle Compagnie del Santissimo Rosario* (Naples: Francesco Savio, 1647); its presence and role in this book is noted by Valeria Viola, “Spaces for Domestic Devotion in the Noble Residences of Palermo in the Age of Catholic Reform” in Maya Corry, Marco Faini, and Alessia Meneghin, eds., *Domestic Devotions in Early Modern Italy* (Leiden: Brill, 2018), 63–88; *Ultima volontà dell'anima, fatta in forma di testamento, di nuouo data in luce per Lorenzo Valla* (Palermo: Il Rosselli, 1641), in 24mo; a 1641 edition from Macerata, Italy, credited to Girolamo Verduro, and listed in the manuscript catalogue of the Clementine Library now at the Catholic University of America, see [http://www.archivioalbani.it/fileadmin/grpmnt/5595/Ms1720/cua\\_albani\\_ms2\\_06-Ascetici.pdf](http://www.archivioalbani.it/fileadmin/grpmnt/5595/Ms1720/cua_albani_ms2_06-Ascetici.pdf); Borromeo, *Última voluntad de el anima, en forma de testamento: que seaçe en vida, para asegurar el Anima de las tentaciones de el demonio, en la hora de la muerte: Echa de S. Carlos Boromeo, . . . Traduisa . . . lengua . . . en española, por D. Ambrosio Messía, de Tovar . . .* (n.p., 1647), described in Odette Bresson, *Catalogue du fonds hispanique ancien (1492–1808) de la Bibliothèque Sainte-Geneviève de Paris* (Paris: Presses de la Sorbonne Nouvelle, 1994), 40.

<sup>46</sup> See, e.g., Joseph Pavia, *Última voluntat de la anima christiana en forma de testament* (Mallorca: La viuda Frau, 1733); British Library: Add MS 18956, fols. 150–56, a handwritten Armenian version from the eighteenth century.



Alessandro Sauli.<sup>47</sup> In all, at least eighty print editions can be found, the latest of them in 1896. One place where it conspicuously does *not* appear is in the five volumes of Borromeo's *Works* edited by Giuseppe Antonio Sassi and printed at Augsburg, Germany, in 1758.

Two things emerge from this history of the document. First, there is little that associates it specifically with missionaries to hostile countries, persecution, or martyrdom. Instead, it occurs in anthologies of material associated with established Catholic institutions in Catholic countries. It is telling that one later edition that alters the text, the 1641 French edition, adds in material that specifically raises the possibility of being persecuted for one's faith, a topic completely absent from the usual version, which paints a picture of a testator dying in a supported setting, surrounded by other Catholics. All this makes it a poor fit for its proposed use as an aid for Borromeo's missionaries.

Secondly, the paper trail seems incompatible with the idea that the *Testament* was written by Borromeo at all. The document is not recorded until almost thirty years after Borromeo's death, and his name does not appear in connection with it until twenty years and six editions after that. Instead, the earliest names associated with it are those of Verduro and Ferrari, while the 1622 edition plausibly ascribes it to Sanzio Ciatelli. But as the text continued to circulate, these attributions dropped away and it gradually became attributed to Borromeo in the same way that unattached early modern plays became attributed to Shakespeare: because he was a revered figure whose very name made a text more appealing. This is certainly a process that happened to other texts that acquired, as the seventeenth century went on, a spurious attribution to Borromeo.<sup>48</sup>

Given that this text seems to have been written not by Borromeo but by someone else—Ciatelli or Verduro/Ferrari—any attempt to associate the *Testament* with John Shakespeare must collapse. At the time of the Jesuit mission in 1580, neither Ferrari nor his future employer Verduro is even detectable, and Ciatelli was only ten years old. While there is evidence for the text's vigorous circulation from 1613 onward, starting in Italy and southern France and spreading outward, there is nothing at all that shows it was in existence anywhere until that year, twelve years after John's death in 1601. The pattern of distribution suggests that the *Testament* is a text of a period later than John Shakespeare's lifetime, and that therefore John Shakespeare did not sign it.

<sup>47</sup> For the Bona attribution, see, e.g., *Sacre offerte della Santissima Passione di Gesu* (Rome, 1720); the latest Ciatelli attribution I have noted is in 1733 in the *Manual de orações, e devoções*, cited above.

<sup>48</sup> See Paul Oskar Kristeller, *Iter Italicum*, 6 vols. (London and Leiden: The Warburg Institute and E. J. Brill, 1963–92), 6:32, describing sermons misattributed to Borromeo.

## IV. NOT JOHN SHAKESPEARE'S

Eliminating John Shakespeare as the signatory is, in effect, an opportunity to rethink from the start all the other information about the "Spiritual Testament." One small consequence, for instance, is that the "first leaf," since it copies so much of the *Testament's* language, also cannot have belonged to John Shakespeare. This is hardly a surprise, since the "first leaf" was already mostly considered to be Jordan's forgery, but it is helpful to have this confirmed. Other consequences relate to the date and provenance of the main document.

When is the "Spiritual Testament" from? The specific English text that it contains is attested in print editions of 1635 and 1638, and not directly otherwise. As a rule of thumb, one would expect an undated example of the text to be close in time to those two known reference points. A 1630s date for the "Spiritual Testament" would also fit with the wider profile of the *Testament's* international vogue in the 1630s and 1640s, and with Malone and Davenport's independent initial impressions about the handwriting and spellings of this particular manuscript. It would not be impossible to argue that it might be later still—say from the 1650s or 1660s—but the later we date it, the harder it is to reconcile with the lack of evidence of this particular English translation circulating after 1638; with the spellings; and with Malone's impression that the handwriting was not so modern that it couldn't, conceivably, be Elizabethan. So while an exact date is elusive, the document seems to be at least fifty years later than the 1580 date usually ascribed to it. And if it is from, as it may be, the later 1630s, then it is worth noting that the religious landscape then was very different from what it was in 1580: England had a Catholic Queen, and Catholic practices of all sorts were tolerated to a greater degree than before. At that point, possessing a copy of a Catholic document such as the *Testament* was much less dangerous and remarkable than it would have been fifty years earlier. Nor was the *Testament* a text as exotic and rare as it has seemed to critics struggling with the early date, since in the 1630s there were several current print editions in continental languages, and at least two in English.

Also congruent with a 1630s date is the fact that the testator's patron saint is said to be St. Winifred. A seventh-century Welsh princess who survived being beheaded by a disgruntled suitor and went on to establish a religious house, St. Winifred was one of the most popular of native British saints, whose cult continued even after the Reformation. Many traveled to her healing well in North Wales, including, as Bearman demonstrates, people from Warwickshire.<sup>49</sup> St. Winifred was popular through the whole of the early modern period, and is

<sup>49</sup> Bearman, "John Shakespeare's 'Spiritual Testament,'" 200.

even, incongruously, mentioned in Webster's *Duchess of Malfi*.<sup>50</sup> But her cult enjoyed a particular prominence in the 1630s, and Archbishop Abbott complained in 1632 about the upsurge in crowds of people attending the well.<sup>51</sup> In 1635 the exiled English press published both the first recorded English translation of the *Testament* and the first recorded English translation of the *Life* of St. Winifred; thus, Winifred and the English *Testament* can be read as two linked elements of a Caroline Catholicism.

So, at some point in the mid-seventeenth century, and arguably sometime around the years 1635 and 1638, a resident of Stratford-upon-Avon either made or had made a personal manuscript copy of the *Testament*.<sup>52</sup> Somehow, by 1784, John Jordan had obtained it, and presented it, or a version of it, as John Shakespeare's.

#### V. JORDAN AND THE "SPIRITUAL TESTAMENT"

One might reasonably stop there. But there remain two intriguing and interlinked questions: how did the "Spiritual Testament" come to deceive Malone, the best Shakespeare scholar of his day, and whose, originally, was it?

Any attempt to address the first question must start with Jordan, a bookish and creative man frustrated by class disadvantage and chronic poverty. Jordan's world was one that rewarded bardolatrous fantasies much more lavishly than it did strict scholarly rigor, and his various engagements with Shakespeare, including his fictions and fabrications, must be seen in the context of that world.<sup>53</sup> One particular characteristic of Jordan's dealings with Shakespeareana that might be especially relevant here is that he often found himself acting as authenticator or agent in the sale of artifacts whose exact connection to Shakespeare was questionable but whose provenance was genuine up to a point. Throughout his career he was involved in the sale of half-authentic Shakespeare antiques to wealthy tourists. For instance, in 1790 he helped the Harts sell an old chair of theirs, allegedly Shakespeare's chair, for twenty guineas to a Polish princess. In 1792, he helped the Hathaway family sell a similar family heirloom, described as Shakespeare's "Courting Chair," to Samuel Ireland.<sup>54</sup> He was also involved in

<sup>50</sup> Andrew Breeze, "St. Winifred of Wales and *The Duchess of Malfi*," *Notes and Queries* 45.1 (1998): 33–34.

<sup>51</sup> See Richard Brome, *A Jovial Crew*, ed. Tiffany Stern (London: Bloomsbury, 2014), 2.1.107–108n, for more information.

<sup>52</sup> Or, for the sake of argument, possessed a print copy. But it wouldn't be of either of the two known printings, because of where the page break falls; and anyway that idea seems unworkable, because it would require Jordan to make a completely forged artifact of the sort discussed below.

<sup>53</sup> See Schoenbaum, *Shakespeare's Lives*, 80–81; Richard Schoch, "The Birth of Shakespeare's Birthplace," *Theatre Survey* 53.2 (2012): 181–201.

<sup>54</sup> Schoenbaum, *Shakespeare's Lives*, 133, and Michał Mencfel, "Shakespeare's Chair: Material Culture and Literary Phantasms," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 74.2 (2023): 114–38.

the authentication and sale of artifacts supposedly made of the wood from Shakespeare's mulberry tree at New Place.<sup>55</sup> So in the case of his proposed publication in 1784, the primary motive need not have been seeking scholarly glory, in the conventional sense, but rather the hope that it would help this particular item find its way to a wealthy buyer.

And then there are Jordan's known Shakespeare fabrications, which include:

- Statements, both verbally to people whom he was taking on tours, and in his own writing, alleging otherwise unattested local oral traditions about Shakespeare. While by their very nature it is hard to pin down that they never existed, it is widely suspected that many of them are Jordan's own inventions. In this category of being a suspect reporter of supposed oral sources, one might also include his misidentification of Mary Arden's house in Wilmcote.<sup>56</sup>
- A drawing of New Place as it might have stood in the Elizabethan era, which he claimed he had copied from a now untraceable Elizabethan sketch of the building, a claim universally disbelieved. As with the spurious "first leaf," Jordan did not attempt to fake an Elizabethan artifact itself.<sup>57</sup>
- Allegedly, an insertion of a false Shakespeare ownership ascription into a (genuine) copy of Bacon's *Advancement of Learning* (1605).<sup>58</sup>
- One apparent attempt to actually forge an old document. In March 1790 Jordan sent Malone a supposedly antique manuscript containing a ballad connected to Charlecote, which, he claimed, had been found in a piece of furniture that had formerly belonged to Samuel Tyler of Shottery. However, "a glance at the simulated antique forms of the letters, as they appeared in that copy, enabled Malone to detect the imposture."<sup>59</sup> This instance is particularly telling in that it shows not only that Jordan did not have enough expertise to succeed in that particular forgery, but that he did not even have enough expertise to anticipate how far short of success it would fall.

<sup>55</sup> The "Courting Chair" is now Shakespeare Birthplace Trust, STRST: SBT 2002-49; for the mulberry object trade, see Shakespeare Birthplace Trust, ER1/16/13.

<sup>56</sup> N. W. Alcock and Robert Bearman, "Discovering Mary Arden's House: Property and Society in Wilmcote, Warwickshire," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 53.1 (2002): 53–82.

<sup>57</sup> Schoenbaum, *Shakespeare's Lives*, 133; Shakespeare Birthplace Trust, ER1/69/10.

<sup>58</sup> See R. B. Wheeler, *A Guide to Stratford-upon-Avon* (Stratford-upon-Avon: J. Ward, 1814), 139–43, esp. 143n; Frederic Madden, *Observations on an Autograph of Shakspeare, and the Orthography of his Name* (London: Thomas Rodd, 1838), 16n; and, for a reproduction, Plate 32 of John Gough Nichols, *Autographs of Royal, Noble, Learned, and Remarkable Personages* (London: J. B. Nichols, 1829).

<sup>59</sup> Halliwell-Phillipps, *Outlines*, 2:382.

In short, Jordan, while a fertile source of doubtful stories, was not a prolific or proficient forger. In this respect he was very unlike his acquaintance William-Henry Ireland, who, possessing more time and far greater resources, spent hours sourcing convincing old paper, consulting on the best antique ink, and practicing handwriting in order to create fully forged artifacts (and even these quickly crumbled before Malone's inspection).<sup>60</sup> By contrast, Jordan's known acts of falsification, other than the document in question, are opportunistic, and much smaller-scale and lower-budget. It remains possible, of course, that early in his career Jordan could have conceived and made one restrained and brilliantly successful five-page artifact that did not suffer the fate of his Charlecote ballad, but it seems unlikely. The idea of a fully recopied forgery seems hard to reconcile not just with what is known of Malone's acuity, but also with what is known of Jordan's resources and ability.

But whether or not he was completely recopying it, Jordan certainly had a genuine seventeenth-century document in his possession. Where had he got it from? Either his tale that Moseley had found it in the roof in Henley Street is substantially true, or else it is merely a lie to conceal the fact that Jordan obtained it from some other place. But it would be an obviously poor choice of lie. The chosen story required the connivance, and the ongoing connivance, of Moseley, who was alive when Jordan first tried to get the document published. It also brought into unnecessary question the rightful ownership of the document, not just with Moseley, but with the Harts, who might well feel they had a claim on a document belonging to their ancestor and removed from their house without their knowledge.<sup>61</sup> It is hard to see why Jordan would have chosen a cover story that dragged in those two avoidable problems, when he could easily claim to have found it himself in the back of a drawer.<sup>62</sup>

The more prosaic alternative, then, is that Jordan was telling the truth in this respect: that the copy in question was indeed discovered by Moseley in the rafters of the house in Henley Street, as is also stated both by Moseley's daughter and by Mr. Hart, and as is also indicated by the fact that Moseley seems to have

<sup>60</sup> Schoenbaum, *Shakespeare's Lives*, 135–56, 160–63.

<sup>61</sup> Note, too, the specific and unlikely statement that Moseley had found it, not in more recent work on the property, but on a particular day thirty years ago, before Thomas Hart even inherited the house, a statement necessitated by the desire to muddy questions of ownership, consent, and permission. Almost all commentators agree that it was likely a more recent find.

<sup>62</sup> This point is also one of the two principal obstacles (the other being the devotion to St. Winifred, discussed further below) to one remaining theoretical possibility, that Jordan had somehow come by, and was attempting to dishonestly profit from, a genuine "Spiritual Testament" written by a genuine seventeenth-century "John Shakespeare" who did not, however, live in Stratford-upon-Avon.

been its owner.<sup>63</sup> In that case, it could perfectly well have been there since the seventeenth century. In 2020, for instance, a *sammelband* of Tudor books last seen in 1817 was discovered in the roof of a thatched cottage in Wiltshire: it appears merely to have been stored there and forgotten about. Similarly, during roof renovations in 2018–19, a prayer book and insurance documents from the 1870s were found in the rafters of Van Gogh's London house.<sup>64</sup> So the time-scale is not unreasonable, nor is there any need to think that the document was, as many narratives insist, deliberately concealed: rafters are an obvious place for the long-term storage of a precious document, being dry and out of the way.<sup>65</sup> The "Spiritual Testament" was a document forgotten in an attic.

In sum, given Jordan's known abilities and resources, the document he had in his hands in 1784, and that Malone saw in 1789, was surely largely genuine. And it is hard to avoid the conclusion that it was indeed found in the roof of the Shakespeare family house by Moseley, who lent it to Jordan, received it back, and gave it to Payton, from whom it made its way in time to Malone.<sup>66</sup>

#### VI. THE "SPIRITUAL TESTAMENT" BEFORE JORDAN

This new history of the document—as not John Shakespeare's, as dating from some time between the 1630s and 1660s, and as most likely actually found in the roof of Henley Street as Jordan said—affords clues that might help to identify its original owner.

First of all, starting afresh, and whatever assumptions one makes about the method of falsification, the original testator would seem to be female. The *Testament* certainly was used by women, as is clear from one of the very few other known manuscript examples, a Spanish version from around 1690, prepared for one Maria Teresa de Cárdenas. Her name "is written four times in the scribal hand in the appropriate places," and she signs the document at the end.<sup>67</sup> Furthermore, the saint invoked in the "Spiritual Testament" is St. Winifred; while it would not be categorically impossible for a male Catholic to invoke a

<sup>63</sup> See Bearman, "John Shakespeare's 'Spiritual Testament,'" 185–86.

<sup>64</sup> Jessica Warren, "Rare Tudor science books written by the inventor of the protractor," *Daily Mail Online*, March 24, 2022, online at <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-10647405/Rare-Tudor-science-books-set-fetch-30-000-auction-blocking-leaky-thatched-roof.html>; the Van Gogh find is described on the house's website: [vangoghhouse.co.uk/the-renovation/](http://vangoghhouse.co.uk/the-renovation/).

<sup>65</sup> The *Testament* itself states that it should be buried with the testator, but it also says it should be kept in a safe place before that. Perhaps this testator died before they were able to retrieve it.

<sup>66</sup> According to the received story, having owned it for thirty years Moseley one day spontaneously, and without asking for anything in return, gave it to Payton, but the source of this story is Payton himself, perhaps not wanting to stir trouble (letter quoted in Bearman, "John Shakespeare's 'Spiritual Testament,'" 186). One suspects that Moseley sold it to Payton.

<sup>67</sup> McManaway, "John Shakespeare's 'Spiritual Testament,'" 198n5.

female saint as his sole patron, it would be untypical, especially as Winifred is a saint particularly associated with women.<sup>68</sup>

Second, given that its most likely place of discovery is indeed the roof of the Harts' house on Henley Street, the most likely candidate to have created it is someone who was living there at some point in the 1630s or subsequently. The Harts' house in the later eighteenth century comprised the property known as "Joan Hart's cottage", which they had lived in since around 1601, plus a few rooms of what had been, in the previous century, the Maidenhead Inn. While the Maidenhead Inn had various occupants in the 1630s, including the Hiccox family, the cottage was occupied throughout that decade by the eponymous Joan Hart, who is best known for being the younger sister of William Shakespeare. Joan lived there as a widow from 1616 until 1646, and while the date of the "Spiritual Testament" cannot be established with certainty, if it fell at any time between those dates, she would be a leading candidate to be the testator by virtue of being a known resident of the property in which it was found.<sup>69</sup>

Little is known about Joan Shakespeare Hart. She was baptized at Holy Trinity Church, Stratford-upon-Avon, in 1569, five years after her famous brother, and she was the only sister of his to survive to adulthood. She married a hatter named William Hart around 1599. William Hart is mainly recorded in connection with a series of suits against him for debt: these have been enumerated by Cathy Shrank, who comments that Joan "does not seem to have made an impressive match." The Harts baptized four children at Holy Trinity, of whom two lived to adulthood and one, Thomas (*b.* 1605), eventually had children of his own. William Hart died in April 1616, a week before his brother-in-law William Shakespeare. Shakespeare in his will granted his sister £20, all of his wearing apparel, and the right to live in the western part of the Henley Street property at a peppercorn rent. She did not remarry, and at her death in 1646 the rental of the house passed to Thomas.<sup>70</sup> There is no evidence at all to illuminate the question whether she was literate. As one might expect of a not particularly wealthy early modern woman, there is not a single document known to survive that she wrote, signed, or marked. And yet even if Joan were demonstrably completely illiterate, this document could have been prepared for her, as Cicatelli recommended and as de Cárdenas's copy seems to have been, by a scrivener or priest. Of course, nothing

<sup>68</sup> See Thurston, "A Controverted Shakespeare Document," 174; Longworth, in *Shakespeare Rediscovered*, 73–74, and de Groot, in *The Shakespeares and the "Old Faith"*, 102, both attempt to deflect this point, but neither cites a document in which a male Catholic names a female saint as his only patron.

<sup>69</sup> Schoch, "The Birth of Shakespeare's Birthplace," 188; Schoch, *Shakespeare's House*.

<sup>70</sup> The definitive study is Cathy Shrank, "His Sister's Family: The Harts" in Paul Edmondson and Stanley Wells, eds., *The Shakespeare Circle: An Alternative Biography* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2015), 49–56, 50.

at all is known about Joan's religious views beyond the fact that her marriage, the baptisms of her children, and her burial all took place under the auspices of the Church of England. But given that she comes from a town (and a family) with many connections to Catholicism, and since this document seems to originate in a time where Catholic practice was comparatively acceptable, it is not out of the realm of possibility that she might, in the 1630s, have held Catholic beliefs.<sup>71</sup>

Given the document's apparent date and provenance, then, one might be tempted to speculate that Jordan could have scraped out the name "Joan Hart" and replaced it, twelve times over, with the name "John Shakespeare." And yet even this seems implausibly difficult, given Jordan's very basic forgery skills: how could he erase and rewrite an entire name, any name, twelve times over without being detected five years later by Malone? But surely he must have made twelve changes of some sort to the name in the document, whoever its original owner, as the dating shows that it cannot possibly have had John Shakespeare's name in originally. The problem is something of a collision between an irresistible force—in that John Shakespeare cannot have subscribed to a document not written until after his death—and an immovable object—in that Malone did not detect any forgery in it.

But Joan Shakespeare Hart is not only a leading candidate to have been the original testator by virtue of living in the house in question at the most promising date, but also the only person in Stratford-upon-Avon in any of the possible decades who could permit an easier solution to this problem, because, as is well-documented, early modern widows would frequently choose to revert to their maiden surname. Widows involved in cultural production who did so include the printer Elizabeth Pickering, who printed books under her maiden name after her husband's death, and the writer Anne Halkett, who after her widowhood wrote her autobiography in manuscript using her maiden name of Murray.<sup>72</sup> In a more everyday context, wills, appropriately, are a documentary source where this practice is often recorded.<sup>73</sup> In this connection, it is striking that Joan's original surname, unlike her married one, had the prestige of being armigerous; and secondly,

<sup>71</sup> See also the seventeenth-century story that Shakespeare himself "died a papist": Schoenbaum, *Shakespeare's Lives*, 79.

<sup>72</sup> David Stevenson, "Halkett [née Murray], Anne [Anna], Lady Halkett (1623–1699), autobiographer," *ODNB*; see also Lotte Fikkers, "The Self-Portrayal of Widows in the Early Modern English Courts of Law," in Elizabeth Scott-Baumann, Danielle Clarke, and Sarah C. E. Ross, eds., *The Oxford Handbook of Early Modern Women's Writing in English, 1540–1700* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2022), 305–18, esp. 311–12; Barbara Kreps, "Elizabeth Pickering: The First Woman to Print Law Books in England and Relations within the Community of Tudor London's Printers and Lawyers," *Renaissance Quarterly* 56.4 (2003): 1053–88; Kreps notes several continental printer widows who did the same.

<sup>73</sup> See e.g., Roger Turvey, "Wives, Widows, and Will-making in Tudor Pembrokeshire," *Journal of the Pembrokeshire Historical Society* 19 (2010): 5–24, online at <http://www.pembrokeshirehistoricalsociety.co.uk/wives-widows-and-will-making-in-tudor-pembrokeshire/>.



that all the male Shakespeares were dead by 1616, and if she did take the name back on she would be keeping it alive in the same way that her niece Judith did in naming her son Shakespeare Quiney (*b.* 1616 and *bur.* 1617). Even her own Hart descendants are once (albeit much later) recorded calling her "Joan Shakespeare."<sup>74</sup> What if the original document were through-written with the name "Joan Shakespeare" in each article?

This is not, in fact, an entirely new suggestion. As long ago as 1923, Herbert Thurston noticed the similarity of names between "John Shakespeare" and "Joan Shakespeare." Even though he believed that the document was from around 1580, he considered the invocation of St. Winifred such a strong suggestion that the testator was female that he seriously entertained the possibility that it had been John's daughter Joan "in her girlhood," with her name subsequently mistaken for or altered into "John" at some point before or after the document was put in the rafters. He even suggested that Jordan might have modified it. If so, Jordan would only have had to alter one medial letter in each of the twelve occurrences of a name that was already written there, to create the most minimally invasive of forgeries in an otherwise entirely genuine document.<sup>75</sup> Longworth and de Groot both saw the force of Thurston's suggestion, but rejected it on the grounds that an eleven-year-old would not sign a spiritual testament, and the idea dropped out of the conversation.<sup>76</sup> But their dating was wrong, and none of those three writers considered the possibility that the document might actually date not from Joan's girlhood but from her widowhood.

What is more, in rethinking Thurston's suggestion, it is not even necessary to invoke any sort of forgery. In transcription of early modern manuscripts, it is a surprisingly common error to misread some form of the name "Joan" as "John," even when the name is written out in full. For instance, the parish register database [Ancestry.co.uk](https://www.ancestry.co.uk) contains dozens of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century people apparently named "John" who are named second in marriages to

<sup>74</sup> See Park Honan, "Shakespeare's Bible and the Harts," *Notes and Queries* 40.2 (1993): 231–32, in which Joan's great-great-great-grandson (son of the Thomas Hart who employed Moseley) refers tantalizingly to receiving "manye other items of my Noble Ancestors [*sic*] Joan Shakespeare."

<sup>75</sup> Thurston, "A Controverted Shakespeare Document," 174–75; in this and in a yet earlier publication, "The Spiritual Testament of John Shakespeare," *The Month* (November 1911): 487–502, Thurston canvasses several other possibilities, including "Joan" having been unusually spelt "John" throughout; or the Harts electing out of curiosity to make a copy of the old document, and making an innocent mistake as they did so.

<sup>76</sup> De Groot, *The Shakespeares and "The Old Faith,"* 100–103; Longworth, *Shakespeare Rediscovered*, 72–73, who also objects that the words would be too indecorous for a woman. This objection is overcome by the evidence that it was used by women.

people with apparently male names.<sup>77</sup> Where page images are available, close examination shows that these “John”s are modern transcription errors for spellings including “Joan,” when the *a*’s bowl is narrowly formed; “Jone,” when the *n*’s stem causes it to look like an *h*, and “Johan.”<sup>78</sup> To mistake “Joan” for “John,” then, is an error frequently made by transcribers even in working with a fairly clear document and even in the face of contextual cues suggesting that the name really should not read “John.”

This, by contrast, was not a fairly clear document. The writing was very cramped to fit on the five sheets, faded, and in parts, as Malone says, “almost illegible.” The two surviving transcriptions of it have different readings at several points, as each transcriber struggles with particular words and phrases, with at least some of the errors on Malone’s side.<sup>79</sup> The first transcriber, Jordan, came to the task with no experience of editing old documents, and he knew it had been found in John Shakespeare’s house, which was a strong contextual cue that it might read “John.” As for Davenport and Malone, following behind, they were at yet greater risk of confirmation bias, since each came to it also already informed that the name would read “John.” Malone’s biographical sketch of Shakespeare shows that he had already thought a good deal about John, as well as his intriguing putative son John junior, while paying correspondingly little attention to the undistinguished Joan.<sup>80</sup> And, as can be seen by comparing his edition of Henslowe’s *Diary* against modern transcriptions, and indeed in the traceable errors he makes transcribing this document, his paleographical skills were good, but by no means infallible. So it is not impossible that Jordan, Davenport, and Malone could all have been tripped up by a subtly wrong name in a manuscript that was difficult to read anyway.

All of this is speculation, and it remains arguable that Jordan did make the tiny alterations suggested by Thurston, for which he would certainly have a

<sup>77</sup> These rise to the top of an [ancestry.co.uk](https://ancestry.co.uk) search for first name “John,” spelling matched exactly, and gender “female,” in marriage records only, limited by date. Many more can be found by searching [ancestry.co.uk](https://ancestry.co.uk) for “John”s married to “John”s, “William”s, and other common male first names.

<sup>78</sup> See, e.g., the “John Crostye” (actually Jone Crosby) married on May 1, 1602, to John Duffolde at St. Saviour’s, Southwark; or the “John Hutchens” (actually Joan Hutchens) married on December 27, 1638, at St. Alphage, Greenwich, to John Haller (London Metropolitan Archives, hereafter LMA: P92/SAV/3001, image 82; LMA: P78/Alf/001, image 16; and their respective transcriptions on [ancestry.co.uk](https://ancestry.co.uk)).

<sup>79</sup> Full collation in John Jordan, *Original Memoirs and Historical Accounts of the Families of Shakespeare and Hart*, ed. J. O. Halliwell-Phillipps (London, 1865), 71–78; discussed by Bearman, “John Shakespeare’s Spiritual Testament.”

<sup>80</sup> See also his letter to Davenport, quoted in Halliwell-Phillipps, *Outlines*, 2:399–400, where he is surprised that John never named any sons after himself, but never observes that John twice named daughters with the female form of his name.

motive, inflating the document's potential sale price; or that he simply started with a document with some other name in entirety, and with Moseley's connivance very skillfully erased and rewrote the whole name twelve times. And yet, the obvious objections to that third scenario are precisely what drives one back to the idea that the original signatory might have been Joan Shakespeare Hart.

Jordan's handling of the "Spiritual Testament" was evidently roguish to some extent, with his forged "first leaf" launching a myth about Shakespeare's father and *Hamlet* that has lasted for more than two hundred years. And yet, in a strange way, he also deserves some backhanded praise. His attribution of the main document to John Shakespeare, whether fraudulent or in good faith, had the effect of drawing enough attention to it that it was recorded before it deteriorated and disappeared, as it followed the inevitable course of most not obviously financially valuable scraps of paper from the early modern period. This speaks to something repeatedly noted by investigators of the "Spiritual Testament": how freakish it seems that such a rare document, the only English manuscript *Testament*, should happen to be associated with the most famous writer of the era. But manuscript *Testaments* are scarce in any language and even in Catholic countries, much scarcer than print editions, partly because they were intended to be buried with their owners as the Bishop of Tournai's was, but also because they had nothing about them that would attract long-term preservation in proper archives.<sup>81</sup> Only Shakespeare's extreme fame in the 1780s, combined with Jordan's misattribution, ensured that adequate attention was paid to this example before it disappeared. Jordan saved the content of the document for posterity.

## VII. CONCLUSION

For reasons of date, the "Spiritual Testament" cannot belong to Shakespeare's father. Biographical deductions based on that assumption are untenable in their current form. It might, however, belong to his sister, a possibility that is surely relevant to current and emerging work on Shakespeare and Catholicism. And, at the risk of making an obvious point, there is a strikingly gendered element to the story I have told here. Despite being the sister of the most famous writer in Western history, Joan Shakespeare Hart is almost

<sup>81</sup> There is, for instance, the Spanish one belonging to de Cárdenas; and the Italian manuscript copy now in Milan, both discussed above. One made by Giulio Cesare of Alpino in 1730, at the age of seventy-nine, is preserved because it is incorporated into his actual will. See Marco Simone Bolzoni, "Il Cavalier d'Arpino disegnatore: Catalogo ragionato dell'opera grafica" (PhD diss., Università degli Studi di Napoli Federico II, 2011), 146–57. A French manuscript version perished by fire in 1871: see Louis Paris, *Les manuscrits de la Bibliothèque du Louvre, brûlés dans la nuit du 23 au 24 Mai 1871* (Paris, 1872), 2.

unknown; she is truly the “Shakespeare’s sister” of Virginia Woolf’s famous essay of 1925, a figure so trapped by gender conventions that it seems there is no chance of finding anything she wrote or created.<sup>82</sup> And yet perhaps there is a profoundly personal statement of her religious faith that had already been in the public domain for over a hundred years at the point that Woolf wrote her essay. If the current essay is correct in its assertion, then it is ironic, and sadly appropriate for Woolf’s thesis, that Joan’s spiritual testament has for all these years been wrongly assigned to her father.

<sup>82</sup> Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One’s Own* (London: Hogarth Press, 1935): indeed, and aptly, Woolf imagines that, if any of her writing existed, it might have been hidden in a loft (71).