

A portrait of John Florio, a man with long, wavy brown hair, wearing a white ruffled shirt and a large, ornate gold and red decorative collar. The background is dark.

*“...in whose paie and patronage I have lived some yeeres;
to whom I owe and vowe the yeeres I have to live.”*

John Florio, A World of Words

SHAKESPEARE & JOHN FLORIO:

HENRY WRIOTHESLEY

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Shakespeare and John Florio shared the same patron in the same period: Henry Wriothesley, the Third Earl of Southampton, who has been frequently identified as the Fair Youth of Shakespeare's Sonnets.

Shakespeare's and John Florio's scholar Countess Longworth de Chambrun pointed out that John Florio was certainly very close to Henry since 1590, because in his *Second Fruits* (1591), there is a dialogue between John Florio and Henry Wriothesley: they play at tennis together and go to see a play at theatre.

Florio's scholar Frances Yates asserted the same, and added, in her biography about John Florio "John Florio, the life of an Italian in Shakespeare's England," that in the same dialogue in which Florio writes about Henry, he quotes the proverb "*Chi si contenta gode*," which is the motto on Florio's portrait. This corroborates the hypothesis that Florio was writing about himself and the young Earl. Moreover, according to Miss Yates, the topics discussed in the dialogues, like primero, theatre, love, and tennis, represent Southampton's tastes.

This proves that around 1590-91 John Florio was already well acquainted with the young Earl, and they spent a lot of time together.

Florio also dedicated his first Italian-English dictionary, *A World of Words* (1598), to Henry Wriothesley.

We know for certain, by the dedications in *Rape of Lucrece* (1594) and *Venus and Adonis* (1593), that Shakespeare too was very close to Henry Wriothesley in the same period in which John Florio was living at Titchfield with the young Earl as his private tutor and secretary.

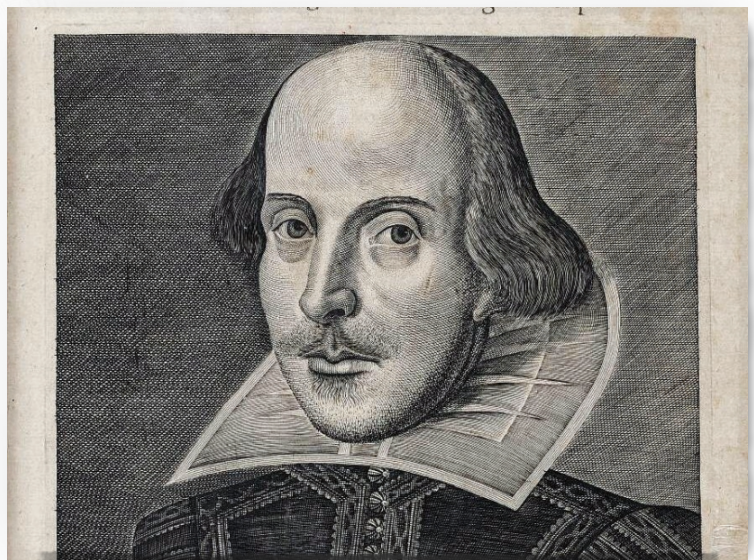
SHAKESPEARE, JOHN FLORIO & HENRY WRIOTHESLEY: DEDICATIONS



“In truth I acknowledge an entyre debt, not onely of my best knowledge, but of all, yea of more then I know or can, to your bounteous Lordship most noble, most vertuous, and most Honorable Earle of Southampton, in whose paie and patronage I have lived some yeeres; to whom I owe and vowe the yeeres I have to live. Your Honour's all devoted wisheth the meed of your merits humbly with gracious leave, kissing your thrice honoured hands protesteth to continue

ever.” - John Florio's dedication to Henry Wriothesley.

“The love I dedicate to your lordship is without end; whereof this pamphlet without beginning is but a superfluous moiety. The warrant I have of your honorable disposition, not the worth of my untutored lines, makes it assured of acceptance. What I have done is yours; what I have to do is yours; being part in all I have, devoted yours. Were my worth greater, my duty would show greater; meantime, as it is, it is bound to your lordship, to whom I wish long life, still lengthened with all happiness.” - Shakespeare's dedication to Henry Wriothesley.



Shakespeare and John Florio also wrote the same dedications to Henry Wriothesley. In *Venus and Adonis* (1593), Shakespeare wrote to Henry:

“If this first child of my invention prove deformed, I shall be sorry it had so noble a Godfather.”

John Florio, likewise, in the dedication to Henry in *A World of Words*, published in 1598, declares himself:

“Over presumptuous to entreat so high a presence to the christening of his brain-babe.”

And continues:

“To me and many others the glorious and gracious sunshine of your Honour hath infused light and life; so, may my lesser borrowed light, after a principal respect to your benign aspect and influence, afford some lustre to others. Good parts imparted, are not impaired. Your springs are first to serve yourself yet may yield your neighbours sweet water: Your taper is to light you first, and yet it may light your neighbour's candle.” - John Florio, *A World of Words*.

But the parallel with Shakespeare's second dedication which accompanied *Rape of Lucrece* in 1594 is still more striking. Shakespeare writes:

TO THE RIGHT HONORABLE, Henry Wriothesley, Earl of Southampton and Baron of Titchfield.

The love I dedicate to your lordship is without end; whereof this pamphlet without beginning is but a superfluous moiety. The warrant I have of your honorable disposition, not the worth of my untutored lines, makes it assured of acceptance. What I have done is yours; what I have to do is yours; being part in all I have, devoted yours. Were my worth greater, my duty would show greater; meantime, as it is, it is bound to your lordship, to whom I wish long life, still lengthened with all happiness.

Your lordship's in all duty,

William Shakespeare.

John Florio, likewise, writes:

“In truth I acknowledge an entyre debt, not onely of my best knowledge, but of all, yea of more then I know or can, to your bounteous Lordship most noble, most vertuous, and most Honorable Earle of Southampton, in whose paie and patronage I have lived some yeeres; to whom I owe and vowe the yeeres I have to live. Your Honour's all devoted wisheth the meed of your merits humbly with gracious leave, kissing your thrice honoured hands protesteth to continue ever. Your Honour's most bounden in true service, John Florio.”

“There is no essential difference between these two texts, either in form or matter.” declared Shakespeare's and Florio's scholar Clara Longworth de Chambrun.¹



Image: Titchfield Abbey. John Florio lived in this beautiful Tudor mansion for many years with Henry Wriothesley, in the same period Shakespeare wrote *Rape of Lucrece* and *Venus and Adonis*.

¹ Chambrun, Clara Longworth, *Shakspeare, Actor-Poet*, Barlow Press, 1927, p. 115.

SHAKESPEARE, JOHN FLORIO AND HENRY WRIOTHESLEY: SONNETS

A year after John Florio's death, in 1626, his old friend William Vaughan published three volumes of mysterious memoirs about James and Anne's court events: *The Golden Fleece*, a variety of memoirs from the court of James and Anne, told in a mysterious language. But behind the seemingly fabricated story, Vaughan told the true story and gossip during Florio's court appearance. He used the pseudonym *Princess Thalia* for Queen Anne and *Apollo* for James I. However, when it comes to John Florio, Vaughan did not hesitate to provide us with his real name and some stories about him.²

William Vaughan, in *The Golden Fleece*, wrote that Hugh Broughton, who was an English divine and rabbinical scholar, jealous of John Florio's prominent position at court and aspiring at the same position of Groom of the Privy chamber. When he discovered that Florio had helped create some verses that Vaughan defined as “a strange morall letany,” which was released during a royal birthday, he tried to make trouble. As a result, Florio had to appear before James I to defend himself from this charge which has been brought against him, having been accused to have descended to a frivolity of tone and matter unsuited to a person of his gravity. Broughton considered himself a better and more serious scholar than the "Italian novelist". For this reason, Broughton hoped to bring John Florio down by revealing his involvement in this poetic production. Florio is described performing salacious and obscene verses during the royal birthday, and defended himself by arguing that it is sometimes necessary to temper gravity with brightness to suit the tastes of one's pupils and patrons. There are several sexual puns that Florio used to make his own "apology". He, for example, refers to the Queen Anne as "The great lady". This throws a light upon the level of confidence which Florio had with the aristocracy.

Giulia Harding, John Florio's scholar, has pointed out that Vaughan, in his work, was referring to Shakespeare's sonnets:

“We know the precise date the Sonnets went on sale. Edward Alleyn was the leading actor in ‘The Lord Admiral’s Men’, a well known theatre company and chief rival to Shakespeare’s group ‘The King’s

² *The golden fleece diuided into three parts, vnder which are discovered the errours of religion, the vices and decayes of the kingdome, and lastly the wayes to get wealth, and to restore trading so much complayned of. Transported from Cambrioll Colchos, out of the southermost part of the iland, commonly called the Newfoundland, by Orpheus Iunior, for the generall and perpetuall good of Great Britaine.*

Men'. We know he went to John Wright's bookshop on June 19th, 1609 and paid five pence for a copy of "Shakespeare's Sonnets". He would have ordered the book when it was first registered at the Stationers' Company and advertised as a forthcoming publication and arranged to collect it as soon as it arrived. The Sonnets had been registered by Thomas Thorpe on May 20th, barely a month before the book appeared. If you had been living in the early seventeenth century you would probably have known why June 19th was an important date. It was the King's birthday. In 1609 James the First turned forty three years old. The publication of the Sonnets on this exact date was no coincidence and to discover the link we must consult the gossipy anecdotes recounted in William Vaughan's "Golden Fleece".³

William Vaughan was therefore describing John Florio as deeply involved in the production of Shakespeare's *Sonnets*. Miss Frances Yates also pointed out that John Florio was connected with the publication of Shakespeare's *Sonnets*:

"It might be interesting to inquire why Thorpe was so keen on publishing old material in this year. [...] Yet in that year Thorpe addressed to William Herbert, Earl of Pembroke - via Florio - a translated satire, Healey's Discovery of the new World, and to a "Mr W.H." a sonnet-sequence by William Shakespeare."⁴



Portrait of Henry Wriothesley, Third Earl of Southampton, the "fair youth" of Shakespeare's *Sonnets*. William Vaughan, in his *Golden Fleece*, wrote that John Florio was involved in the production of Shakespeare's sonnets. John Florio also lived at Titchfield with the young Earl from 1590 to 1598. Florio's dedication to Henry in his *A World of Words* has been compared to Shakespeare's dedication in *The Rape of Lucrece*. "There is no essential difference between these two texts, either in form or matter." declared Shakespeare's and Florio's scholar Clara Longworth de Chambrun.

³ Giulia Harding, *John Florio and The Sonnets, Part I*, www.shakespeareandflorio.net.

⁴ Frances Yates, *John Florio, the life of an Italian in Shakespeare's England*, Cambridge University Press, 1934.

JOHN FLORIO & THE DANVERS-LONG FEUD: *Romeo and Juliet*

It has been suggested by many Shakespeare's scholars⁵ that the famous Danvers-Long feud inspired Shakespeare for the plot of *Romeo and Juliet*. On Friday 4th October 1594, John Florio took part in the famous Long-Danvers case, backing Henry Wriothesley's friends in their efforts to escape. Henry Danvers and Sir Charles Denvers were the two elder sons of Sir John Danvers of Dauntsey. Both close friend to Henry Wriothesley, they committed a crime in Wiltshire. According to one account, Henry Long was dining in the middle of the day with a party of friends in Corsham, when Henry Danvers, followed by his brother Charles and a number of retainers, burst into the room, and shot Long dead on the spot. Master Lawrence Grose, Sheriff, was informed on the murder, and on the evening of October 12th the following scene took place at Itchen's Ferry:

“The said Grose, passing over Itchen’s Ferry with his wife that Saturday 12th, one Florio an Italian, and one Humphrey Drowell a servant of the Earl, being in the said passage boat threatened to cast Grose overboard, and said they would teach him to meddle with their fellows, with many other threatening words.”



Image: Henry Danvers, Earl of Danby in a portrait of the 1630s by Anthony van Dyck. This incident involved two feuding families, a scuffle among servants, earlier violence, insults, and a quarrel escalated into a murder, which contains many similarities with the plot of *Romeo and Juliet*. While there's no prove that Shakespeare lived at Titchfield and was involved in this case, these documents prove that John Florio took part in the Danvers-Long feud while he was living at Titchfield with **Henry Wriothesley**.

⁵ Just to name a few: Alison Wall, *The Feud and Shakespeare's Romeo and Juliet: a Reconsideration*, Sidney Studies; A. L. Rowse, *Shakespeare and the Danvers-Long Feud*, *The Spectator*, 16 FEBRUARY 1985, Page 31; Sasha Roberts, *William Shakespeare, Romeo and Juliet*, NorthCote House, 1998.

ROMEO AND JULIET: SHAKESPEARE, HENRY WRIOTHESLEY, VINCENTIO SAVIOLO AND JOHN FLORIO

It has also been suggested that **Vincenzio Saviolo's** fencing manual played a fundamental role for some dialogues written in *Romeo and Juliet*, specially the duels between Mercutio and Tybalt.⁶

Vincenzio Saviolo was Henry Wriothesley's fencing master, in the same period John Florio was his tutor and personal secretary.

Shakespeare in his plays uses Saviolo's Italian fencing vocabulary:

*"I suggest that the fencing manual of Saviolo, Vincenzio Saviolo his Practice, dedicated to the Earl of Essex and published in 1595, provides evidence that Shakespeare probably responded to this manual's specific diction and general theory in writing his play [Romeo and Juliet]."*⁷ (Ozark Holmer, 1994:163)

"Shakespeare's Love's Labour's Lost, Romeo and Juliet and As You Like It are perfect examples. Shakespeare illustrates his knowledge of the code duello with characters like Touchstone in As You Like It, who pontificates about the manner and diversity of lies, and how a gentleman is or is not compelled to respond to the various degrees of lies." (Kirby, 2013:33)

"Romeo and Juliet includes more Italian fencing terms than any other play in Shakespeare's canon – among them are the passado, punto reverse and stoccata. He also includes references to the Italian duelling code and the style of fencing at the time – all of which were included in Saviolo's treatise." (Kirby, 2013:33)

⁶ Some examples: Ladan Niayesh, "Make it a word and a blow": The Duel and Its Rhetoric in Shakespeare's Romeo and Juliet, <https://hal.archives-ouvertes.fr/hal-01880178/document>; JOAN OZARK HOLMER, "Draw, if you be men": Saviolo's Significance for Romeo and Juliet, Shakespeare Quarterly, Vol. 45, No. 2 (Summer, 1994), pp. 163-189 (27 pages) Published By: Oxford University Press, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/2871216>;

⁷ "The Saviolo-Shakespeare Connection" in *Olde Wordes, an Examination of Elizabethan English*, url= [The Saviolo-Shakespeare Connection](#).

References to Saviolo and his treatise are to be found among the works of some of the literary figures of the day. Shakespeare uses one of Saviolo's anecdotes and reshapes it in "As You Like It" (1599). Saviolo's tale concerns Luigi Gonzaga, (nicknamed "Rodomont" on account of his "courageous character and athleticism") brother to the Duke of Mantua, who accidentally kills the Emperor Charles V's champion wrestler in a match." (Chatfield, 2010)

The timing of the publication of Saviolo's manual in 1595 and the later publication of several of Shakespeare's plays with fencing jargon in them presents a connection, at least in text form, between Saviolo and Shakespeare. There is little doubt that Shakespeare would have known about Saviolo. *Romeo and Juliet*, while one of the most filled with fencing jargon is not the only one which was influenced by Saviolo's work.⁸

"More topical and up-to-date might have been Vincentio Saviolo's textbook, written in English and published in two volumes, of which the first was devoted to fencing with rapier and dagger and the second to honour and honorary quarrels. Saviolo's book appeared in 1595, two years before the first performance of Hamlet, and was, at that time, very modern." ⁹

The second part of the process is to establish a connection between Saviolo and Shakespeare, somewhat based on the timing of the publication of the plays and the presence of the increase in fencing language present. This connection is always explained by Shakespeare's scholars in the form of John Florio:

*"That Shakespeare was familiar with "...[H]is Practise" there can be little doubt. There may be a personal connection; Saviolo's likely co-author was **John Florio**: Florio was tutor and secretary to Henry Wriothelsey, Earl of Southampton to whom Shakespeare dedicated the poems "Venus and Adonis" (1593) and "The Rape of Lucrece" (1594)." (Chatfield, 2010)*

⁸ Ibidem.

⁹ Ibidem.

The connection which is present above could be seen as a little tenuous, being that the link is through other individuals. The fact that it is likely that Florio assisted Saviolo in the production of his fencing and duelling treatise, and also was tutor to one of Shakespeare's patrons places the two individuals closer and closer together. Further to this, it was not only in Saviolo's own work where Shakespeare could have learnt about Saviolo:

"Shakespeare could have encountered Saviolo by reputation in print as early as 1591, because John Florio, who knew Saviolo, provides the first extant description of him in Second Frutes." (Ozark Holmer, 1994:165)

Once again this places John Florio and Shakespeare within close proximity.

J.D. Aylward was the first scholar to point out that John Florio was the most likely author of Saviolo's fencing manual, describing Florio as "Saviolo's ghost"¹⁰ demonstrating that Saviolo's manual was the result of a collaboration between Florio, who translated and re-wrote an Italian fencing manual in the first book and the dialogues between the Master and the student in the second book, and Saviolo's technical knowledge on fencing. John Florio also refers to Vincentio Saviolo in his *Second Fruits*, by using, like Shakespeare, Saviolo's Italian fencing vocabulary:

John Florio, *Second Frutes*, Chapter 7:

"E. Hee will hit any man, bee it with a thrust or stoccada, with an imboccada or a charging blowe, with a right or reverse blowe, be it with the edge, with the back, or with the sat, even as it liketh him."

The knowledge of the Danvers-Long case and Saviolo's fencing manual in Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* cannot be explained, once again, without John Florio's knowledge of Saviolo's manual and his involvement in the Danvers-Long feud.



¹⁰ Aylward, J. D, "Saviolo's Ghost", (1950-05-27), *Notes and Queries*, CXCIV.