



The Sanders Portrait: This Is the Face of the Bard

The Importance to Canada of having the Most Authentic Image of the Bard

How beauteous mankind is! O brave new world,
that has such people in't!
The Tempest, Act V, scene 1

William Shakespeare shook the dust of the old world of literature from his feet and boldly created a brave new one. It is interesting, and perhaps symbolic, that the Sanders portrait was “discovered” in the “new world.” It seems as if the image in the Sanders portrait represents the youthful vigour and vitality of the Americas, while the Droeshout engraving and the memorial bust, literally and allegorically, denote a certain faded colonial glory.

Coincidentally, the age of the Sanders portrait roughly matches that of Canada. In 1603 when it was painted, the great explorer Samuel de Champlain had just set his first tentative steps in New France. A small trading post or two represented the entire European presence. With a sense of faith and adventure, the settler families persevered and established a society with its foundations in the Old World but informed by the new land they inhabited.

LEFT The Sanders portrait

The portrait itself travelled across the Atlantic with just such a family of adventurous, faith-filled immigrants who were in search of a new life in a land of abundant opportunity. We do know that by the year 1786 the first professional theatre company in Canada had performed Shakespeare's plays. His plays have been performed here continuously ever since. One of the largest Shakespeare festivals in the world takes place each year in Stratford, Ontario. The University of Guelph, the initiator and sponsor of the Shakespeare—Made in Canada exhibition, hosts the largest website in the world devoted to Shakespeare in a specifically national Canadian context <www.canadianshakespeares.ca>. Shakespeare's works are studied by students and enjoyed by theatre-goers across the country.

There is a great fascination with the Sanders portrait in Canada and even pride and joy that it was discovered here. The portrait attracted large crowds when it was exhibited at the Art Gallery of Ontario in Toronto during the summer of 2001. The book, *Shakespeare's Face*, by Stephanie Nolen was a Canadian bestseller. Many people would like to see the Sanders portrait remain in Canada in order to preserve its educational and historic value as part of an unparalleled legacy bequeathed to us and our children. The portrait provides a tangible expression of the deep British roots in our collective history and the arts.

A Portrait in Authenticity

He is mischievous, keen-eyed, almost flirtatious. Half
twinkle, half smirk, he looks out from his portrait with
a tolerant, world-weary air. This is Shakespeare. Perhaps
you thought you knew him: bald pate, thin brows, stiff
white ruff. You thought wrong.

—*Globe and Mail*, 2001

It's a wonderfully romantic portrait. He looks amused
and amusing and intelligent, just the way we'd rather
like Shakespeare to look.

—Professor Anne Lancashire, University of Toronto

The Sanders portrait puts a human face on English
literature.

—Professor Alexander Leggatt, University of Toronto

I was caught by the eyes. There does seem to be something about the eyes that seems to resemble the eyes in the two other known representations.

—Professor Morgan Holmes, Ryerson University

The Sanders portrait shows a dashing, enigmatic young man who looks like he might have just walked off the film set of *Shakespeare in Love*.

—Stephen Sheding

[The Sanders portrait] displays a handsome visage, intelligent quixotic eyes and an enigmatic Mona Lisa smile.

—Paul H. Altrocchi, M.D.

Not many would argue with the statement that William Shakespeare is the greatest English poet and dramatist. He is widely celebrated for the immense range of his subject matter and style; his extraordinary ability to get inside his characters without judgment or bias; his way of bringing together a whole range of ideas and issues without imposing himself upon them; and his sheer creativity with language.

Renaissance dramatist, playwright, and poet Ben Jonson placed Shakespeare above Chaucer and Spenser, and above the great Greek and Roman dramatists. “He was not of an age, but for all time,” Jonson wrote only a few years after his friend’s death, and he could not have been more visionary in his assessment. Shakespeare’s influence on English literature and culture goes beyond that of any other single creative artist. In his own time, his plays were highly popular at the public theatres and at court. Today, his words speak to us with the same wit, wisdom, and insight as they did to our ancestors four hundred years ago.

But who was the historical figure behind these timeless writings? What does the face of genius look like? For centuries people have asked these questions. Frustratingly, William Shakespeare has proven to be one of the most elusive characters in history. Many details of his life are shrouded in mystery. We have only two images of Shakespeare that are universally accepted as authentic. They are the Martin Droeshout copper engraving and the stone memorial bust of Shakespeare at Holy

Trinity Church at Stratford-upon-Avon. Unfortunately, both were created after his death and are considered poor in quality.

This is the story of the Sanders portrait, which the Sanders family and its Canadian descendants firmly believe to be a true-life image of the Bard of Avon. According to Sanders family tradition, the portrait was painted by an ancestor, a friend of Shakespeare and bit player in his company of actors. The portrait, the family, and their stories are intertwined; together they have survived fire, flood, and a transatlantic voyage. The Sanders have always kept their portrait close to them—sometimes proudly displayed in their homes, at other times tucked away in cupboards or under beds for safe-keeping.

Quietly, the Sanders portrait passed from generation to generation to the present owner, Lloyd Sullivan, who acquired it from his mother, Kathleen Hales Sanders. The portrait's provenance, having been passed through the centuries within a single family, is an extraordinary story—one that few portrait histories could duplicate.

In 1603, the date of the Sanders portrait, Shakespeare was thirty-nine years old. No longer “the upstart crow” who shook the London theatrical establishment a decade earlier, in 1603, he was a prominent member of it. He had achieved artistic and financial success as an actor, playwright, and partner in the Globe Theatre. His literary legacy then consisted of twenty-four plays, including *Hamlet* and *Romeo and Juliet*, and he was on the verge of penning his great tragic masterpieces. This is the Shakespeare who had just purchased the second largest house in his hometown of Stratford. He had achieved the status of gentleman through the award of a coat of arms. This is also the year that Shakespeare and his company were granted the right to use the prestigious designation “The King’s Men” by the new king, James I, who reigned from 1603 to 1625.

The face in the Sanders portrait bears a striking similarity to a famous contemporary description of Shakespeare. He displays the quintessential look of an Englishman of the Midlands: fine features, fair of hair and complexion. The eyes are bluish-green with a mischievous twinkle and a surprising intensity of gaze. The head is capped by a shock of receding auburn hair. The mouth is slightly upturned in a kind of “Mona Lisa” smile. According to the *London Times*, February 5, 2006, “the face that emerges as if by candlelight from the dark shadow in this picture

is utterly individual, marked with humour and sorrowful wisdom, self-confidence, intelligence and candour." Or, put more simply, another reviewer has said that the man in the Sanders portrait seems ready to "burst into words."

The costume in the Sanders portrait is a striking woven doublet with a stiff Elizabethan collar. Experts at the Globe Theatre in London have attempted to recreate the decorative pattern of the doublet using a number of different materials and methods that were available in the early 1600s. They have concluded that only silver thread on silk satin could reproduce the look of the doublet in the portrait.

Until 1604, England had strictly enforced the sumptuary laws, which at that time placed personal limitations on the wearing of colours, fabrics, and styles of decoration. Elizabethans were quick to modify their wardrobe as soon as a small change in social rank permitted new options. Silver lace on silk satin was something only a gentleman could legally wear. The date of the Sanders portrait, 1603, was the earliest that a social-climbing Shakespeare would have been permitted such ornamentation. The Globe experts have also confirmed that the hairstyle in the portrait is consistent with the date for someone of Shakespeare's rank and status.

The Sanders portrait has been subjected to a significant number of scientific tests—more than any other image associated with Shakespeare. All the tests prove that the portrait was painted around 1603, and that the artist used materials, techniques, and a style consistent with that of the Northern School of Art, which was prevalent throughout England during that time period. Radiocarbon analysis confirms that the label on the back of the portrait dates from approximately the same era as the painting itself. There is no evidence of overpainting or alteration of any kind since its date of creation.

The Sanders portrait measures 42 cm by 33 cm (16½" by 13") and is painted in oil on two oak panels carefully prepared with a layer of calcium carbonate and glue, followed by a layer of lead white and calcium carbonate in oil. The date "Anno 1603" appears in the upper right hand corner in reddish paint.

Portions of the edges of the oak panels are slightly worm-eaten. It also appears that approximately two inches of the panel on the right side may have been damaged or worn away.

An exhaustive genealogical investigation of the Sanders family has traced the family tree back to the late 1500s in the Worcester area, a few miles from Shakespeare's hometown of Stratford-upon-Avon. Documents confirm the existence of a Sanders or Saunders in Shakespeare's company of actors. A Sanders family story retells that the names Sanders and Shakespeare appear next to each other in a Swansea Inn visitor's book originally found in London, England. A tantalizing 1745 document describes the estate of a Sanders ancestor as including "8 pictures," though the subject or titles of the paintings are not revealed.

The portrait has been publicly exposed on only a few occasions over its long history. In 1909, the current owner's great-grandfather, Thomas Hales Sanders, lent the portrait to the noted Shakespearean expert M. H. Spielmann, who wrote an article on it for *The Connoisseur* magazine (Volume XXIII, January–April, 1909). Spielmann also mentioned the Sanders portrait in the 1911 *Encyclopedia Britannica* (eleventh edition, volume 24). It appears that the earliest public display of the portrait took place at the Stern Brothers Gallery in New York City in 1928. It was displayed again in the early 1960s at the Art Gallery in the Eaton's department store in downtown Montreal.

In 2001, the *Globe and Mail*, Canada's national newspaper, published a series of in-depth articles on the portrait. Media outlets around the world then picked up the story. In the summer of that year, the Sanders portrait was the focal point of an exhibition at the Art Gallery of Ontario in Toronto, attracting a large number of visitors, including many Shakespeare scholars and art enthusiasts.

During the following year, the Stratford Festival of Canada chose the Sanders portrait to illustrate the promotional posters and souvenirs for its fiftieth anniversary season. Also in 2002, the book *Shakespeare's Face* was published. In it, author Stephanie Nolen recounts the legend and history of the Sanders portrait. The book was a bestseller in Canada and was subsequently translated into a number of different languages and published throughout the world.

In early 2006, the Sanders portrait was featured as part of the greatly anticipated Searching for Shakespeare exhibition, organized by the National Portrait Gallery in London, England. This exhibition included a host of important Shakespeare and theatre artifacts. It also assembled, for the first time in one location, the elite group of reputed life portraits of Shakespeare: the Chandos, the Flower, the Soest, the Grafton, the Jansen, and the Sanders. In June 2006, the exhibition travelled to the Yale Center

for British Art in New Haven, Connecticut, prior to its arrival in Guelph for the Shakespeare—Made in Canada exhibition.

The Sanders portrait, painted in 1603, depicts the Bard in the prime of his life both physically and creatively. Some of the great tragedies, like *Othello* and *Macbeth*, and his late plays often called the Romances (*Cymbeline*, *The Winter's Tale*, and *The Tempest*) were still to be written. The Sanders portrait offers far more insight into the man behind the words than the bald, bloated image that stared blankly at us from the cover of our high school texts. Take a look into those mischievous, intelligent eyes and you too will be convinced that this is the face of genius!

Ancestry

There is a lack of pertinent family documents concerning the Sanders portrait from the time it was mentioned in the 1915 will of the great-grandfather of the present owner, Lloyd Sullivan, back to the date of the portrait, 1603. According to oral provenance, many Sanders family documents relevant to the portrait were lost to fire and flood in the 1800s.

However, a team of investigators, including a genealogist in Worcester, has researched the Sanders portrait for the past fifteen years and has uncovered a number of interesting facts relevant to the Sanders family tree.

Kathleen Sullivan, née Hales Sanders (1903–1972)

Kathleen, mother of the current owner of the Sanders portrait, was the youngest daughter of Aloysius and Agnes Hales Sanders. She was born in Montreal on May 30, 1903, and was a multi-talented person much like her father. She was educated at St. Marguerite Bourgeoys School for girls in Montreal where she excelled in French, music, and the arts. She possessed the traditional Sanders talent for painting, which she started while attending school but did not resume again until much later in life.

In 1928, Kathleen married Alexander Sullivan in Montreal. Their only child, Lloyd Sullivan, was born on April 12, 1933. Kathleen was a gentle, peaceful, energetic woman much loved by her siblings. She was a kind person who went out of her way to help people, especially her sisters and



Kathleen Sullivan, circa 1928

brothers. When her mother fell ill in 1940, Kathleen became her primary caregiver until Agnes's death on March 24, 1943.

During the time that Agnes lived with her daughter's family, the Sanders portrait and other objects of family value lay hidden under her bed. Lloyd Sullivan can remember, when he was about nine or ten years old, bringing his grandmother tea, and for this act of kindness she allowed him to have a peek at the Sanders portrait. These were solemn moments for him, full of mystery and wonderment, and he was totally fascinated by it all. Little did he know that this fascination would remain with him for the rest of his life.

The Sullivan's home in Montreal was always open to Kathleen's sisters and brothers. They gathered there most weekends especially on birthdays and holidays. Family business was discussed and often centred on the portrait. A great deal of time was spent discussing what to do with the Sanders portrait. Now and then, when the rhetoric became too heated and tempers flared, Kathleen would step in and settle the matter; everything would return to normal, yet no decisions concerning the portrait were made.

Finally, a number of years after Agnes's death, the Sanders family members consented to allow Kathleen's eldest brother, Frederick, to arrange to have the Sanders portrait displayed at the Eaton's department store in downtown Montreal. Eaton's had a large picture gallery on the sixth floor and the Sanders portrait was displayed for a few weeks in the summer of 1964. During that period, Frederick was approached by a Montreal art dealer who wanted to purchase the portrait for \$100,000. Frederick was anxious to sell the painting, and the Sanders family considered its proposed sale. Heated and drawn out discussions ensued, but in the end a vote was taken—the family decided not to sell the portrait.

Frederick was furious, but family members convinced him that the portrait was probably worth far more than \$100,000 if it could be authenticated. In the ensuing years, the Sanders family members came to the realization, after a number of enquiries were made, that the authentication of the portrait would be an extremely costly and time-consuming endeavour.

Over the years, family interest in the portrait waned. Frederick died on June 11, 1971, and the portrait was passed to his sister, Kathleen.

Shortly before her death a year later, Kathleen said that the family wished her son, Lloyd Sullivan, to have the Sanders portrait as they believed that he would invest in its authentication.

Aloysius Hales Sanders (1864–1919)

Kathleen's father, Aloysius Hales Sanders was born on May 7, 1864, in Lowestoft, Suffolk, England. He was the only son of Thomas Hales Sanders who, among twelve other children, survived to adulthood. Aloysius was a wise and talented person. He attended Ushaw College in the north of England, which was a training centre for Catholic priests. At the completion of his MA, Aloysius decided instead to embark on a banking career. He joined the National Provincial Bank of England, the same London bank that his father had worked for many years before.

Aloysius married Agnes Biggs on April 11, 1884, at a Catholic church in Croydon, England. He and his wife had five children when they decided to emigrate from London to Canada in 1894. They settled in Montreal, where Aloysius started his teaching career.

Aloysius and Agnes had eight more children, a total of thirteen, although three born in England had died in infancy. Aloysius taught art, history, English, and music. In Montreal, he taught at Sarsfield School and was one of the founders of Blinkbonnie Academy and Catholic High School. He also taught at St. Kevin's School in Outremont, Montreal. Aloysius was a skilled artist and he perfected his talent by painting outdoor scenes in and around Montreal.

In 1909, Aloysius brought more than three hundred of his father's paintings from England to Montreal, and he and the Honourable Judge Curran set about selling these art works at public auction, including Aloysius' own paintings, in order to raise funds to help with financing the schools with which Aloysius was associated. Aloysius was a successful and efficient principal and was recognized as one of the top educators in Canada. In 1907, the federal government chose him to head up a new bilingual training school in Ottawa. Aloysius turned down this



Aloysius Hales Sanders, n.d.

prestigious appointment, preferring not to uproot his wife and children who were settled comfortably in Montreal.

Aloysius inherited the Sanders portrait from his father, Thomas Hales Sanders, on his death in 1915. The following is an excerpt from his will, which is registered with the Principle Registry of the Probate Divorce and Admiralty Division of the High Court of Justice in London, England, probated on December 14, 1915:

I give to my son Aloysius Joseph James Hales Sanders my reputed portrait of Shakespeare dated 1603. Also my large Family Bible containing a Register of births and deaths of my family, also the life size portraits of my father and mother.

The will and estate were held up in the British probate court for over four years. Family conjecture at the time was that the British government was reluctant to let the Sanders portrait leave England because of its heritage significance. However, after much protest from the family, permission for the portrait to leave England was given in late 1919, though, sadly, not soon enough for Aloysius who died earlier on March 11, 1919, in Montreal. The portrait was left to his wife, Agnes, who went to England to retrieve it later that year.

Nine years later, her eldest daughter, Mary Agnes, arranged for the portrait to be publicly exhibited, for the first time, in a theatre exhibition at Stern Brothers in New York City. The following excerpt is from an article that appeared in the *New York Times*, October 19, 1928:

Miss Sanders, who was at Stern's yesterday for the exhibit, said that Shakespeare and Sanders were supposed to have been close friends and that their names are to be seen together in an old visitors' book at Swansea Inn, London. Shakespeare's name is on the back of the painting, on which is also written "This likeness taken 1603—Age at that time 39 y^s" She said that during her grandfather's lifetime he had been approached many times by Shakespearean societies and individuals who wished to purchase the Sanders portrait, but he always refused to part with it, as he considered it his most treasured pos-

session and did not want it to leave the family to which it had always belonged.

A year later, on January 16, 1929, Agnes gave the Sanders portrait to her daughter Mary Agnes as a gift. Fourteen years later on March 24, 1943, Agnes passed away. Mary Agnes never married and when she died in Montreal on October 19, 1959, the Sanders portrait passed to her eldest brother, Frederick. After Frederick's death in 1971, the portrait passed on to Kathleen Sullivan, mother of the present owner.

Thomas Hales Sanders (1830–1915)

Thomas Hales Sanders, the great-grandfather of the present owner, was born in Worcester on June 3, 1830, to Thomas Sanders and Mary Griffiths. Thomas joined the National Provincial Bank of England in Worcester on September 1, 1842, at the early age of twelve. In 1858, at the age of twenty-eight, he married Henrietta Martha Fitzgerald and they settled in Martley, Worcester. Their first child, Mary Agnes, was born on April 17, 1860.

With a young family to support, Thomas requested a better position at the bank. He was promoted to bank manager and sent to Lowestoft, Suffolk, where he stayed for over eight years until he was transferred to the bank's head office at 15 Bishopsgate, London, in 1869. Thomas retired on June 30, 1898, after fifty-one years of service.

Thomas and Henrietta had nine children, four boys and five girls. Only one boy, Aloysius Hales Sanders, and three of the girls lived to adulthood. For generations, Sanders family members have possessed talent for art, music, and teaching. Thomas loved to paint, which he did in his spare time on weekends and holidays. He was primarily a marine painter but he also made many portraits of his children. He produced beautiful watercolours and oils and exhibited at institutions such as the British Institute and the Royal Academy of Arts in London, as his father, Thomas Sanders, had previously done on several occasions. In 1908, Thomas brought the Sanders portrait to M. H. Spielmann, a London expert on Shakespeare iconography, to have it examined.



Thomas Hales Sanders,
circa 1913

Evidence

Shakespeare's Signature

As a young teenager in Montreal, Lloyd Sullivan, the current owner of the Sanders portrait, recalls a disagreement that arose among his mother's siblings about the spelling of Shakespeare's name—spelled “Shakspere”—on the linen label attached to the back of the portrait. Before his grandmother died in 1943, she said that the spelling on the label was exactly the way William Shakespeare signed his name, as reflected in the early records of Stratford-upon-Avon. This story was passed down through the Sanders family over the years, and it was one of the reasons why her father-in-law, Thomas Hales Sanders (the owner's great-grandfather), believed the portrait to be authentic.

Some of the Sanders family members thought that perhaps the ancestor who painted the portrait in 1603 had misspelled Shakespeare's name. In 1964, they sought professional advice to resolve the matter, and were reassured that “Shakspere” was indeed the way William Shakespeare spelled his name in the early days in Stratford.

The spelling “Shakspere” also recurs with a more than common degree of consistency in the registry of the Stratford Parish Church; the entry for the poet's burial in 1616 reads: “Will Shakspere gent.” “Shakspere” is the spelling on both the first and second pages of the Bard's will. The same spelling can be found in conveyancing and mortgaging documents at Stratford-upon-Avon. As such, the inscription on the Sanders portrait—“Shakspere”—is consistent with a wide range of documentation from Shakespeare's own time.

Hairstyle and Costume

Costume and hairstyle analysis have contributed to the authentication of the Sanders portrait based on what is known about fashionable dress of the period. The analysis includes information about the laws governing dress code during Shakespeare's time, including the “proclamation against excesse in Apparell, 6 July 1597” made by Queen Elizabeth I.

Jenny Tiramani, director of theatre design at Shakespeare's Globe Theatre in London, England, analyzed the hairstyle and the clothing of the sitter in the Sanders portrait. After exhaustive study and research, a team of experts led by Tiramani confirmed that the sitter's hairstyle, large collar (determined to be an earlier version of the Droeshout col-

lar), and doublet with silver thread ornamentation on it are consistent with the 1603 date on the Sanders portrait for someone of Shakespeare's rank and status.

In November 2002, Tiramani was invited to present her findings at the Picturing Shakespeare symposium held by the University of Toronto. The subject of the conference was the Sanders portrait. Many Shakespeare scholars from around the world were in attendance. Tiramani showed a number of slides depicting examples of the hairstyle and clothing worn by courtiers and gentlemen in Shakespeare's era; the examples were consistent with the hairstyle and clothing of the sitter in the Sanders portrait.

During her presentation, Tiramani displayed pieces of clothing and costumes that she had brought over from England to substantiate her claim that the clothing worn by the Sanders portrait sitter was consistent with the fashion in 1603. In fact, many surviving portraits from the time show us that men of all ages, in accordance with Elizabethan dress laws, wore the same hairstyle and type of clothing as the sitter in the Sanders portrait. The sumptuary laws, which governed what an individual was allowed to wear according to class and status, were still in place at the time of the Sanders portrait, but had been repealed by James I one year later in 1604.

Tiramani's research included a comparison of the undecorated collar worn by the Sanders sitter with early seventeenth-century theatre portraits. These portraits included three images of Shakespeare, namely the Droeshout engraving, the Chandos portrait, and the Janssen memorial bust. Portrait depictions of the playwright Ben Jonson and the actor Richard Burbage were also comparison studies. Tiramani's findings reveal that only the Droeshout collar is as fine in quality as the Sanders collar, although Droeshout's is of a later fashion. This finding is consistent with the 1623 date of the Droeshout engraving (made seven years after Shakespeare's death and twenty years after the Sanders portrait was painted). Indeed, Shakespeare was thirty-nine years old in 1603, and according to Tiramani's research, the sitter's clothing and physical features in the Sanders portrait are consistent with that historical moment, further evidencing the portrait's authenticity as an image of Shakespeare.

Tiramani's fourteen-page analysis of the Sanders portrait was published in *The Journal of the Costume Society* of London, England (2005, Number 39).

Spielmann's Erroneous Examination of the Sanders Portrait

In 1908, Thomas Hales Sanders, great-grandfather of the present owner of the Sanders portrait, brought the painting to M. H. Spielmann, a London expert on Shakespeare iconography. Spielmann conducted his analysis and wrote a lengthy commentary on his findings in a 1909 article published in *The Connoisseur*, an illustrated magazine for art collectors.

Spielmann's findings are summarized as follows:

- The sitter's costume in the Sanders portrait was painted at a later time by someone else.
- The date shown in the upper right-hand corner of the painting was a relatively modern addition.
- Spielmann considered the portrait to be only 250 years old.
- The sitter's head is apparently not painted in oil.
- The label on the back of the portrait was a recent addition and was only sixty years old when Spielmann examined the painting in 1908.
- Spielmann thought the painting was not the face of Shakespeare. The shape of the skull, the construction of the jaw and chin, and the shape of the mouth are among the irreconcilable elements that prevented Spielmann from accepting the attribution.
- The sitter in the portrait looks too young to be Shakespeare at thirty-nine years old in 1603.

At the time that Spielmann conducted his examination of the portrait, he was considered to be one of the few reliable scholars to have specialized in the portraiture of Shakespeare. His 1911 *Encyclopedia Britannica* (eleventh edition) article on the portraits of Shakespeare (in which there is a reference to the Sanders portrait) was the most exhaustive survey of its kind at the time.

Recent Scientific Examination of the Sanders Portrait

Background

In the early 1990s, the Canadian Conservation Institute (CCI) conducted twelve scientific tests on the Sanders portrait. The results proved positive and consistent with the Sanders family history of the portrait, and clearly and conclusively disproved Spielmann's observations.

According to the CCI:

The results of the tests that were done were conclusive: the painting was executed on wood that dated from the correct period; the materials and the way in which they were used were consistent with a painting done in England in the early 17th century; no anachronistic material was found; and the label identifying the subject of the portrait was made of rag paper dating from 1640 at the latest. All these elements indicated that the painting was indeed an old painting and not a relatively modern copy or fake.

The first experiment that the CCI conducted was to the wood panel that the portrait is painted on. Tree-ring dating was done by Dr. Peter Klein of the University of Hamburg, Germany, who is a leading world expert in the field of dendrochronology. His analysis showed that the panels were made from oak wood from the Baltic region, that the earliest possible date for the execution of the painting was 1597, and that a date of execution in 1603 was plausible.

The only statement made by Spielmann that cannot be disproven by scientific analysis is his comment that the sitter in the Sanders portrait looks too young to be Shakespeare at thirty-nine years old. Scientific testing cannot verify this, since it is a purely subjective, impressionistic, and refutable assessment.

Shakespeare biographer, Samuel Schoenbaum (1927–1996), said that he could not accept Spielmann's conclusions about portraits that he had examined, since there was no scientific equipment available to Spielmann at that time. Consequently, Spielmann's conclusions are considered conjectural and not the product of careful scientific examination and analysis.

The Linen Label

Before the label itself was analyzed, the CCI conducted tests on the adhesive used to affix the label to the back of the portrait. Using a scalpel to extract tiny fragments from the edge of the label, the CCI collected a sufficient sample of the original adhesive for examination under a microscope and analyzation by infrared spectroscopy. Through this process,

a substance absorbs infrared radiation, the bonds between its atoms vibrate with a characteristic frequency, and a characteristic spectrum is produced. The spectrum the CCI observed indicated that the glue was made from a plant starch, such as rice or potatoes, a finding consistent with the manufacture of adhesives in the year 1603.

Another significant scientific test done on the Sanders portrait involved the carbon dating of the label. CCI analysis showed that the label was made from rag paper comprising linen fibres, as opposed to pulp paper of modern manufacture. Then, the label itself was dated. Dr. Roelf Beukens of the Isotrace Radiocarbon Laboratory affiliated with the University of Toronto concluded that the paper was dated no later than 1640. Consequently, the dating of the paper glued to the back of the portrait, which identifies Shakespeare as the subject of the painting, indicates that the label was probably applied to the portrait between the time it was painted in 1603 and about forty years later (in 1640, the latest possible date of its manufacture).

Although the label on the back of the Sanders portrait has deteriorated considerably, it was legible in 1909, the date of Spielmann's examination of it for his article on the portraits of Shakespeare. In his article, Spielmann identified Shakespeare as the subject of the painting, and gave the dates of his birth and death. The following is the wording of the label as recorded by Spielmann:

Shakspere
Born April 23 = 1564
Died April 23 – 1616
Aged 52
This Likeness taken 1603
Age at that time 39 y^s

Author Gary Taylor explains in his book *Reinventing Shakespeare* his reluctance to adopt the accepted spelling "Shakespeare," as opposed to what he refers to as the more authentic "Shakspere," the spelling that appears on Shakespeare's baptismal record, in his will, and on the first of two drafts of a coat of arms granted to "Shakspere." Shakespeare's family name, like many names of that period, was spelled in several ways. The spelling "Shakspere" is how it appears in most Stratford records.

In relation to the Sanders portrait, the significance of the spelling “Shakspere” constitutes one more piece of evidence pointing to the authenticity of the portrait. It indicates that the label was affixed to the Sanders portrait by someone who knew the Bard well enough to know how he spelled his name. The painter would have been a likely person, on the basis of his association with Shakespeare.

In 1999, the owner of the Sanders portrait learned that the scientific testing of the ink on the linen label affixed to the back of the Sanders portrait was problematic. The technique and scientific equipment used at the time required a large sample of the label and, even then, was not guaranteed to produce an accurate result. The owner did not want to chance destroying the fragile label as it is a major part of the provenance of the portrait, so he decided not to have the ink retested, electing to wait until the scientific technique and equipment were improved to the point where only a small sample of the label would be required to produce reliable results.

Recently, a company specializing in forensic ink analysis through transmission electron microscopy testing on small ink samples has been located. Negotiations have been conducted with this company to carry out the carbon dating of the ink on the label of the Sanders portrait; tests are ongoing as this publication goes to press.

If the ink on the linen label on the back of the Sanders portrait is dated to four hundred years, the label will be the only contemporary document of historical significance in the world that records Shakespeare’s date of birth. To date, the only comparable document is Shakespeare’s baptismal record held in the Stratford Parish Church registry: “baptized 26th of April, 1564 in Stratford-upon-Avon.” In those days, it was customary that a child was baptized at three-days-old because of the high rate of infant deaths.

Conclusion

Jenny Tiramani, the director of theatre design at Shakespeare’s Globe Theatre, with a team of experts, has confirmed that the sitter’s hair style, large collar, and doublet with silver thread ornamentation on it, as depicted in the Sanders portrait, are consistent with the 1603 date for someone of Shakespeare’s rank and status.

The twelve scientific tests that were conducted by the Canadian Conservation Institute on the Sanders portrait in the 1990s prove that the portrait's oak panels, the paint, the date 1603 in the upper right-hand corner of the portrait, the technique and artistic style of painting, the linen label on the back of the portrait, and the glue on the label, are all four hundred years old, consistent with the period, and are not recent additions. If the only remaining test—that of the ink on the label—proves conclusively that the ink is four hundred years old, then the authenticity of the portrait is further substantiated.

The artist who painted the Sanders portrait must have known Shakespeare intimately in order to document the authentic spelling of “Shakspere,” and to identify correctly the date of his birth (April 23, 1564), the date of his death (April 23, 1616), and his age of thirty-nine years in 1603. This is a further indication that the sitter in the portrait is Shakespeare. Shakespeare's birth and death dates were unknown to historians and the public until they were first published in 1773, some one hundred and seventy years after the Sanders portrait was painted. Therefore, the dating and spelling details further indicate that the sitter in the portrait is Shakespeare; how else could the person who created the portrait know these specific intimate details about the Bard unless he had close contact with Shakespeare himself?

No other Shakespeare portrait has been subjected to the level of scientific, genealogical, and stylistic scrutiny that the Sanders portrait has. The Sanders portrait, the quiet contender, has maintained its credibility throughout a significant barrage of tests, and emerges today as the only authentic lifetime image of William Shakespeare.

Lloyd Sullivan is the Canadian owner of the Sanders portrait. This essay marks the first time that an overview of his research on the portrait's authenticity has been published.