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Comments on 'George Wilkins' and the First Two Acts of *Pericles*: New 'Evidence' from Function Words
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Abstract

The facts are misstated. According to Smith, 'Wilkins' is not a theory but a proven fact. According to Jackson, 'Wilkins' is not a proven fact but a theory. They believe they are allies, but in fact they are adversaries; and one of them must be wrong.

Jackson defines his crucial point in terms of how 'the results are interpreted'. So the question here is one of interpretation, like Freud or astrology. There is, we are also told, no question of demonstration, 'of course'. So what actually is the crucial argument? It seems to run thus, rhetorically: 'If it is a meaningless coincidence that a Shakespeare play heads the table of matchings to *Pericles* III-V, while a Wilkins play heads the table of matchings to *Pericles* I-II, it is a very strange one'. We are presumably being asked to infer that this is no coincidence but on the contrary strong supporting evidence, if not rigorous proof, that I-II were written by 'Wilkins'. But this conclusion is actually contradicted later on. What is claimed is that I-II was *not* written by Wilkins, in any ordinary sense of those words. Shakespeare, it seems, kindly lent a hand, with results apparently indistinguishable from 'Wilkins'. Curiously, his hand was so disguised as to leave no traces at all, in any sample. At the same time it remains recognisable to Smith; and Jackson seems to concur. Similarly III-V shows no trace of 'Wilkins', though 'Wilkins' is supposed to have lent a hand to Shakespeare in those acts. Something very strange, to put it mildly, is going on here.

Worse still, the so-called 'coincidence' is nothing like a coincidence. The author is blinding himself with science. How could *Pericles* III-V, which is avowedly a Shakespeare sample, have *failed* to match another contemporary Shakespeare sample, by any rational matching process? All this tells us is that the matching process is not necessarily wholly illusory, in that one respect.

That leaves one result to be considered in isolation. And it is seriously misstated. It is quite untrue, on the given figures, to say that 'a Wilkins play heads the table of matching to I-II'. What heads the table is one sample from that play, selected for some unexplained reason. And this, for all anyone knows, may head the table merely because other samples, from Shakespeare, which have not been selected, and might have fitted much better, have been excluded. Even as it is, *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* (in a text unknown before 1623) and *Othello* and *Cymbeline* fit I-II better than *The Miseries of Enforced Marriage* 4, 3 and 1, whatever they may be. These matters, and the extraordinary omission from these comparisons of any identifiable line or phrase of early Shakespeare, or any mention of the surely rather relevant fact that Wilkins is remembered solely as a Shakespeare plagiarist, are discussed in more detail below.

Introduction

Par. 1

'Corrupt' and 'corruption' are seriously misleading. Jackson has countersigned Taylor's (entirely baseless) assumption, in the '1987' (*recte* 1988) Oxford *Textual Companion*, that *Pericles* 1609 is a 'memorial reconstruction'. But if that is so, nothing whatever can be inferred about the unknown and unrecoverable original text, let alone its authorship. In reality, how could we possibly know what original text was thus wrongly remembered? and what method could conceivably determine the author of an unknown text? Here too is the first sighting of the 'everyone agrees' ploy, which will later be used to describe notions known only to a tiny minority.

Par. 2

(a) Edwards and (b) others are all the discussion we are ever going to get. The rule *audi alteram partem* falls on deaf ears. Not a word is said anywhere here about the massive historical and documentary evidence for an early or wholly Shakespearean *Pericles*. Either alternative would annihilate 'Wilkins'; yet they are both utterly ignored, together with four centuries of anti-'Wilkins' or non-'Wilkins' witness. Who

cares what a great poet laureate said, in association with Shakespeare's own godson? And of course all those publishers and printers and other witnesses throughout the seventeenth century were dupes or liars. The millions of Shakespeare-lovers over the last four centuries for whom I-II sound authentic enough may also be dismissed unheard. Their unanimous testimony and assessments are dispersed *a priori*, like so much chaff, in the rushing mighty wind of theories generated by a tiny minority of editors and mathematicians, and vigorously disputed by other interested parties. Also blown away in the same gale are all the arguments from imagery or style or vocabulary or structure put forward over the last hundred years, in paper after paper, journal after journal. The 'Notes' manage to omit an entire bibliography of a Shakespearean and/or non-Wilkinsian *Pericles*. Who cares about any of it? Who can be bothered even to mention any of the hundreds of arguments?

The outrageous assumption being overtly made is that so-called 'objective methods' trump and take all the tricks, so we needn't bother to play the game. But this is just card-sharpping, a way of palming the actual question at issue and dealing unargued assumptions from the bottom of a marked pack.

'Most scholars believe' is just another such example, again entirely typical. Nothing of the kind has ever been documented. 'Most-scholars' means the same tiny but vociferous coterie. Again 'there has been some measure of agreement' about which parts of *The Travels* are by Wilkins and which by Day and Rowley means only some measure of agreement among the three or four Wilkinsites who are the only people in the world who concern themselves with such topics, and duly applaud each other's conclusions.

It is time to say straight out that none of this is in the least verifiable or tenable. Nobody really knows which parts of *Travels* were written by Wilkins, nor can any of the hypothetical shares be definitely allocated.

Smith's tests

Par. 1

Smith does not test, and never has tested, and apparently has no intention of testing, whether Shakespeare or 'Wilkins' was more likely to have written the first two acts of *Pericles*. At least however the inbuilt subconscious bias is frankly stated. The testing process begins by assuming what it claims to have proved, namely that 'Wilkins' is quite likely to have written *Pericles* I-II, an assumption not only entirely devoid of any external evidence but entirely contrary to it. Further, the test confessedly is not a test of Shakespeare properly so called; it is a test of *Cymbeline* and *The Winter's Tale*, i.e. a test of late Shakespeare only. Again the approach is biased by baseless subconscious assumption about the question supposedly under objective investigation. The date of c. 1609 for all *Pericles* is just invented, although it is crucial to the method and its results.

Par. 2

Again, there are no discriminators that distinguish 'Webster', though they may distinguish *The White Devil*. Similarly there are no discriminators that distinguish 'Shakespeare', though they may distinguish two of his plays.

So with the others. Style is confused with date, which is assumed to be irrelevant. Again the answer is built in to the premises, like a permanent annexe.

Par. 3

So Smith has *not* validated his methods, to any extent. He does *not* compare *Pericles* III-V with 'the work of Shakespeare', or with 'the work of any of the others', including 'Wilkins'. Similarly, III-V do *not* 'exhibit a greater affinity with Shakespeare' properly so called, though they may with a tiny proportion of the oeuvre. And what about these 'ambiguous' results? Another way of putting it is that these results are, in the Wilkinsites' own opinion, wrong, contradictory and misleading. Then if 'Wilkins' actually means 'the author of *The Miseries* etc', that definition should replace 'Wilkins', who was perhaps the author of other words and works not considered here. What justifies this invariable and ubiquitous assumption that one work sufficiently defines an actual author? And there's something terribly wrong with 'Shakespeare may have written' parts of I-II. *Which* parts? If this self-evidently vital question cannot be answered, the whole theory falls. A method purporting to tell Shakespeare from 'Wilkins' which admittedly, as a matter of fact, cannot tell Shakespeare from 'Wilkins' in any particular line, is already a hopelessly lost cause. For as Dr. Smith repeatedly and no doubt rightly says, particulars are what matter, and the general theory of 'Wilkins' can only be compounded of particular instances, each of which is confessedly unidentifiable as 'Wilkins'.

Par. 4

Again 'Wilkins' does not mean Wilkins; it means certain selected and unspecified features of *Miseries*. Nor does 'Shakespeare' mean Shakespeare. And once more there's an anomaly (in plainer terms, something has gone wrong) in nine of the eighteen comparisons.

Par. 5

Smith's findings provide no support whatever for any such 'theory'; and still less do they provide a proof, which (not a theory) is what he himself has rashly claimed. There is no trace of objectivity; the claim of 'proof' is anything but objective; each step is based on the literary assumptions of other people, made in defiance of all the evidence; the method incorporates the likelihood of 'Wilkins' before it even begins; it derives whatever validity it has solely from a point-blank refusal, over a span of ten whole years, ever to pay the least attention to any comparison between *Pericles* I-II and early Shakespeare, although this is admittedly an absolutely crucial point in the procedures. Now, briefly, Jackson touches on the truth of the matter. In Smith's objective investigations, 'Shakespeare is characterized by only two of the thirty-six plays that were published in the First Folio of 1623'. In other words, Shakespeare, properly so called, is not characterized at all. Again, 'Smith was expressly testing the Shakespeare of the late romances period'. In other words, again, Smith was not testing Shakespeare, properly so called, in any respect whatever. It's good to note though that what 'some scholars have held' (meaning what everyone in the world except Jackson and Taylor has always accepted) is perhaps after all worthy of some slight attention. A look at the actual question at issue, however belatedly, would indeed be 'helpful', especially to Wilkinsites. So the new test is unreservedly welcome. To it we now turn.

A new test on some old data

Par. 1

By 'function-words' is meant thirteen selected words, out of tens of thousands. In fact, none of them is 'a word' in the ordinary sense of an identifiable unit; each has many different functions, and meanings. 'That' for example is half-a-dozen separate parts of speech, together used in some *seventy* separable senses. No one has ever shown that any of the 'function-words' has ever proved of the least value in identifying any aspect of authorship.

Par. 4

If samples vary significantly by genre or date or verse/prose, one obvious inference is that the methods are fundamentally misconceived, and cannot identify authors as such.

Par. 5

'Wilkins's share of..... *Travels* ... as defined by several scholars' means 'as assumed for the present purpose'. So does 'the portion of *Travels* generally attributed to Wilkins's collaborators'. What is meant by 'David J. Lake has tentatively assigned to Wilkins', how tentatively and on what basis, remains obscure.

Par. 7

'*Cymbeline*..was composed within the same period of Shakespeare's career [as the whole of *Pericles*]' is just another convenient fiction. It is, furthermore, a vital aspect of the actual question allegedly under objective investigation, which is sturdily begged yet again. Ditto for *The Tempest*.

Par. 8-9

The 'Wilkins samples' are not Wilkins samples but samples supposed to be Wilkins samples. Weasel words like 'Wilkins', 'non-Wilkins' and 'Shakespeare' continue to proliferate and self-destruct; more like lemmings.

Why the persistent silence about the surely salient fact that Wilkins is remembered solely as a plagiarist of Shakespeare's *Pericles*? A similar silence prevails about the equally vital point that *Miseries* is a plagiarism of *A Yorkshire Tragedy*, a play officially registered as Shakespeare's on 2 May 1608, published as written by Shakespeare (and performed by his company at his theatre) in the same year (eight years before his death), reprinted as written by Shakespeare in 1619, and transferred as Shakespeare's on 4 August 1626, and published as Shakespeare's in the Second Folio of 1664. If it is indeed his, all Jackson's and indeed Smith's arguments vanish like so many puffs of smoke. But they somehow happen to know

that it is not in fact a Shakespeare play; so this evidence too may safely be disregarded. But if they know such things already, as it were by inspiration, why are they bothering with any statistics at all, whether each other's or their own? Why not just tell us who wrote what and have done with it?

Par. 10

These tests 'give no support to the theory that *Pericles* I-II are early'. Well, they wouldn't, would they, since their deviser begins by ignoring all the relevant evidence and refusing all discussion of this absolutely essential question. This seems to be the standard practice of all concerned. If 'telling objections can be raised', why not raise them? Otherwise everyone interested can see that the topic is taboo; can't be considered verbally, can't be tested numerically, can't even be seriously thought about for a single second. What if the *TGV* results, instead of being labelled an 'anomaly' simply because they are inconvenient, are not an anomaly at all, but a direct reflection of the actual fact of the case, namely that I-II are early? The argument that *2H6* is an early play which provides the worst fit is not only feeble but a plain falsification; there is no evidence whatever that the 1623 text of *2H6*, which is a very different play from *The Contention* 1594, is 'early'. Its only rational date is 'before 1616'.

Conclusion

Par. 1

Well, at least 'this paper does not of course demonstrate'. Nor in my view does it provide 'further' or any evidence for 'Wilkins'. On the contrary. The obvious explanation of the curious fact, honestly stated, that *I-II* matches *III-V* more closely than *III-V* matches undisputable Shakespeare plays, is that *I-II* is also Shakespeare. The attempts to explain the fact away sound sadly desperate. (1) 'a certain homogenization' and (2) the 'presence' of 'some' Shakespeare are both sheer fantasies, the sole purpose of which is to stave and shore up a tottering hypothesis. The astonishing 'tendency' of Shakespeare to be akin to 'Wilkins' also demands the same obvious explanation; there never was any 'Wilkins'. There never was an argument, either, and isn't now. If the 'chi-square closeness of fit to *III-V*' of Shakespeare himself can vary from 11.172 to 74.418 then *I-II* could perfectly well be by Shakespeare, even on the selected figures given, which mysteriously exclude, for the tenth consecutive year and nth consecutive paper, any consideration of early Shakespeare. How about trying Part B of *Edward III*, which is at last agreed to be by Shakespeare, as I've been saying for ages. And indeed how about trying *Ironsides*, about which it has been authoritatively stated that 'Sams may be right'? No need at all for 'Wilkins'. And if anyone wants a reason why *Miseries* should seem Shakespearean, it's because the notorious Shakespeare-plagiarist Wilkins plagiarises Shakespeare, certainly from *Pericles III-V* and on the evidence also from *A Yorkshire Tragedy*. There must be a reason why such simple and self-evident explanations of the observed facts are passed over in such total silence, so often and for so long.

Par. 2

But Gary Taylor's methods and conclusions have all been vitiated - by Dr. Smith among others, including T. Merriam.

Par. 3

'Whatever the weaknesses of this investigation, they are not those of bias...'. Oh yes they are, precisely, *passim*, just as in similar treatments of *Edward III* and *Ironsides*, or *Edward III* and Qq. 2-3 *Henry VI*, or Q and F *Henry V*, or Q and F *Hamlet*. All these sources, over the last thirty years, first assume and then reach their conclusions, without budging an inch. The studies of Jackson, Smith and Taylor do not 'converge'; they all begin with the same assumptions, and stay still. One of the assumptions, equally unmentioned here, is that of Q *Pericles* as a 'memorial reconstruction', which means that the actual text of I-II, and hence *a fortiori* its authorship, can never be known. The reasons for believing that George Wilkins wrote the least line of it are becoming less and less substantial, to the point of non-existence and beyond.