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## Shakespeare's Capital Letters

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Modern scholarship<sup>1</sup> agrees that the first Quarto of *Love's Labour's Lost* (1598) and the second Quarto of *Hamlet* (1603-4) were both set up from copy written in Shakespeare's own hand. So both those printings surely have something to tell us. But, sadly, the rest is silence. Even in this age of computer analysis, nothing follows. One possible reason is uncertainty about the part played by Tudor printers; another, that the *More* manuscript (generally accepted as undoubtably if undatably in Shakespeare's own handwriting) is a compositor's nightmare in its wild variability of speech-prefixes and spellings including capitalisation. For example, the hero is introduced as 'moo', 'moor' and 'moore' as well as 'more'; other proper nouns such as flanders and portigall begin with small letters, though ffraunc (sic) has in effect a capital F; the word 'sheriff' is spelt in five different ways, none modern, twice with a capital S (the corresponding facts and figures for 'sergeant' are thrice, never and once); the modal auxiliary verbs appear solely as coold, shoold or woold, sixteen times all told. Perhaps the passage would have been recopied more coherently had the play qualified for performance or publication. On the evidence of the extant *More* manuscript, however, Shakespeare's compositors, copyists or editors exercised a fair degree of freedom in revising his texts for publication; some of the *More* scene's many eccentricities (such as coold etc.) never appear in any of his published works.

But what exactly was changed, by whom and why? No doubt it is now too late to answer such questions beyond a peradventure. But it would surely have been reasonable to ask them. This essay seeks, however belatedly, to break that new ground, in the hope that it may prove fertile, not futile. Rationally, no one concerned with publication in the reign of Queen Elizabeth the First would have ventured to *add* capital letters to the autograph manuscripts of her chief playwright. Of course the Defender of the Faith might have insisted on G for God and C for Christian; but Shakespeare (*a line or two of text is missing here – Ed.*) Then suppose that the nouns capitalised in *both* plays represent Shakespeare's own orthography, especially if they fall into definable categories. And they do. So the shared occurrences of Ape, Ass, Calf, Capon, Columbine, Daisy, Deer, Dog, Hobby-horse, Lion, Owl, Raven, Rose, Serpent, Sheep, Violets, Whale (all set forth in the modern singular spelling, apart from their first letters) surely show that Shakespeare, who by the time both plays had been printed was nearly forty years old, had been taught (presumably from the first) to raise his cap, so to speak, like a polite country boy, to all flora and fauna - or even their derivatives such as Hobby-horse.

Of course such observances can be characteristically inconsistent; many other such terms might have been thus treated, and are not. Again, different plays use different words; thus *Love's Labour's Lost* has its own capitalised vocabulary in the same categories (Beast, Bird, Bran, Bush, Carnation, Cedar, Coppice, Cuckoo, Cuckoo-buds, Daws, Eagle, Flea, Gnat, Goose, Greyhound, Hose, Hound, Humble-bee, Lady-smocks, Lemon, Lily, Mint, Nutmeg, Oak, Osier, Pea, Pigeon, Rabbit, Snail, Snake, Sycamore, Woodcock and so forth, while *Hamlet* offers Animals, Camel, Cat, Chameleon, Crocodile, Crowflowers, Dove, Egg, Fennel, Mole, Mouse, Nettles, Pansy, Pelican, Porcupine, Rosemary, Sparrow, Weasel, Willow). But enough are left to form a plain pattern. Further, they confirm that Shakespeare was always obsessed (hardly too strong a word) with Nature, as it is spelt in both plays. His phenomena can famously be supernatural too, like the Ghost in *Hamlet*; both plays have an Angel or Angels as well as Celestial and Priest.<sup>2</sup> These too may just be concepts to which

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<sup>1</sup> as recorded in e.g. two collected editions: the American *Riverside* 2/1997 (pp. 246 and 1234) and the *Oxford Shakespeare* 1986 (pp. 315 and 735).

<sup>2</sup> Or, in *Love's Labour's Lost*, Hedge-priest, which like Wethercock in the same play presumably owes its capitalisation to its second component; compare also Worme there with Gloworme in *Hamlet*.

Shakespeare wishes to was taught to raise his hat, so to speak, as to Court and Crowne (and perhaps Coach) in both plays, as well as Sea, Sunne and Moone. The category of weapons is more clearly defined; both plays have Armes, Cannon and Rapier. By a simple shared modulation via Drum and Trumpet, the writer proceeds to capitalise the concepts of his own new drama; both sources have Author, Comedy, Clown, Jig (then part of dramatic entertainment) and a Letter or Letters, together with a Poet or Poem, a Prologue, and a Play or Players.

Also communally capitalised, however, are some non-literary types and classes, such as Bastard, Courtier, Man, Officer, School- (whether boys or fellows). Again, both plays capitalise substances (Amber), compass-points (East, North, South) and close relationships (Father, Son). And of course one would expect to find that God, King, Prince or Queene begin with capital letters, again in both plays; and this is indeed so, down to such details as Gentleman, Grace, Knight, Lady, Lord, Madam, Majesty, Master, Mistress. Such shared spellings (all singularised and modernised, as before) are predictable; but the rules of capitalisation, even if often unobserved, are less expected. Given the existence of such a plan, however, why was it observed so very copiously in the manuscript *More* scene, where initial capitals occur once in every four lines, compared with once every seven lines in *Love's Labour's Lost* and seventeen lines as in *Hamlet* (some 6%), if both plays were printed from copy in the hand of the same playwright? Perhaps Shakespeare changed his capitalisation completely? More plausibly, the compositors concerned were conforming with current practice. In fact a comparable profusion appears in the *More* manuscript, with 35 examples in 147 lines.

Further, the system of capitalisation seems the same. Thus *More* has Beefe and Dung; *Love's Labour's Lost* has Mutton. Again, *More* has Brother; both plays have Father. *More* awards a capital to the concept of Bushell; *Love's Labour's Lost* has Hogshead and Measure. There is further correspondence in the capitalisation and spelling of Charg, without the final e; in a capital C for Credit or *More* Credyt; the variant spellings of Country and City; the preponderance of capital C (only), presumably for the reason, as the *More* authorities say, that Shakespeare's small c was unclear. Again, both sources have Lord, Earle, Peace and Wisedome [?], while *More*'s Seriant or Seriaunt (Sergeant) corresponds with *More*'s Corporall.

This last comparison may afford a clear clue to Shakespeare's spelling of uncapitalised words.

#### [APPENDIX: WORD-LIST (?) Unfinished]

a right abhominable adew aduance/aduaunce annoynt answere auoyde ay/I ayre barraine beautie  
beautious been/beene/bin begger beleue blew [blue] boord brest [breast] busines by'th [by the]  
cald [called] chance/chaunce chast [chaste] coms [comes] command/commaund comming [coming]  
companie compleat conceaue continuall counsaile curtesie coyne deceaue/deceiue deckt demaund  
do/doe doo't [do it] doost/dost dosen [dozen] dreadfull elament els [else] entent [intent]  
entreate/intreat/intreate esteemd euill [evil] expence exprest faithfull falshood familier farre [far]  
fayre fayth fier [fire] fierie [fiery] flie [vb] flourish foorth France/Fraunce frend/friend ful/full gate  
[gait] generall go/goe graunt greatnes grone [groan] groning guiltie gyant happines harmonie hart  
[heart] hatcht he/hee heere [here] heer's he's/hee's highnes honor/honour Ile [I'll] immediatly  
imploy inck incounter ingaged in't [in it] ioynt yfaith ist i'th it selfe kild kist [kissed] lackt lets/let's [let  
us] liberall lies/lyes litle/little loose [lose] loosing [losing] lowlines maiden/mayden maister [master]  
matcht me/mee meere [mere] memorie merrit me thinkes/me thinks me thought mettall mooued  
moouing mortall murderer musicke/musique needfull nere [ne'er]

noyse onely [only] ore [o'er] our selfe our selues partie peece peeces personall perswade plaid  
[played] pleasd policie poynt poysons prayse prickt prodigall prooue prophane publique purposd  
quantitie raignes [reigns] reckning remoooue returnd royall runne saies/sayes sayd sayle scholler  
scratcht secrecie sence sencibly sequell seuerall shee's shew sicknes sinne sinnow [sinew] smels  
smot [smote] sodaine solembre something/somthing soueraigne soyle speciall spight [spite] spred  
strooken [stricken] summe talkt tearme tel/tell thats/that's therefore/therfore ther's thy selfe to  
morrow too't [to it] touch/tutch turnd turph [turf] twas twere twill [it will] vertue vertuous vndoo  
voyce vppon waigh [weigh] walkt warre wast [waist] we/wee weele wel/well whats whipt withall wits  
wonne yeelding yeere [year] yf

armd/arm'd a'the/a'th Coppie/coppied dispight/despight Deuill/deuill deuis'd/deuisd  
disclosd/disclos'd feard/fear'd fort/for't ist/is't lodgd/lodg'd obseru'd/obserude orerule/ore-rule  
ore'sway/ore-sway purposd/purpos'd receiud/receiu'd returnd/return'd turnd/turn'd twas/t'was  
twere/t'were weele/wee'le whats/what's